

# Alcohol and football



## Introduction

*“Alcohol seeps out of every pore in English football”*

Sam Wallace, The Telegraph

Football is our national sport, loved by young and old, with the total attendance at matches in England and Wales in 2012/13 exceeding 39 million.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the consumption of alcohol has become firmly embedded in British culture, where 23% of men and 18% of women report weekly consumption above recommended guidelines<sup>3</sup> and alcohol-related hospital admissions in England alone have risen to 1.2 million.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, football and alcohol have become closely entwined at all levels, and officially endorsed. The English, Welsh and Scottish Football Associations, for example, all have formal partnerships with leading beer companies, and for many fans, drinking is a central component to the match day experience. Alcohol companies have been keen to associate themselves with the sport, and it's now rare to watch football on the television without being exposed to various forms of alcohol marketing.

This briefing looks at some of the key debates and issues around alcohol in the game.

## Alcohol marketing in football

*“In every corner of the world, football fans share a passion for their favourite teams and players, and they enjoy watching the games with a cold beer.”*

Tony Ponturo, Anheuser-Busch Inc<sup>5</sup>

*“Beer and football go together – and we’re doing all we can to make sure that the beer is Carlsberg! At every level of the game, Carlsberg has become the beer you associate with football... What’s better than watching your favourite team with your best mates, while enjoying a cold pint of Carlsberg?”*

Carlsberg Group<sup>6</sup>

The value of football and sport more widely, to alcohol brands is clear. Tom Moradpour, Vice President of the Carlsberg Brand, has stated that UEFA Euro 2012 was “a very successful tournament for us, both in terms of increased sales and increased media exposure”<sup>7</sup>. Drinks company AB InBev said sales of Budweiser beer increased by nearly 19% during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, where it was an official sponsor, in comparison with the same period in the previous year.<sup>8</sup>

Drinks companies have worked hard to align themselves to the positive and healthy image of sport and this has led to a position where alcohol marketing has become synonymous with the game. Such marketing appears in various guises, including TV commercials and pitch-side adverts, sponsorships, ‘official’ club beers and stadium ‘pouring rights’. Alcohol brands had an official

## Alcohol Concern Briefing



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## Alcohol and football

### Alcohol Concern Briefing

sponsorship or partnership deal with 17 of the 20 Premier League clubs in the 2013/14 season,<sup>9</sup> whilst one leading club has even named its official club mascot after their beer brand sponsor.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the English, Scottish and Welsh national football sides all have contractual relationships with drinks companies, for example Carlsberg is the 'official beer of the England football team'. Alcohol brands also sponsor the major European and domestic tournaments, Heineken and Budweiser are major sponsors of the UEFA Champions League and FA cup respectively.



Researchers at Newcastle University, when reviewing six broadcasts of televised top class English club football matches in 2012, found over 2,000 visual references to alcohol of various types (mostly beer), plus 32 verbal mentions of alcohol company sponsors and 17 alcohol adverts during the matches<sup>11</sup>. During an England World Cup football match in June 2010, an estimated 1.6 million children aged 4-15 years old viewed alcohol adverts aired in the commercial breaks.

Viewers of topflight English football are exposed to around two references to alcoholic brands every minute.

Finding from Dr A. Graham & Dr J. Adams, Newcastle University<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to reconcile football's potential for creating and promoting healthy and active lifestyles with the volume of alcohol marketing associated with the sport. A number of studies have demonstrated a relationship between alcohol marketing and youth drinking behaviour. Young people, especially those who are already showing signs of alcohol-related problems, are particularly vulnerable to alcohol marketing, shaping their attitudes, perceptions and expectancies about alcohol use which then influence their decision to drink.<sup>13</sup>

### Alcohol and the FIFA World Cup

*"In South Africa in 2010, Budweiser was the only beer for sale in World Cup stadiums. Not surprising then that it outsold every other beverage on offer - sports drinks, soft drinks and bottled water combined."*

Eve Parish, Business Writer<sup>14</sup>

*"Alcoholic drinks are part of the FIFA World Cup, so we're going to have them. Excuse me if I sound a bit arrogant but that's something we won't negotiate. The fact that we have the right to sell beer has to be a part of the law."*

Jerome Valcke, FIFA General Secretary<sup>15</sup>

## Alcohol and football

### Alcohol Concern Briefing



The power of the drinks industry can be seen perhaps most clearly in relation to the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2014. In a bid to reduce alcohol-related sports violence and protect public health more generally, alcohol sales had been banned from football stadiums in Brazil since 2003.<sup>16</sup> Following pressure from FIFA, however, the law has been changed to allow alcohol to be sold at the World Cup venues. FIFA has long-term, multi-million pound contracts with AB InBev for its Budweiser brand to be the official beer of the World Cup, and similar pressures have already been placed on the respective authorities for the Russian World Cup in 2018 and Qatar World Cup in 2022 to also change their rules – both countries currently have bans on alcohol sales in and around their football stadiums.

Does alcohol really need to be a central feature of the football World Cup as suggested by FIFA's General Secretary? Russia has shown that a global sporting event can be successful with restrictions on alcohol sales and limited alcohol marketing. Sochi's 2014 Winter Olympics has been called the "driest Olympics in memory",<sup>17</sup> with the sale of alcohol prohibited

inside sports stadiums and arenas, as well as within 50 metres of some sports venues. Heineken, the official beer of the London 2012 Olympics, consequently opted not to sponsor the Sochi Games. Yet the event was still a success and will have no doubt inspired a future generation of elite athletes.

Back at home, this does not seem to have influenced Government thinking about the role of alcohol during the forthcoming FIFA World Cup, despite the likely increase in consumption that it will facilitate. During the lead-up to the FIFA World Cup 2010, Carlsberg, the official sponsor of the England football team, expected an extra 21 million pints to be drunk during the tournament.<sup>18</sup> In March, the Home Office confirmed that pubs in England would be allowed to stay open late during certain matches as England's appearance at the tournament was deemed to be an occasional of "exceptional national significance"; the first time a sports tournament has been awarded such a status. The decision was made after the Prime Minister David Cameron intervened against an original Home Office decision, and despite concerns expressed by the Association of Chief Police Officers, who stated it will result in a rise in public order related incidents as a consequence of increased drinking.

### Drinking at the big match

*"Now don't tell me that in 60 years' time people will still be going to football matches and still not be able to drink alcohol (there). Society moves on and laws need to keep pace with changes in society."*

Simon Clegg, former Chief Executive of Ipswich Town<sup>19</sup>



## Alcohol and football

### Alcohol Concern Briefing

*“Football matches should be family-friendly events where children are not exposed to alcohol-related harm.”*

Dr Evelyn Gillan, Alcohol Focus Scotland<sup>20</sup>

Drinking alcohol within view of the football pitch was banned in 1985 following a string of public disorder incidents at both home and abroad, at least some of which, particularly the more ‘spontaneous’ incidents, were exacerbated by alcohol. In presenting the Bill for the Sporting Events Act 1985, the Secretary of State stated “there is widespread agreement that alcohol is a major contributory factor in violent and disorderly behaviour in football grounds”.<sup>21</sup>

Home Office statistics from 2012/13 show that English football is now in a vastly changed place however, with arrest rates as low as one for every 15,782 fans and with no arrests in 74% of regulated games.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, arguments in favour of lifting the ban on alcohol consumption in the stands have arisen again recently.

Football is now the only sport in England where supporters are barred from drinking at pitch-side, and the common perception is that fans of sports like rugby and cricket enjoy drinking during the match without issue. This may not be entirely accurate, however: one journalist attending a Test cricket match in 2011 at Lords described how the venue “transformed into a vast urine-conversion plant or alcohol-extraction facility”<sup>23</sup> and another at an England rugby match in 2013 observed “grandstands full of drunk professionals”.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, instances of alcohol-related public disorder still sporadically occur in these and other sports.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, countries which permit pitch-side drinking in football have not been without problems. In April 2011, for example, a Bundesliga match had to be abandoned after a match official was struck in the back by a glass of beer.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in 2013 a Swedish football match between Djurgarden and Mjallby was abandoned when a player was hit in the stomach by a beer bottle thrown from the crowd.<sup>27</sup>

Some studies have indicated that where football fans are part of a match-going culture based around social drinking, restrictions on the sale and consumption of alcohol at the venue do not typically reduce the amount of alcohol consumed.<sup>28</sup> Researchers evaluating reports from doctors at Glasgow Celtic FC during the 1999-2000 season found that even though alcohol was not for sale at the club’s stadium and intoxicated fans were prohibited from entering, one in four of the 127 clinical presentations was alcohol related.<sup>29</sup>

### Violence and domestic violence

*“The (football) tournament... creates all sorts of problems, often aggravated by alcohol, on the smallest of issues such as what programme the TV is tuned into.”*

Social services representative<sup>30</sup>

Whilst violence specifically on the terraces is largely confined to the recent past, evidence still suggests that violence more generally increases during football games and tournaments. A study in Cardiff between 1995 and 2002 of people requiring medical emergency treatment for assault at the time of international football (and rugby) matches found that assault-related

## Alcohol and football

### Alcohol Concern Briefing



injury attendances were significantly higher on those weekends when matches were played compared to weekends where there were no matches.<sup>31</sup> The researchers concluded that the increased attendances were, in part, due to the ‘celebratory’ consumption of alcohol. Similarly, the FIFA World Cup 2010 tournament was associated with a 37.5% rise in assault attendances across 15 hospital emergency departments on England match days.<sup>32</sup>

There is a small but growing body of evidence linking domestic violence to football and other sports events, which can be exacerbated by drinking. The Home Office has reported that incidents of intimate partner violence increased by up to 30% on the days of England’s fixtures during the FIFA World Cup 2006.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, research examining data from a police force in the north west of England across the 2002, 2006 and 2010 World Cups found the risk of domestic violence rose by 26% when the English national team won or drew, and a 38% increase when the national team lost.<sup>34</sup>

It would be wrong to state that alcohol misuse causes domestic violence – the perpetrator is responsible for his (or her) own actions, and violent incidents may occur irrespective of the presence of alcohol. Likewise, there is no suggestion that football events cause people to become more violent. Increases may also in part be linked to awareness-raising campaigns, like a Domestic Violence Enforcement campaign undertaken by UK police during the 2006 football World Cup, encouraging women to come forward. However, drinking around sporting events may increase opportunities for perpetrators to be violent and be used as excuses for violence.<sup>35</sup>

### Booze in the professional game: all in the past?

*“These days, we are all aware that drinking is no good for an athlete at all, and if you can stop drinking altogether then that’s the most sensible thing”*

Robbie Fowler, ex-Liverpool and England footballer<sup>36</sup>

*“Train, play, drink, train, play, drink. If you trained well and looked after yourself, you could last out a long time... Ninety per cent of footballers do what I used to do.”*

Fernando Ricksen, ex-Rangers and Netherlands footballer<sup>37</sup>

*“Booze can be a problem in management... In football, there is that culture, everything is free in all the boardrooms and so on; it’s very easy to get into a drinking habit. Sometimes people drink to forget things, or if you are depressed, and football is one of those jobs where you are bound to feel that way every so often...”*

Neil Warnock, ex-Leeds Utd manager<sup>38</sup>

Alcohol addiction is nothing new in top level football: Jimmy Greaves, Malcolm McDonald, George Best, Paul McGrath, Kenny Sansom, Tony Cascarino, Paul Merson, Tony Adams and Paul Gascoigne are all examples of exceptional football talents who have battled the booze.

A range of explanations have been put forward over the years as to why footballers turn to drink. One suggestion is that the majority of



## Alcohol and football

### Alcohol Concern Briefing

professional players in the British game tend to come from high risk groups for alcohol misuse in the general population i.e. young, single males from relatively deprived social backgrounds. Excessive consumption may also be a result of, and a means of coping with, wealth and fame, plus a way to relieve boredom during long periods of free time between training and matches. Strong team camaraderie and bonding sessions also provide an environment conducive to big drinking.

There is a view that the tendency for coaches to turn a blind eye to drinking sessions, provided the players still produced the goods on the pitch, is now a thing of a by-gone era. The arrival of Arsene Wenger in the mid 1990s as manager of Arsenal is widely regarded as a watershed moment in British football, in terms of players beginning to adopt healthier diets and cutting out cigarettes and alcohol.

Nevertheless, a look through newspaper headlines suggests heavy drinking by high profile players is still a problem in the game. In 2010, Roberto Mancini expressed dismay at the drinking behaviour of his British Manchester City players<sup>39</sup> and then-England manager Fabio Capello warned of the “English culture” of binge drinking.<sup>40</sup> Alleged incidents of player drinking sprees have appeared as recently as last season.<sup>41</sup>

### Grassroots football

*“I went to my old football club at the weekend, on Sunday, and the culture is what it is in England. You go and play a game and, afterwards, you go to the bar and have a few pints. That is what people do. There’s a clubhouse there where people sometimes go after work. It’s part of the social network.”*

Rio Ferdinand, ex-Manchester Utd  
footballer<sup>42</sup>

The majority of people that play football do so at a grassroots level for their local team. However, household survey findings indicate that heavier alcohol consumption is associated with playing sports like football or belonging to a sports club compared to the general population.<sup>43</sup> This is particularly concerning given that, for young people, it is usually their first foray into the game, the local football club being where attitudes are formed and role models followed.

Unfortunately FIFA’s own nutritional advice to aspiring footballers appears to minimize the harms associated with alcohol use, by stating that “the most important problem associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol after exercise is that it may disinhibit the player and distract them from making good choices.”<sup>44</sup>



## Alcohol and football

### Alcohol Concern Briefing



It seems a ‘play hard, drink hard’ attitude continues to prevail, both in football and other sports, where consumption is endorsed through post-game celebrations and club social functions. Almost two thirds of respondents to an Alcohol Concern survey of over 400 community sports clubs in Wales in 2013 agreed with the statement “club players and members often consume too much alcohol”.<sup>45</sup>

Community football clubs are often reliant on alcohol industry monies, whether from their local pub or big alcohol brands. Clubs can hardly be blamed for not refusing money from the likes of Budweiser, for example, who recently pledged £1million as part of the brand’s FA Cup sponsorship deal to be used towards improved clubhouse facilities.<sup>46</sup> Yet international research indicates that clubs who actively seek to limit alcohol consumption and promotion at their premises can be rewarded with expanded and more varied membership, increased spectators and increased overall income (despite lower bar takings).<sup>47</sup>



## Alcohol and football

### Alcohol Concern Briefing

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## Alcohol and football

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# Alcohol and football

## Alcohol Concern

Alcohol Concern is the leading national charity working on alcohol issues. Our goal is to improve people's lives through reducing the harm caused by alcohol. We have an ambitious long-term aim to change the drinking culture in this country. We campaign for effective alcohol policy and improved services for people whose lives are affected by alcohol-related problems. We support professionals and organisations by providing expertise, information and guidance. We are a challenging voice to the drinks industry and promote public awareness of alcohol issues.

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