British Asians, Covert Racism and Exclusion in English Professional Football

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Abstract

This article examines the exclusion of British Asians from English professional football. At present, there are eight British Asians with professional contracts out of over 4,000 players. This statistic is increasingly noteworthy when we consider that, first, football is extremely popular across British Asian groups and, second, Britain is home to over 4 million British Asians (the UK's largest minority ethnic group). Following a brief introduction as well as a discussion of racisms, the work will provide an overview of the barriers that have excluded British Asian football communities from the professional ranks. In particular, I shall discuss some of the key obstacles including overt racism, 'all-Asian' football structures and cultural differences. However, the focus of this paper is to explore the impact and persisting nature of institutional racism within football. With the aid of oral testimonies, this work shall present British Asian experiences of covert racism in the game. I shall therefore demonstrate that coaches/scouts (as gatekeepers) have a tendency to stereotype and racialize British Asian footballers, thus exacerbating the British Asian football exclusion. Finally, the article will offer policy recommendations for reform. These recommendations, which have come out of primary and secondary research, aspire to challenge institutional racism and combat inequalities within the game.

Keywords: 'Race', racism, British Asian, exclusion, football.

Introduction

This paper will begin by critically examining overt, symbolic, inferential and institutional racisms as these different forms each work to exclude British Asian football communities from the professional game.[1] Secondly, I will provide an overview of the British Asian under-representation in order to establish context.[2] Thirdly, I shall succinctly outline the methodological processes that were used within my research. Fourth, with the aid of oral testimonies, the research will critically highlight the extent to which covert racism is embedded within English professional football. Finally, I will present recommendations for reform that could be implemented in order to challenge institutional racism in English football.

Despite popular belief, football, and not cricket, is the number one sport for British Asian groups (Burdsey 2007; Saeed & Kilvington 2011; Kilvington & Price 2013). Research collected from Manchester University (1991 in Asians in Football Forum 2005: 9) found that British Bangladeshi boys, for instance, played football more frequently than white British boys. Yet, British Asian football communities remain isolated from the mainstream game. Why is this a problem? Why does it matter? Well, if a minority group is excluded from a field, in this case football, it is not possible to label the field egalitarian. Football therefore represents an unequal sphere, contradicting the oft cited 'level playing field' mantra. This paper attempts to raise awareness of the institutional inequalities that British Asians encounter while also offering possible combative solutions. This area of research is vital as football has the ability to 'bring different cultures together' (Fleming & Tomlinson 1995: 2). One could argue that this issue has never been more important as social segregation and exclusion continues to affect certain populations across Britain.

Racism

Racism is one of the most complicated theoretical terms to define, understand and explain due to its changing nature. Nonetheless, Miles (1989: 149) attempts to define racism as

> any set of claims or arguments which signify some aspect of the physical features of an individual or group as a sign of permanent distinctiveness and which attribute additional negative characteristics and or consequences to the individual's or group's presence.

The emphasis on physical traits that underpins racist thinking is further elaborated by Cashmore and Troyna (1983: 27), who note that the consequence of this is an 'ordering' of human populations:

> Racism is the doctrine that the world's population is divisible into categories based on physical differences which can be transmitted genetically. Invariably, this leads to the conception that the categories are ordered hierarchically so that some elements of the world's population are superior to others.

The authors indicate that 'race' and racism are ideologies that centre on biological difference. However, new forms of racism have emerged within contemporary society (Barker 1981; Gilroy 1992; Mason 1995; 2000). As Goldberg (1990: xiii) postulates, 'the presumption of a single monolithic racism is being displaced by a mapping of the multifarious historical formulations of racisms'.

Racism is not just a passing phenomenon as it constantly mutates. Malcolm X (in Otis 1993: 151) once used an analogy from popular culture to describe its shifting meaning: 'Racism is like a Cadillac. The 1960 Cadillac doesn't look like the 1921 Cadillac, but it is still a Cadillac; it has simply changed form'. This demonstrates that racism has changed meaning within a relatively short period of time. Yet, whatever the detours may be, one constant remains, 'ultimately, the goal of racism is dominance' (Memmi 2009: 131). As Wetherell and Potter (1992: 70, in Hook 2006: 210) note, racism is best defined as 'the effect of establishing, sustaining and reinforcing oppressive power relations between those defined as racially or ethnically different'.

Although the goal remains the same, one must emphasise that we can no longer discuss racism in the singular. Racisms, in the plural, is now more accurate (Barker 1981; Mason 1995; 2000).

Overt Racism

Overt racism, for example, could be applied to extreme right-wing groups who wish to repatriate all Black or Asian communities from Western countries to their country of ancestral origin or individuals and groups who actively seek out and verbally and physically abuse some minority groups. This type of racism is very visible. Conversely, one could suggest that a general sensitivity now surrounds overt racism which has led to its decrease. Yet, Stangor (2009: 5) highlights that there are exceptions as, for instance, we are more likely to 'express those prejudices ... when they can be covered up by other external causes'. As Stephan, Ybarra and Morrison (2009: 44) note, 'Symbolic group threats are threats to a group's religion, values, belief system, ideology, philosophy, morality or worldview'. Under these parameters, one is able to defend or even justify the differential treatment of ethnic minority groups on the proviso that 'Other' groups challenge dominant society's culture or 'way of life'. This is commonly referred to as the intergroup threat theory (Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison 2009).

Symbolic Racism

'Symbolic racism' refers to the ethnic, religious or racial symbols that 'out-groups' display (Gilroy 1987; Van Dijk 1993). Notably, groups that are considered vastly different or 'socially deviant' may elicit greater 'symbolic threats' (Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison 2009: 47). Islamophobia is an example of symbolic racism, a form that affects the homogenised 'Asian' within the British context (Saeed 2003). Muslims have been presented as 'primitive, violent ... and oppressive', whereas the West is traditionally considered 'civilised, reasonable ... and non-sexist' (The Runnymede Trust 1997: 6). Following 9/11, Britain saw community relations worsen as 'anyone who wore a turban, or simply "looked Asian" was at risk of physical assault or verbal abuse' (Ratcliffe 2004: 9). In the Islamophobic era, British Muslims are stereotyped as 'dangerous social problems' (Archer 2006: 55) and stigmatized as 'terrorist warriors' (Salih 2004: 998).

Johnson (2007: 24) argues that without our noticing, Britain is 'becoming a society increasingly divided by race and religion' and as a result, British Muslims in particular are not only becoming isolated, but seen as the 'enemy within' (Allen 2007; Ratcliffe 2004). This general trend suggests that if Islam, which means Asian in the British context (Saeed 2003), continues to be presented as incompatible with the British 'way of life', it may have direct ramifications for British Asian footballers. In short, British Asians appear to be on the receiving end of 'symbolic racism' within contemporary western societies (Gilroy 1987; Van Dijk 1993). Under the guise of symbolic racism, ethnic groups are considered homogenous and incompatible with the host culture.

Inferential Racism

Stereotypical perceptions of 'Others', or inferential racism, is central to this debate. Hall (1990: 13) suggests that covert racism can be classified as inferential racism which, refers to

> those apparently naturalised representations of events and situations relating to 'race', whether 'factual' or 'fictional', which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions. These enable racist statements to be formulated without ever bringing into awareness the racist predicates on which the statements are grounded [...] Inferential racism is more widespread – and in many ways, more insidious (than overt racism), because it is largely invisible even to those who formulate the world in its terms.

In any ways inferential racism is based on 'common-sense' or hegemonic thinking. This type of racism is strongly influenced by stereotypes, which Stangor (2009: 2) describes as 'the traits that come to mind quickly when we think about the groups'. One could argue that inferential racism influences social actions and structures and leads to another type of covert racism, known as institutional racism.

Institutional Racism

Coates (2011a: 1) describes institutional racism as 'hidden; secret; private; covered; disguised; insidious or concealed'. While this term entered British popular discourse (Cottle 2004) with the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999, the concept can originally be found in the writings of black activists Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton. Writing in 1967 about the conditions of blacks in America they argued that racism was not just the attitudes of a few white people but was intrinsic to US society. They note that institutional racism is harder to challenge but in many ways is more pervasive than overt racism.

> When a black family moves into a house in a white neighbourhood and is stoned, burned or routed out, they are victims of an overt act of individual racism which many people will condemn – at least in words. But it is institutional racism that keeps black people locked in dilapidated slum tenements [...] The society either pretends it does not know of this latter situation (Carmichael & Hamilton 1967: 4).

This indicates that racism, as well as being an individual act, is also a part of the fabric of society and can be seen in various settings. At times this manifestation is overt but more often it is covert and less likely to gain public condemnation or even acknowledgement (Farrington et al. 2012). This suggests that the foundations of contemporary racism are to be found disguised within institutions and organisations. Institutional racism is therefore very hard to identify and challenge (Farrington et al. 2012). As Zarate (2009: 388) notes, it is possible for one to 'document the underrepresentation of minorities among elected and appointed officials', but it may be 'virtually impossible to identify any specific instance of racism'. Put simply, this form of racism 'operates as a boundary keeping mechanism whose primary purpose is to maintain social distance between racial elite and racial non-elite' (Coates 2011b: 121).

Although sport is considered equal, Hylton (2009) argues that discrimination is present, just as it is in the educational sector and the health service. That said, it is important to point out that overt racism, for instance, in English professional football has decreased in recent years (Frosdick & Newton 2006). Nevertheless, as this discussion has postulated, racism is a complex concept. As this article argues, covert forms of racism in particular have exacerbated the British Asian exclusion from English professional football.

British Asians, Football and Exclusion

It has been argued that Western imagination understands the British Asian 'culture' as being 'inexorably related to the Indian subcontinent' and, it is perceived as 'traditional rather than modern' (Burdsey 2006: 491). Consequently, if one comprehends the British Asian 'culture' or 'identity' to be static rather than

changeable, one may subscribe to the notion that football, Britain's national game, is too 'modern' for the South Asian diasporas. That said, football has been a part of the Indian subcontinent for over a century (Dimeo 2001; Dimeo & Mills 2001; Bandyopadhyay 2003).

For Burdsey (2007: 38), 'football is an extremely popular and socially significant activity for increasing numbers of young British Asian men'. But, in order to fully emphasise the passion and enthusiasm that so many British Asians harbour for the game, it is worth quoting Bains and Johal:

> The truth is there is mass Asian participation in football on a variety of different levels. From playing the games in their thousands to travelling around the country supporting their favoured teams, from working as executives within professional football clubs to buying them out completely, British-Asians, be they young or old, rich or poor, male or female, have either dipped their toes or fully immersed themselves in the dynamic waters of the modern game (1998: 17).

Yet, this passion is not mirrored with participatory success in the professional sphere. For example, there are only eight players of Asian-heritage within the professional game. Moreover, there were only 13 Asian heritage players, seven of whom are of dual ethnicity, between the ages of 16-18 participating at football league academies in the 2009/10 season. This statistic becomes increasingly noteworthy when one considers the fact that over 1,200 players participate at this level. Those of Asian-heritage are not only under-represented in the professional ranks, but also in the youth system.

It has been agreed that there are multiple barriers that British Asian football players encounter when attempting to gain inclusion within English football (Bains & Patel 1996; McGuire, Monks & Halsall 2001; Burdsey 2007; Saeed & Kilvington 2011). For Burdsey (2004; 2007), Lusted (2009; 2011) and Bradbury (2010; 2011), racisms have exacerbated the British Asian exclusion. Bains and Patel (1996: 26) found that 49 per cent of Asian heritage players, mainly within amateur football, had encountered verbal racism, while a further 48 per cent had faced both verbal and physical abuse. The oral testimony cited below emphasises the commonality of overt racism in semi-professional football:

> You hear it at away games ... I know it's a horrible thing to say but I've had it most of the season. I can name the number of games on one hand where I haven't had it and we've played 46 games. (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 4 May 2011)

Burdsey (2004: 298) indicates that 'issues of "race" and racism at amateur level might make a more substantial contribution to the under-representation by restricting the progress of British Asian players into the higher echelons of the game'. McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001) employ quantitative data to test the idea that racism poses a barrier for British Asian football players. They note that over 90

per cent of Asian heritage players saw 'racist supporters' as obstacles for entry into professional football (McGuire, Monks and Halsall 2001: 75).

In short, overt racism is still manifest within the grass-roots and semi-professional spheres (Kilvington & Price 2013). In turn, it is no surprise that British Asian football communities created 'all-Asian' football structures.[3] These mono-ethnic environments were established as a 'safe haven' after British Asian players regularly encountered overt racism in mainstream football leagues. As Johal (2001: 53) explains, 'South Asians [were] forced into creating their own mono-ethnic football teams in order to protect themselves from racial abuse and still partake of the sport'. As Bains and Patel (1996: 26) note, 'those who played in Asian teams were significantly less likely to encounter racism than those who played in mixed or predominantly white teams'.

The continuation of 'all-Asian' football structures is hardly surprising considering the current climate of racial hostility. For example, Athwal, Bourne and Wood (2010) analysed 660 cases of racial violence across the UK during 2009. They noted that 'Asians, who are recognisably Muslim and/or working in isolating trades or living in poor communities where they do not enjoy strength of numbers, are at greatest risk. Just over 45 per cent of victims were Asian' (Athwal, Bourne & Wood, 2010: 10). Thus, one must understand the appeal of 'all-Asian' leagues. For Kilvington and Price (2013: 175), 'mono-ethnic structures ... allow socially alienated communities the opportunity to participate in sport', while Burdsey (2009: 716) adds that these organisations 'remain necessary given the continuing presence of racism in amateur football'.

Nevertheless, these 'all-Asian' environments are perceived to embody British Asian self-segregation. Hence, 'communities that are under-represented as players, coaches and managers are blamed for causing their own exclusion, rather than being seen as the recipients of exclusionary attitudes and practices' (Burdsey 2011: 6). For Lusted (2009: 732), this transferring of blame places the onus onto ethnic minority groups as they are deemed unwilling to 'conform to hegemonic practice', or in this context, participate in mainstream football environments. If one adopts this standpoint, they problematically engender a 'colour blind' ideology and thus deny the existence of racisms (Long et al. 1997; Long 2000; Gardiner & Welch 2001; Johal 2001; Long & Hylton 2002; Lusted 2009). Put simply, British Asians are blamed for their isolated position due to their perceived insular tendencies.

Religio-cultural differences have also been highlighted by football insiders to explain the British Asian exclusion. In other words, British Asians are excluded because their 'culture' *is* deemed incompatible with English football. This transferring of blame is encapsulated by the following football insider's comment:

'You hear about Asian players stopping to say their prayers. They're different from us, have a different culture' (*Independent on Sunday* 17 September 1995, in Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001: 179).

Moreover, Kilvington (2012) argues that gatekeepers continue to racialize British Asian players. British Asians' lack of success in football is said to perpetuate the physiological myth that 'Asians cannot play contact sports' and, instead, only play stick sports (Sleap 1998: 111, in Collins & Kay 2003: 125). One could argue that South Asians and British Asians are 'racially framed' to possess physical characteristics that are deemed incompatible with contact sports (Feagin 2006). For example, Dave Bassett, a former manager of Leicester City FC, commented that 'the Asian build is not that of a footballer [...] It may well be that Asian ingredients in food, or the nutrition they take, [is] not ideal for building up a physical frame' (BBC TV 1995, in Fleming 2001: 114). Unfortunately, 'Bassett's views on the British Asian exclusion are not alone, as many figures within the game today may still embrace such stereotypes' (Kilvington 2012: 209). It is important to point out that from a sociological perspective, there is little evidence to suggest that 'racial' differences determine success or failure in particular sports (Cashmore 2005; Coyle 2010).

If gatekeepers adhere to the outlined stereotypes, one could argue that institutional figures will not actively scout Asian-heritage players (Bains & Patel 1996; Burdsey 2004; 2007; Randhawa 2011; Kilvington 2012). As a result, this maintains the British Asian exclusion as they are being overlooked by the scouting system on the basis that 'they' are not compatible with the physical or cultural requirements that the game entails (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001; Burdsey 2007; Kilvington 2012; Kilvington & Price 2013). It is at this point that inferential and institutional racism comes to the fore. As this paper will argue, these forms of racism are still embedded within talent identification systems (McGuire, Monks & Halsall 2001; Burdsey 2004; 2007; Kilvington 2012). Although British Asians are blamed for causing their own exclusion (Kilvington & Price 2013), I shall suggest that it is in fact the football system that is maintaining and exacerbating the British Asian exclusion, rather than British Asians themselves.

Methodology

As this article includes primary research, it is important to briefly discuss the employed methods. The empirical work the article is grounded upon is part of my wider PhD research which examined the British Asian exclusion from English professional football. The research methodology chosen was that of 'action research' as the investigation aims to 'make improvements to that environment' (Denscombe 2002: 26). The work includes the thoughts of 58 individual partici-

pants within the field, and using purposive, theoretical and snowball sampling, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two FA members, five football academies, five centres of excellences, two overseas professional British Asian players, nine semi-professional British Asian players, three amateur British Asian players, two professional clubs, nine British Asian founded grassroots level organisations, and three anti-racist organisations.

During the coding process, 38 barriers to participation were highlighted. These barriers include the lack of grassroots teams in predominantly British Asian populated environments, the failures of the scouting system and the lack of role models. That said, there were considerable overlaps between most barriers. For instance, covert racism could be fitted into an overarching racisms category which includes both overt and covert forms. This overarching category then links with 'all-Asian' football environments as racisms, notably overt forms, acted as an 'accelerant' in their formation (Bradbury 2011: 81). Yet, while overt racism led to the creation of such mono-ethnic structures, it is inferential and institutional racism that maintains the exclusion as gatekeepers do not visit such areas. Covert racism therefore acts as a significant barrier in the exclusion of British Asian players, and it is for this reason why this article has decided to focus on this exclusionary force.

British Asians, Institutional Racism and Football

> Racism in football operates in increasingly complex, subtle and nuanced ways, to the extent that it often goes unrecognized and subsequently unchallenged, in the game (Burdsey 2007: 40).

Hylton (2009: 41) argues that 'we live in a fundamentally racist and unequal society where processes systematically disenfranchise and limit the potential of black (and white) people. We therefore have a racist society that impinges on all aspects of our lives'. Yet, although discrimination is a constant in our daily life experiences, Long (2000) suggests that there is a 'denial of racism' within sport. These denials permit that

- success is based on 'merit', e.g. 'We scout players ... If there happened to be an Asian player who was outstanding, we'd sign him' (Academy manager, 6 June 2011).

- strength of 'character' is needed, e.g. 'Being called a Paki from your teammates is different, right? You have to get used to that ... It's banter, you take it on the chin and they'll respect you more' (British Pakistani former academy player, 25 May 2011).

- the 'blame' is 'transferred' onto excluded groups, e.g. 'Cricket is still number one for Asians' (Bradford City centre of excellence staff, 9 July 2011).

- 'societal change' means society is less racist, e.g. 'For an Asian player now to make it in the game ... it is definitely easier than it was because society has changed; we've become more open minded, more liberal' (Anglo Bangladeshi semi-professional footballer, 7 April 2011).

An additional tenet of this denial is that of 'colour blindness', which effectively refuses to 'identify "race" as an influencing factor on the playing field' (Lusted 2009: 730). 'Just as the law, policing, education, health, housing, social welfare and politics cannot afford to be colour-blind, neither can those in sport as managers, policy makers, the media or academics' (Hylton 2009: 31). This discussion will therefore aim to centralise minority voices in a bid to highlight examples of covert racism that have been experienced by British Asian football communities within the recruitment process.

For Burdsey (2007: 53-4), there are four fundamental failures of the scouting system. First, gatekeepers are ignorant and believe that the more talented players, whatever colour or 'creed', will compete in mainstream leagues. Second, many recruiters do not venture to 'all-Asian' or 'specialist' leagues as they are considered not to be of a sufficient overall standard. Third, the smaller clubs may not have the time, money or resources to send out employees to observe 'specialist' leagues. Fourth, most 'all-Asian' structures are believed to be adult-dominated and these players are past the 'golden age' of learning. Williams (1994: 160, in Lusted 2009: 725) points out that scouts and coaches tend to follow tradition when it comes to player recruitment:

> Knowledge of local male networks and of the interface between local, non-league and professional football is a significant currency inside the male communities which manage, play and support the game at the local level. The 'scouts' of professional clubs have a special, near-mystical status in this culture as they trawl the top local leagues in search of young men who have the elusive and indefinable 'right stuff'.

While these institutional figures peruse the top leagues they are routinely by-passing British Asian football environments. This led one participant to argue: 'There needs to be a revamp of the system because they [the scouts] only go to places that they know' (British Bangladeshi semi-professional footballer and youth development officer, 5 April 2011).

Back, Crabbe and Solomos (2001) promote a framework of policy interventions that aspire to combat the racialisation and exclusion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) footballers. They note that within the occupational (recruitment) arena, BAME players are racialised in terms of their 'attributes, sporting capacity and professional competence' (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 214).

Therefore, the football recruitment process, and sport in general, is not egalitarian because recruiters are likely to perceive British Asians as inferior to their white and black counterparts (Bains & Patel 1996; Kilvington 2012). Back, Crabbe and Solomos (2001: 214) continue by suggesting that policy responses should aim to raise 'awareness' of 'racial stereotyping' within the game, thus challenging scouts' preconceived ideas.

Problematically then, because racial myths persist, gatekeepers avoid 'parallel' British Asian football environments and continue to use their 'networks of "white knowledge"' (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 37). As a result, it has been suggested that 'most British Asian players do not play in an environment where they are likely to be spotted by professional clubs' (Burdsey 2006: 776), and, in turn, British Asian football communities remain a 'reservoir of untapped talent' (Bains & Johal 1996: 265). This gatekeeper avoidance is emphasised in the oral testimony below:

> We haven't looked [for British Asian players] to be honest with you but there's none in the leagues that we follow. You've got to bear in mind that although we do as much as we can, and we probably do more than most for the community, we're not here primarily for the community, we're here to find the next Messi and that's what we get our wages paid for. (Scout co-ordinator, 2 June 2011)

Although professional clubs, including Chelsea FC, West Ham United and Queens Park Rangers, have attempted to engage with British Asian communities, the overwhelming majority have ignored this exclusion. In short, there is a non-recognition of the British Asian exclusion. When one ignores this exclusion, one is effectively dismissing structural racism and 'transferring' the 'blame' (Long 2000). Interestingly, McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001: 75) note that only 26 per cent of youth development officers acknowledged that institutional racism 'was operating as a barrier'. In contrast, they add that 90 per cent of British Asian respondents argued that institutional racism excludes players.

While black people are excluded from the football boardrooms, British Asians are excluded from the playing fields. Therefore, some researchers have suggested that British Asians suffer from a decreased level of opportunity (Bains & Patel 1996; Burdsey 2004, 2007; Kilvington 2012; Kilvington & Price 2013). Significantly though, when the opportunity does arise and British Asians secure a trial, these players commonly face ability-related stereotypes, which hinders progress. This is observed in the interviews below:

> I spent some time at [two professional clubs] and I was excelling, I was definitely one of the better players there but I never got pushed forward to go to the next level by the coaches. It became disheartening, you know, because what am I supposed to do? I'm better than all these players but I'm not progressing ... All coaches will have a certain perception about something and that will always stick in their mind. (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 19 May 2011)

> Playing in the playground I was always one of the best players in comparison to the other lads whether they'd be white, black or whatever. So, I always knew I was better than the others but it was about somebody putting that faith in me ... I've never got the breakthrough that I felt I deserved. I always felt like I had to be twenty times better than the white kid standing next to me to be in the starting eleven. If I had one or two things better than him that wasn't good enough, I had to be, like, superior. (British Pakistani professional overseas footballer, 20 May 2011)

These oral testimonies emphasise the struggles British Asian players face in the youth system. 'Asians have argued that scouts and coaches have certain preconceived ideas about Asian footballers, and that these preconceptions adversely affect the way they look at certain groups of players' (Bains & Johal 1998: 263). In short, inferential racism (Asians *lack* interest or ability) leads to institutional racism (avoidance of 'all-Asian' football communities). In order to achieve professional contracts, or even gain a trial, British Asian footballers feel that they have to be 'superior' in order to be taken seriously.

Bains and Patel (1996: 57) note that professional clubs perceive the Asian exclusion to be the result of a lack of 'interest' while the Asian physique does 'not conform' to the physical requirements of professional footballers in England. Although there is little evidence in support of the 'physique' barrier, the following two participants emphasise that perceptions of this ideology may have contributed to their lack of football success:

> If an Asian player and a white player were playing at the same level and of the same ability, I think they would pick the white guy more. I don't want to come across saying that's the case every time but I have actually experienced it ... When I was at [an academy], and without sounding big headed, I thought I was about two or three times better than anybody else but they said to me I was too small. I'm average height, I'm five foot eleven and they chose someone about six foot one. The players I was playing with said to me after that the decision was ridiculous. (British Pakistani semi-professional footballer, 28 April 2011)

> I'm not the biggest, I'm 5 foot 8, 5 foot 9, and I'm a centre half. A centre half naturally is supposed to be a six foot five skinhead and built like a brick house. Some of the guys I've played with are playing in the Premiership at the moment. Me and Danny Shittu, we played football together, cricket together, badminton together and volleyball together. We played them sports at county level so we could've gone on and progressed in any one of them sports. Now, he chose football. I chose football. He made it and I didn't but that's just how it is. The funny thing is, the game he got scouted and got his first pro contract, we were playing in the same team together. That game I was playing centre half, I played well, no, in fact, I played outstanding, but then I turned round and saw Danny getting scouted. I'm happy for him because he is a good friend of mine but he's six foot five and built like a brick house and there you go. (British Bangladeshi semi-professional footballer and youth development officer, 5 April 2011)

These accounts highlight that inferential and institutional racisms are arguably at play within the selection process. Bourdieu (1984: 217-18) posits that a sport is more likely to be embraced by 'a social class if it does not contradict that class's relation to the body'. This hypothesis can also be linked with the process of racial-

isation as the Occident's notion of the British Asian body is one that denies the necessary qualities needed to succeed in contact sports (Said 1985; Farrington et al. 2012; Kilvington 2012). Hence, the British Asian 'identity' becomes racialised as characteristics are unfairly ascribed to them (Back et al. 2001). While whites remain 'unraced', non-white 'Others' are marked by their raced bodies (Dyer 1997; Hylton 2009). If gatekeepers adhere to such timeworn notions of the physically inferior South Asian, they may not take the 'gamble' in recruiting 'weak' British Asian footballers (Dimeo 2001; Kilvington 2012). British Asians are therefore unfairly stereotyped by some institutional figures. The following comment is a case in point:

> They don't like physical contact; I think that's their problem. Why are they good at cricket? Why are they absolutely exceptional at squash? Why do they not participate in any other sports where there is physical contact? Rugby? Football? They do participate but they don't participate to the highest level ... it's just talent wise, physical contact and an understanding of the game. (Scout co-ordinator, 2 June 2011)

One could argue that this comment would not look out of place in a 1970s investigation of racism in football. This scout has biologically and culturally homogenised British/South Asian communities by suggesting 'they don't like physical contact' on the basis that very few have reached elite level in contact sports while they are 'absolutely exceptional' in stick sports, due to successes. This is a simplistic and essentialist viewpoint that embraces a nature over nurture standpoint. In short, 'this scout may refrain from targeting predominantly British Asian locations for players' (Kilvington 2012: 210). Burdsey (2007: 106) adds that 'physical stereotypes strongly influence beliefs about footballing competences and, consequently, impact on issues of inclusion/exclusion'.

Bains and Patel (1996: 5) highlighted that 69 per cent of professional clubs subscribed to the stereotype that British Asians were physically inferior to players from other ethnic groups. Yet, McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001: 74) uncovered that 40 per cent of professional clubs strongly disagreed with the notion that a 'lack of powerful physique' acts as a barrier. Hence, there seems to be a shifting attitude regarding biological discourses of 'race'.

As part of my PhD research, I conducted interviews with 18 gatekeepers (coaches/scouts working with professional clubs): seven were white British and 11 were British Asian. Although these quantitative findings struggle to be representative of gatekeeper's ideologies due to the paucity of responses, they do mirror the results of McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001) as three white British scouts/coaches agreed that physicality is a barrier while four others disagreed. Yet, for one British Indian academy coach and County Football Association (CFA) member, offering Asian-heritage players a professional contract is still considered a 'gamble':

> It comes down to the decision making of the coaches and them taking a bit of a gamble. I think the fear's still there with coaches at the moment. Coaches think: 'Because there's not many of them, do I take that gamble'? ... They're still not willing to take that brave risk. I think it's still there and I've seen it myself. I think: 'Go on, take a gamble, give him a pro contract. Take the gamble'. If he doesn't make it then fair enough but listen, there's a lot of worse players I've seen get one year contracts. (31 April 2011)

This failure to 'gamble' can be witnessed in the oral testimonies below:

> When I was playing at county level, every single player that I was playing with was at a pro club, except for me. I was playing with about three Chelsea players, two Arsenal players and one of those now plays for Leeds. So, you can see that if I were ever gonna get scouted it would have been at these matches, but it never happened. You can't get scouted from a better place than playing county with ten other pro players, you know. That's when I started thinking: 'This is a joke'! (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 19 May 2011)

> One of the guys we've got up front used to play in the professional game; he's gone for a trial at [a League One club]. He scored 20 goals this season; I scored 25 and I'm still here. I'm not going on trial anywhere. How can you get 25 goals and have nobody be even looking at you? (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 6 May 2011)

These participants' experiences again suggest that there is a 'glass ceiling' which prevents British Asian inclusion at elite level. In other words, these players can only progress so far but when it comes to decision time, institutional figures arguably assume that British Asians cannot succeed at the highest level. Black players have managed to gradually erode the racialised perceptions through high levels of participation within the game (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001). Yet, British Asians 'have been less successful in combating dominant imagery' (Burdsey 2007: 26). Thus, increased 'participation may actually enable them to resist and challenge wider social [cultural and 'racial'] stereotypes' (Burdsey 2006: 479). The various ideas raised in this discussion can be observed in the following oral testimony:

> Are scouts going to the right places? Are scouts only looking for the exceptional Asian players? If you look at the vast majority of the scouts in the UK, they are English. Maybe they have inbuilt stereotype? They might think that if they took an Asian lad on his parents would say no. All these things need to be taken into account. (British Indian grass-roots coach and founder of anti-racist organisation, 6 April 2011)

Indeed, all these facets need to be taken into account, addressed and challenged. To combat this issue, talent identification programmes should be scrutinised and structural changes must follow.

Hitherto, I have examined covert racism in football. It has been suggested that British Asian football communities are by-passed as talent identification systems continue to draw on networks of 'white knowledge' (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 37). My wider research attempted to challenge this claim and it uncovered

that the 17 British Asian footballers included in this study, all of whom have played at academy level, were not recruited from 'all-Asian' environments. Moreover, not one of these players was offered a professional contract meaning that recruiters refrained from taking the 'gamble'. One could argue that essentialist thinking among gatekeepers has contributed towards this exclusion. In order to challenge this issue, key stakeholders must begin to acknowledge the problem and accept, rather than deny, the existence of racism. It is vital that action must be taken.

Recommendations for Reform

This section promotes recommendations for reform that, if implemented, would be likely to encourage British Asian inclusion within the professional game. Yet, it must be noted that there is no perfect solution or quick fix to solve this issue.

First of all, it is essential that the current crop of gatekeepers must be educated on the British Asian exclusion. In other words, the 'denial of racism' must be challenged (Long & Hylton 2002; Hylton 2009; Lusted 2009; 2011). Academy personnel must be enlightened to the perpetual struggle BAME communities, and particularly British Asian footballers, face within football. Football's governing body, the FA, should therefore fund and facilitate a biennial workshop which brings together all relevant academy personnel and key figures within the Football in the Community programmes of all 92 professional clubs. Of course, British Asians must also be encouraged to attend this platform as it provides a space for them to network and share their football experiences. The event would aim to emphasise, for example, stereotypes, myths and the institutional barriers that exist within the recruitment process as

> the main barrier facing young Asian kids right now is the lack of education among the coaches ... A lot of coaches out there still think: 'Oh yeah, they love their education'. Or: 'Sport is not important'. (British Pakistani former academy player and CEO of anti-racist organisation, 25 May 2011)

> clubs aren't selecting enough Asian youngsters because they think they haven't got the ability that's required. (FA Spokesperson, 15 March 2011)

Yet, there are some considerable problems with this rather ambitious policy recommendation. First, clubs in exclusively white environments may view such an event as unnecessary. Ergo, if the workshop tackled wider discriminatory issues such as Islamophobia, homophobia and the exclusion of black managers, it would not only expand its objectives, it would widen its appeal. Unfortunately, this may dilute the 'Asians in football' content. Second, an event of this nature, which aims to bring together key figures from 92 professional clubs as well as BAME communities, is perhaps unrealistic. To overcome this obstacle, it might be possible to

stage biennial regional workshops at local CFAs, thus bringing local football communities together.

Coach education must be reviewed if institutional barriers are to be overcome. Randhawa (2011: 245) notes that 'race equality education' is one of the many ways in which to achieve 'sustainable change'. This recommendation aims to raise awareness of the barriers British Asians face, it will educate gatekeepers and also provide a platform in which two polarized football communities can construct links.

The second recommendation refers to the construction and development of links between professional clubs and 'all-Asian' football structures. Hitherto, the majority of professional clubs have failed to acknowledge the issue and have therefore overlooked British Asian footballers within the recruitment system (Bains & Patel 1996; McGuire, Monks & Halsall 2001; Burdsey 2004; 2007; Randhawa 2011; Saeed & Kilvington 2011). It has been argued that key stakeholders do not understand British Asian communities (Taylor 2004; Randhawa 2011), and, as a result, this maintains the divide. This lack of understanding is demonstrated by the following oral testimony:

> I'm a Sikh, right. We had a meeting with [a community representative at a football club] and the first thing he said was: 'Oh, do you lot need prayer mats and prayer rooms'? I wasn't upset with him but he'd already painted a picture before he'd, kind of, worked with us. What they were thinking automatically was: 'Do we need to build a prayer room at our club'? [Laughter]. (British Indian Sikh coach and founder of 'all-Asian' league, 3 June 2011)

Without interaction, it is likely that stereotypical notions of 'Asianness' may deter clubs from forming partnerships with British Asian groups. The British/South Asian 'community' is perceived as alien, 'Other' and homogenous (Said 1985). With the construction of links though, these barriers will be slowly eroded, as an understanding between parties should blossom. Trust must be built between key stakeholders and British Asian football communities. This view is presented by the oral testimonies below:

> The clubs have got to link with grass-roots football a bit better. We don't trust each other. (Youth development officer at 'all-Asian' club, 10 August 2011)

> You can't just produce literature and programmes and hope people will engage with you, you do have to go out and connect. I think some organisations, not just football clubs but others, all need to get their head round that. (QPR Trust spokesperson, 3 May 2011)

Professional clubs in particular must attempt to reach out to their local British Asian communities. Links must be primarily forged with local schools and grass-roots clubs. In time, these links can snowball and 'Asian' leagues or 'Asian' tournaments may be acknowledged and attended by recruiters. One could suggest that the most appropriate way to establish dialogue would be for academy personnel to

meet with prominent figures within the local 'Asians in football' scene. These individuals would be able to advise clubs on how to engage with British Asian communities while also offering relevant contacts within the locale. Therefore, academies must play a key role in overcoming the British Asian exclusion (Burdsey 2007).

Conclusions

Although English professional football is perceived to have set the benchmark on anti-racism (Burdsey 2011), this article has suggested that covert racisms are ingrained within the domestic game. 'All-Asian' football structures, which were formed against the backdrop of overt racism (Bradbury 2010; 2011), have maintained the British Asian exclusion, as empirical work shows that talent identification systems continually overlook these environments. Not only does this segregation result in the reification of stereotypes, i.e. biological difference and religio-cultural incompatibility, it also shifts the blame onto the excluded group and this upholds the denial of racism. For professional clubs, then, the outcome is one of non-response and, in consequence, generations of British Asian talent have been bypassed by the scouting 'networks of "white knowledge"' (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 37). In order to challenge this problem, it is essential that structural changes must be implemented. My wider research has offered ten recommendations for reform, but, within the context of institutional racism, it is important that coach education is scrutinised while links are constructed, maintained and further developed. Until action is enforced, British Asians will unfortunately remain on the sidelines of the professional game.

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Notes

[1] Although commonly critiqued, the term British Asian will be employed throughout. As Farrington et al. (2012: 111) state, it refers to an individual that is born in the UK and has 'two parents who are of South Asian descent'. However, when I present oral testimonies, I will refer to the participant's ethnic/national origin, i.e. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Sri Lankan as this helps to de-homogenise player experiences.

[2] It must be noted that the term exclusion is strongly favoured over under-representation. Under-representation is de-prioritised as the research is not suggesting that the Asians in football debate should end when British Asian professional footballers become representative, i.e. match their population levels. I am not arguing that because Asian-heritage peoples represent over four per cent of the total population, British Asian footballers must make up over four per cent of the professional cohort. Rather than creating a debate that focuses on under and over-representation, the discussion will instead examine issues of inclusion and exclusion.

[3] The term 'all-Asian' has been allocated to football structures that are essentially British Asian dominated. The Asian Premier League (APL) of London is referred to as an 'all-Asian' league, while teams that are predominantly British Asian are described as 'all-Asian' teams. Yet, please note that this term has been placed in quotation marks as, for instance, many 'all-Asian' structures are now likely to include players, coaches, volunteers, etc from other ethnic backgrounds (Burdsey 2009; Bradbury 2010). Ergo, it would be unfair to label these organisations as simply, all Asian or Asian only.

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