WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

A study of the nature and extent
of Racism in Rugby League

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A STUDY OF THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF RACISM IN RUGBY LEAGUE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following study has been carried out by Leeds Metropolitan University on behalf of the Rugby Football League, Commission for Racial Equality and Leeds City Council. The aim of the research was to provide an informed report on the nature and extent of racism in rugby league.

The research consisted of three components: a questionnaire survey of rugby league supporters at four selected clubs; a postal questionnaire to club officials (Chairmen, Secretaries, Physios/Trainers and Coaches) throughout the Rugby League; and interviews with players at the four selected clubs (8 black and 8 white players were interviewed).

The response from the supporters survey was excellent with a total of 2,364 questionnaires used in the analysis (67% response rate). The survey of officials also received a high response rate for a postal survey (60%).

The average age of the supporters was 36 years, with half the respondents in the age range 30-49. The research revealed the "average" rugby league fan to be more likely to be male, employed and from a C1/C2 socio-economic background. However, as many as a third of the fans were women.

A large majority of all respondents knew that some clubs had been taking part in campaigns to stop abusive chanting. Their awareness came largely through PA announcements, programme notes, and papers and magazines. Most fans also thought that such action was a good idea.

The referee was the most prominent target for abusive chanting, while almost half the respondents reported hearing chanting against black players and 5% even said that they were the most frequent target. Not surprisingly the majority of people do nothing if they hear racial chanting but as many as 22% said they complained either to stewards/police or directly to those chanting. When asked about the acceptability of abuse to players just because of their skin colour, 13% of respondents thought it was either acceptable or sometimes acceptable. Despite populist views, few fans subscribed to the idea that black players were lazy or that Asians were unsuited to playing rugby league, though more tended to agree that women were unsuited to playing rugby league.

The club officials who responded had a slightly older age profile than the respondents of the fan survey, and 38% of them were, or still are, professional players.

Like the fans the vast majority of officials reported hearing chanting against the referee, and a third said they had heard chanting against black players at their own club. Two thirds said that their own club had been involved in a campaign to combat abusive chanting and a similar proportion thought the campaigns had made things better. Half of the respondents agreed with the statement: 'If we have ethnic minority players in the side they get picked on at some clubs'.

41% of officials were of the belief that African-Caribbeans had special characteristics suited to rugby league, compared to 11% who held the same belief of the Asian population. A quarter of responses also identified characteristics that suited African-Caribbeans to particular positions. More club officials reported Asians as having characteristics that are limiting in rugby league compared to African-Caribbeans. Characteristics associated with African-Caribbeans were 'their natural athleticism', 'power' and 'speed'; characteristics seen to limit them were associated with their handling and catching of the ball, and co-ordination. Limiting characteristics for Asians were associated with pain tolerance, small stature and lack of tradition. Responses as to why there are more African-Caribbean players than Asian ones in rugby league were divided into three main areas: physical, e.g. Afro-Caribbean players are generally larger in stature; social, e.g. where they are born and who they make friends with; and, cultural, e.g. religious beliefs lead them to non contact sports.

Two thirds of club officials said that people from ethnic minorities were welcome at the club if they wanted to come, while less than a quarter said their club actively encouraged them. A quarter of respondents said that their clubs had taken steps to try to make sure there was no racism shown by staff, and slightly more had taken steps with supporters, largely in the form of PA announcements and programme notes. A third of club officials maintained their club had a race equality policy but for most this did not extend beyond an assertion that black players would be selected if they were good enough.

Only a quarter replied that they had any member of the permanent staff who came from an ethnic minority. Four out of ten respondents reported that 10% or more of their players were from ethnic minorities.

Over half the club officials had witnessed racist behaviour at some clubs. Again, over half had said it had been in the form of chanting. Despite these observations, two thirds still insisted that racism is not very widespread. The majority had not heard of the 'kick racism out of football' campaign, and only 40% thought such a campaign in rugby league would be a good idea.

The interviews with Asian and black rugby league players revealed that all had suffered racial abuse of one kind or another, largely from spectators, which varied in intensity from club to club. Interviews with white players confirmed that racial abuse in the form of shouts at players from the crowd are seen as commonplace. They conceded that black players were more open to more abuse than other players simply because of the colour of their skin.

Racial abuse from certain players was also said to occur on the pitch. While the black players said they had suffered racial abuse as a 'winding-up' tactic, not all the white players said it happened. Black players also suggested they had to work harder than white players as they had to combat racial abuse and racial stereotyping. These stereotypes about the ability of black players were used by white players and, to a lesser extent by black players.

The players felt action should be stricter on those who shout racial abuse, and that any development and encouragement of the game among ethnic minorities would be for the good of the game at large.

Overall the research team concluded that there is a small but significant problem in rugby league accompanied by a lack of awareness of racial issues on the part of some. However, the loyalty of rugby league fans and their pride in the game could be used to good effect in any action to combat racism in the game.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

At the start of the 1993/4 season the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Professional Footballers' Association launched the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign which subsequently gained the support of the Football Association, the FA Premier, the Endsleigh League and the Football Trust (CRE/PFA, 1994). That campaign led to discussions between the Rugby Football League (RFL), Leeds City Council and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) with a view to taking action to address racism in rugby league.

Some sports though have become renowned as being sites for racialist confrontations, most notably football, as recorded in Hill's (1989) account of John Barnes' experiences and Holland's (1994) work on the terraces at Newcastle, Leeds and Bolton. General impressions suggested that the position in rugby league was not as bad as in football, but racist abuse and occasional incidents of banana throwing and monkey chants have all been recorded at rugby league matches. Concern about racism at matches has also been expressed recently in the letters pages of the rugby league press and players have talked about their own experiences on television.

Since we live in a racist society it would be remarkable if there was no evidence of racism in sport. Nonetheless, as the National Governing Body of the sport, the RFL recognised that this was not a reason for taking no action if it were demonstrated that there are cases of racism in rugby league. However, before embarking on direct action it was decided that information was needed on the nature and extent of racism within the game. To that end Leeds Metropolitan University was asked to survey attitudes and it was agreed that this investigation should have three main components:

a) the attitudes of the clubs
b) the attitudes of (black and white) players
c) the attitudes of spectators

At this stage we have been concerned only with the professional game, though the scope of the project may be extended subject to discussions with BARLA.

Racism

<u>All Different, All Equal</u>

1995 has been designated as the International Year of Tolerance and the Council of Europe has identified it as the year of action against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance. The Council of Europe's campaign is called 'All Different, All Equal', but has received very little attention in the UK. This may reflect a British attitude that there is little to be gained by drawing attention to something unpleasant.

<u>Language and terminology</u>

In terms of any project addressing racial issues, there is a difficulty in adopting appropriate language that is unambiguous, does not insult people and matches people's everyday understandings.

The use of the term 'Black' has been used politically to refer to those who can be distinguished by the colour of their skin and subjected to prejudice by the white majority as a consequence. However, that term embraces many other variations. Crucially for this project, we were alert to different issues relating to people of African-Caribbean, Asian and Polynesian descent. Moreover, while Polynesian players are commonly referred to as 'black' in New Zealand, the use of this term for Polynesian players in Britain is less usual.

The term most commonly used within rugby league is 'ethnic minorities', and because of that it is a term we have often used ourselves even though it does not properly fit the subject of this research (for example, the Irish might be considered an ethnic minority in England). Table 1 presents definitions of key terms offered by Cashmore and Troyna (1983). Most writers in the field would suggest their own fine tuning of these but they are a useful starting point provided by recognised authors within the field of sport and 'race'.

<u>Racism and Racialism</u>

Racism is the belief that the world's population can be divided into categories based on physical genetic differences. This is then associated with the belief that some categories are superior to others and used to justify inequality. Racialism comprises the discriminatory actions taken as a result of such racist beliefs.

<u>Racism and the Individual</u>

We make great use of stereotypes in order to help us organise our thoughts and operate in everyday life. If combined with an intolerance of difference this may prejudice us against those from other groups.

> *In 1984, in the British Social Attitudes report, we reported high levels of awareness of racial discrimination and a surprisingly high proportion of people were prepared to admit to personal prejudice against blacks and Asians (Airey, 1984)...1991 [figures] show a remarkable stability in the perceptions of racial prejudice. Around half the respondents think there is a lot of prejudice against black people and slightly more think this to be the case for Asians. A further third think there is a little prejudice against both. Even more remarkably, only a very small proportion of the British - fewer than one in ten both eight years ago and now - see their society as prejudice-free. (Jones, 1992, p181)*

Table 1: Definitions and Terms

Racism

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.

Racialism

The action of discriminating against particular others by using the belief that they are racially different, and usually inferior. It is the practical element of the 'race' concept.

Institutional Racism

The policies of institutions that work to perpetuate racial inequality without acknowledging the fact. Douglas Glasgow refers to this as camouflaged racism, meaning that it is not open and visible, but concealed in the practices and procedures of organisations such as industries, political parties and schools.

Ethnic Group

A number of people who perceive themselves to be in some way united because of their sharing either a common background, present position or future - or a combination of these. The ethnic group is subjectively defined in that it is what the group members themselves feel to be important in defining them as a united people that marks them off, and not what others consider them to be.

Prejudice

An inflexible mental attitude towards specific groups of others based on unreliable, possibly distorted, stereotyped images of them.

Stereotype

A mental image held about particular groups of people constructed on the basis of simplified, distorted or incomplete knowledge of them. An example would be a stereotype of Jews: all of them are mean. This isn't accurate, but is a widely held stereotypical image of them.

Taken from Cashmore, E & Troyna, B (1983) Introduction to Race Relations. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

It is not always easy to distinguish what constitutes racist behaviour. If someone is attacked or denied an opportunity it is often not easy to establish whether or not that has anything to do with their colour. Some people try to justify racist abuse by likening it to other forms of abuse, say, in highlighting someone's lack, or length, of hair or their weight. However what this type of excuse fails to acknowledge is that all these terms of abuse can be levelled at anyone, regardless of their skin colour. Racist abuse is substantially different as it deliberately works to isolate a particular section of the community who have no redress and carries with it meanings that are far more violent and damaging to those on the receiving end than any light-hearted reference to someone's weight or hair length. Holland (1994) highlighted, with his study at football grounds, how black players receive not only racist abuse but also more abuse of *all* kinds from the fans; thus they suffer what he refers to as a 'double burden' of abuse. A lot lies behind racist labels. In any case there are plenty of people who do not want to hear abuse of any kind, hence the RFL encouragement for club campaigns to stamp out abusive chants.

Commonsense Racism

Some stereotypes have become so pervasive that they are accepted
as commonsense. As far as this project is concerned this applies most commonly to athletic ability in sport because of some presumed genetic inheritance:

        * black people are naturally athletic
        * black people are less intelligent than white people
        * black people don't make good swimmers
        * black people are better sprinters than white people
        * Asians are too frail for rugby

Many such racial stereotypes have proved extremely resilient despite research to the contrary (e.g. Edwards 1973, Phillips 1976, Cashmore 1990). Moreover, some of these conventional wisdoms have eventually had to give way in the face of very obvious contradictory evidence on the ground. For example, it was not long ago that it was thought by some that black footballers were not good defenders because they lacked the necessary 'bottle'. However this was demonstrably refuted when Viv Anderson became the first black footballer to play for England as a defender in the late seventies.

Institutional Racism

We have suggested that most people are racist to a certain degree (in their stereotypical views rather than their actions), and there is no reason to expect black people to be different in that either. The point is that the positions of power in British society (and British sport and rugby league), are dominated by white people. Not surprisingly, that leaves black people feeling that they have to be better than their white counterparts in order to succeed.

The days of banning athletes because of their colour (e.g. boxing in Britain and baseball in the United States) is a thing of the past, but some racist attitudes are so pervasive that they are built into the structures of sport. Those processes which, whether intentionally or not, result in the continued exclusion of a subordinate group are labelled as institutional racism (Miles, 1989).

<u>Racism in Sport</u>

The Sports Council, many local authorities and National Governing Bodies of Sport have expressed their concern that there are not more people from ethnic minorities taking part in sport either as players or spectators. In reviewing the involvement of South Asian youths in sport, Fleming (1994) has argued that 'the preoccupation with cultural differences is a diversion and a distraction from **the** most fundamental issue - the pervasive impact of racism in all its guises.'

The work already mentioned by Holland (1994) established the disproportionate amount of abuse directed at black football players, black supporters and black people living near the grounds.

Various writers have expressed their concern with what they have labelled 'stacking', whereby black athletes tend to be played in some positions/events/sports and not others. Once such a pattern has been established, the way in which aspiring athletes follow in the steps of role models will tend to perpetuate it.

Rugby League

Overall, the common impression is that whatever racism there may be in rugby league, it is of a different order of magnitude from that experienced in soccer. For example, the 1991 Football (Offences) Act that was introduced following the Taylor report to legislate against racist chanting (among other things) does not apply to rugby league grounds.

It is a long time since Lucian Banks played for Hunslet (over 80 years) as the first black player in the League. Since then there have been others (often arriving from Welsh rugby union), but it is only relatively recently that there have been more than a handful of ethnic minority players at the same time. The long history of involvement has led to a certain complacency: 'How can rugby league be racist? Look at Cec Thompson who played for Great Britain in 1951, look at the legendary Billy Boston and Clive Sullivan, who captained Great Britain in the early seventies. Then there are the 'greats' of the modern era; players like Henderson Gill, Des Drummond, Roy Powell, Martin Offiah and Ellery Hanley.'

Black players have become part of rugby league's history and roots at the highest level. In the amateur game too, black players have been and are involved in the running of sides. On the surface it can appear that rugby league has no problem.

However, rugby league is clearly perceived as white man's culture, associated with the northern masculinity of pits, pints and props in spite of so many famous black players. Players like Clive Sullivan and Ellery Hanley are exceptions whose talent was too obvious to ignore, but black players have struggled to gain acceptance. Until the arrival of Ellery Hanley, no black player had been so influential at a club (Wigan) and at international level, becoming both captain and coach. This season he has been the only club captain or coach who is black. And the shouts from the terraces that 'there's only one Ikram Butt' (the only Asian player in the league) are all too true. Asian and African-Caribbean spectators are also noticeable by their absence.

Table 2 presents data on the representation of ethnic minority players in the first teams (including substitutes) of all first division rugby league clubs for fixtures over one weekend in September.

On the same weekend in Division 2 there were 18 players (out of 240) of African/African-Caribbean origin and no Asian players. Seven clubs had no players from ethnic minorities playing on the day.

So, excluding the Polynesian players, 7.9% of the players were black. In simple numerical terms then, there is no indication that African-Caribbean players are under-represented compared with the population at large in the younger age groups. However, such a measure of proportional representation would provide only a very simplistic, crude indicator of racism, which is multidimensional. Moreover, on the same basis, Asians are clearly under-represented.

There is clear indication of 'stacking' in rugby league. On the same survey weekend, of the black UK players: five were forwards, 13 wingers, one a utility back and one plays anywhere (i.e. 75% are backs, 65% wingers). Of the black UK players in the second division, seven were forwards and eleven were wingers. Of all the UK players from ethnic minorities in both divisions, none were in the scrum half or stand-off position, and only one was in the hooking role.

Table 2: Players From Ethnic Minorities in First Division Rugby League Teams

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Total number of players                          =    240
Number not white English                         =     54    (22.5%)
 of whom
        number of English non-white               =  20   (8.3%)
         of whom
                African-Caribbean from traditional RL areas    =      14
                African-Caribbean from other areas             =       5
                Asian descent                                  =       1
        number of overseas players                =  34  (14.2%)
         of whom
                Polynesian/mixed origin from S. Pacific              =      19
                European origin from Australasia               =      11
                European nationals (French)                    =       3
                South African (Afrikaner)                      =       1


4 clubs had no players from UK ethnic minorities
6 clubs had one
4 clubs had two
2 clubs had three

[2 clubs had no overseas players on their quota]
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The Report

The rest of the report explains the research that we undertook (Chapter 2), then presents the findings from the survey of the fans (Chapter 3), the survey of club officials (Chapter 4) and the interviews with players (Chapter 5), before drawing conclusions which we hope will help to indicate the way forward. There is a separate executive summary and set of recommendations for consideration by the funding partners.

CHAPTER 2: DOING THE RESEARCH

General Principles, Setting-up and Selection

In accordance with the purpose of the research outlined in the previous chapter, three basic components of the project were identified:

a) a questionnaire survey of rugby league supporters;
b) a postal questionnaire to club officials;
c) interviews with players.

In addition we have monitored the national and rugby league press and reviewed the academic literature on related issues.

Asking questions about a sensitive issue like racism is clearly not straightforward if people are to be encouraged to give honest replies. In devising suitable survey instruments we had the advantage of an advisory group representing the various funding bodies, and further advice from CRE research staff, colleagues at LMU and researchers at other institutions who have worked in similar fields.

Since questionnaires should contain questions that do not appear to be the product of a single mind set, we found ourselves in the strange position of posing questions that we felt were inherently racist. The intention was to try to convince people that there were no right or wrong answers, an uphill battle given people's perceptions of political correctness. However, we hoped the guarantee of anonymity we had agreed with the advisory group would persuade people that they could express their views freely.

The research did not get underway until February 1995. That meant we had to operate to a very tight time schedule with the last day of the league season on April 23rd and a commitment to report by the end of June. Inevitably there were consequences for the sequencing of survey work and the selection of fixtures.

The survey of club officials involved all clubs in Division 1 and Division 2 of the Rugby League. The other two components of the research were conducted at four clubs: Keighley Cougars, Leeds, Saint Helens and Featherstone Rovers. Insofar as was possible within the timescale, the fixtures at which supporters were surveyed were selected to widen further the geographic spread of the people involved (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: The Surveys of Fans

Date	Match	Response Rate
26.02.95	Keighley v Huddesfield (pilot)	52%
12.03.95	Leeds v Workington Town	61%
02.04.95	St Helens v Wakefield Trinity	82%
23.04.95	Featherstone Rovers v Oldham	73%

The Survey of Fans

The survey work conducted in football by CRE and Market Research Solutions Limited (CRE, 1994a,b) was an evaluation of the Let's Kick Racism Out of Football campaign and its associated publicity material. We had no such campaign to provide the focus for our questioning. However, the RFL had been encouraging clubs to campaign against abusive chanting. Clubs had taken this up with varying degrees of enthusiasm, so we decided to use such campaigns as a way of beginning to raise issues important for this research.

Members of the supporters club at one of the clubs not to be included in the main survey agreed to help our initial discussions and provide feedback on an early version of the questionnaire. The full questionnaire was then piloted at a match, which also allowed us to assess the practicalities of our survey procedures.

The questionnaires (see Appendix 1) were self administered, handed to respondents as they came through the turnstiles before the game. Fans were provided with a pen and asked to return their completed questionnaires to designated collection points before the start of the match, at half time or at the end. Fortunately we were blessed with good weather on each survey day and the chances of a good response rate were further improved by offering those completing the questionnaire entry to a prize draw, with a chance to win a pair of tickets for the Halifax Rugby League Centenary World Cup (names and addresses were on a separate form to ensure anonymity).

Any survey has to be concerned about those who do not respond, but, especially in the light of warnings beforehand, we were very pleased with the level of response achieved, which is high for a self-administered questionnaire in such circumstances. One message is clear: the fans are keen to be involved in 'their' game.

For the pilot study 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 1000 were used at each of the other games. Since only very minor changes were made between the pilot and the main survey, responses from the pilot survey have been included in the full data set, giving a total of 2,364 responses.

Being at the games also gave the survey team a further opportunity to observe beyond the matches some of them would otherwise attend as fans. Doing participant observation is not without its difficulties. For example, it is not always clear how to interpret what is observed. At one game a nearby supporter was shouting, '...you fucking nig nog'. The abuse was not being directed at a black player, but at the referee. However, it was because of its original associations that the term was used as being suitably abusive.

Other information was received because the survey team were seen in a semi-official capacity. At one match two of the away fans complained that a woman (home fan) standing behind them had poured out a torrent of racist abuse picking on one player in particular, "calling him 'a fucking black twat' every time he got the ball."

The Survey of Officials

As explained above this was intended to obtain the views of club officials at all 32 clubs in the first and second divisions of the Rugby League. At each club we identified the Chairman, Secretary, Coach and Head Physiotherapist/Trainer or their equivalent (different clubs use different titles). This identified 126 people.

The RFL wrote initially to alert clubs of the research and encourage their participation. That was followed by our questionnaire with a covering letter explaining why it was important that they should participate and asking them to return the completed questionnaire in the self-addressed, prepaid envelopes provided. A reminder was then sent (with another copy of the questionnaire and prepaid envelope) to those who did not respond. Finally, the RFL phoned the three clubs with a zero return in order to try to persuade them to respond.

Table 4: Postal Survey Schedule

RFL alert	Week 1
First questionnaire	Week 3
Reminder	Week 6
RFL phone	Week 8
Cut-off date	Week 13

All together 126 questionnaires were sent out and 73 useable replies returned (a response rate of 60%). In the end, some response was received from every club bar one. We even received replies from Doncaster which was in the process of being wound-up at the time.

Once again a lot of work was done before the questionnaires were administered in discussion with the advisory group and other experts. Because this questionnaire was to go to all clubs, that left no club officials on whom to pilot it. So instead we identified a number of colleagues at LMU who were both rugby league fans and familiar with research and writing on social issues. They were then asked to review the questionnaire imagining that they were themselves a club official.

Several of the questions used matched those asked of the fans. However, given the nature of the questionnaire and its target audience we felt able to move on to some questions more directly related to racial issues (see Appendix 2). It was stressed that we were interested in the respondents' own views and did not expect them to give an official club view.

Interviews with Players

The final component of the field work was a programme of interviews with both black and white players from four clubs. These proved more difficult to arrange, coming in some cases after the last game of the season or when attention was being focused on finals.

Initial discussions about the content of the interviews was followed by a preliminary interview with a professional player living nearby before the interviewers were put in the field.

The format of these interviews was much looser than had been possible with the questionnaires, allowing interviewers to follow those avenues identified as being particularly important to each respondent. The main themes explored were: the respondents' own career and aspirations; how different players were received on arrival at a club; patterns of socialising; and experiences of racism. For these interviews it was felt important that white players should be interviewed by a white interviewer and black players by a black interviewer.

Interviews were conducted with 16 players at the clubs and tape recorded to aid our analysis. Having said that what was reported to us would be treated in confidence, we have assigned pseudonyms to the players in our reporting in Chaper 5; and where readers may still be able to identify the respondent we have formally sought their approval to quote them here.

Analysis of Data

The results from the fan survey were all coded and then entered into a computer statistical package (SPSS) for analysis. This allowed us to compare results from the various sub-groups (e.g. male / female; home / away; different clubs), but some of the differences revealed could be attributed to sampling error. In regarding the findings we have therefore drawn attention only to the most significant differences.

Part of the results obtained from the club official survey were analysed using the same method adopted for the fan survey. However, some questions didn't lend themselves to such analysis and were therefore analysed in a more qualitative manner.

Players were interviewed face-to-face using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees permission from which personal accounts of the experience of racism in rugby league were collated.

CHAPTER 3: THE FANS AND THEIR VIEWS

We decided that in the interests of confidentiality we should not present data separately for the four surveys. In any case the aim was to gather information from rugby league fans rather than the supporters of particular clubs. Where we felt that there was something significant about the differences between the survey findings from the different clubs we have identified that in the commentary. The questionnaire we used is presented in Appendix 1.

The Rugby League Fan

At one stage it was suggested that our questionnaire should contain a question about which ethnic or racial group the respondents considered themselves to belong to. However, it soon became obvious that surveys based on a random representative sample would not pick up sufficient people from ethnic minorities to give the exercise any point. Instead the survey assistants were asked to keep a count of black (in its widest sense) fans passing the survey points. The outcome was that 11, 8, 5 and 0 black fans were recorded at the matches surveyed. Against attendances of five and a half thousand, almost 16,000, almost 6,000 and almost 4,000, respectively, these represent a negligible proportion. The CRE research also noted the 'virtual absence of ethnic minority spectators at [football] matches' (CRE, 1994b).

As would be expected, home supporters made up a large proportion of the survey respondents. From all the surveys 74% were home supporters while only 13% were away supporters; the remaining respondents were classified as being neutral.

Rugby League has the reputation of being the working man's game. That it is supported predominantly by men was confirmed with 70% of respondents being male. However with 30 per cent female support, that is twice the proportion (14%) recorded in the CRE/MRSL surveys at football grounds (CRE, 1994a) or the 13% recorded in the 1995 FA Premier League Fan Survey (Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research, 1995). Supporters also tend to be 'working', with almost three quarters in employment (see Table 5 - quite similar proportions were recorded at all matches). However, it is less easy to draw clear conclusions about the social class composition of the crowd because a large number of respondents provided inadequate information to allow them to be allocated to one of the six socio-economic groups commonly used in survey work. As can be seen from Table 6 two thirds were in socio-economic groups C1 (lower middle class) and C2 (skilled working class) and a quarter were in the upper middle and middle class groups.

Table 5: Employment Status of Respondents

Employment Status	Percent of Respondents
Employed	73
Unemployed	5
Retired	8
Housewife / husband	3
In full time education	10

Table 6: Socio-economic Group of Respondents

Socio-economic Group		Percent of Respondents
A	Upper middle class	6
B	Middle class	19
C1	Lower middle class	35
C2	Skilled working class	33
D	Working class	7

Figure 1 shows the age profile of respondents. The overall average (mean) age was 36 years, with almost half the respondents in the age range 30-49 (though of course the youngest spectators were not included in the survey)

Figure 1:   Age Profile of Respondents
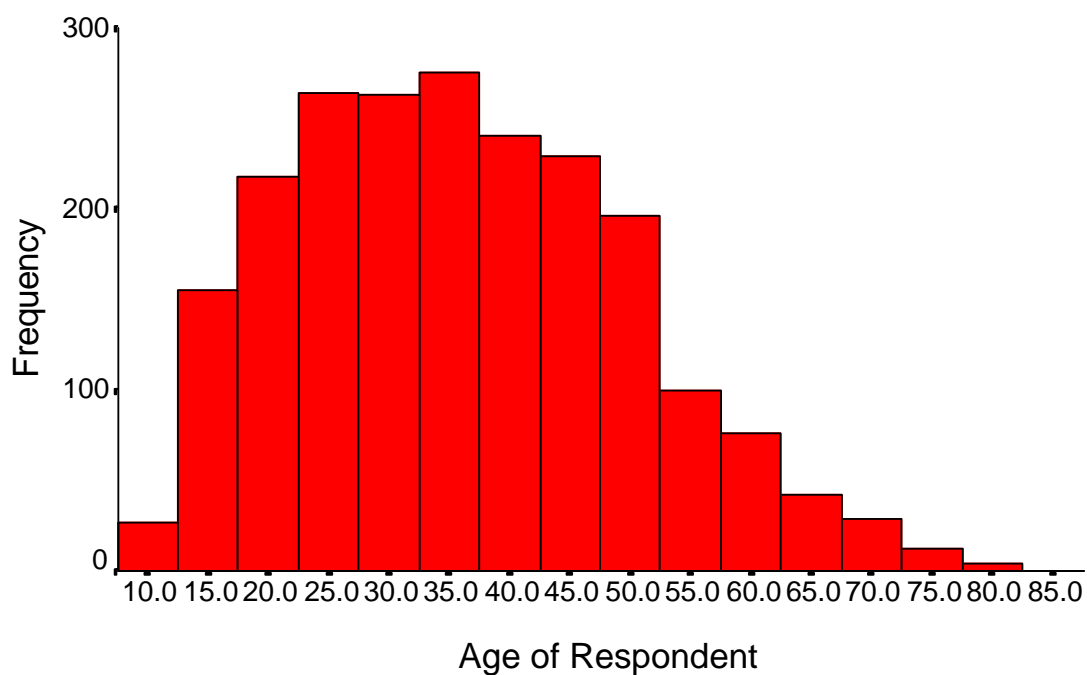
In recent years the RFL and the clubs have once more been trying to exploit the image of 'a family game'. Almost two thirds of our respondents came with family or with family and friends (only 5% came alone). Moreover, 91 per cent disagreed with the statement that 'rugby league is no longer a family game'. Perhaps not surprisingly, the family orientation was more evident among home fans; away fans were more likely than home fans to be with friends.

The survey findings seem to support the idea of the loyal rugby league fan with over half the fans (56%) having supported their club for over ten years, while 20 per cent and 18 per cent had been supporters for 5-10 and 1-4 years respectively. That left only 6 per cent who had been supporting the team for less than a year. This may underestimate the number of 'new' supporters if they thought themselves insufficiently informed to complete the questionnaire or passed it to a more seasoned fan who had come to the game with them. Examining each club separately revealed that St Helens and Featherstone attracted more long term supporters (i.e. more than 10 years), while Keighley and Leeds were more successful in attracting those who had only been a supporter for 1-4 years. In Keighley this probably reflects the vigorous promotional campaign associated with 'Cougar mania', while Leeds has a more transitory local population to draw on.

In summary, the 'average' rugby league fan is more likely to be male, employed and from a C1/C2 socio-economic background. More of the fans are home supporters, they are likely to attend the match with others and the majority have been a supporter for more than 10 years.

Campaigns Against Chanting

The RFL has encouraged its member clubs to take action to try to discourage abusive chanting from the stands and terraces. Clubs have taken this up with varying degrees of enthusiasm and commitment, and different clubs have tried different approaches. At Headingley, for example, before some of the matches, placards were placed around the pitch, facing the supporters and politely asking for their co-operation in avoiding abusive language. Clubs have also made appeals to the fans via the public address system and programme notes, trying to emphasise the 'specialness' of rugby league and appealing to the pride of its supporters.

A large majority of all respondents (88%) knew that some clubs had been taking part in campaigns to stop abusive chanting. While this level of awareness was similar among respondents at each of the matches surveyed, we were surprised to find that levels of awareness were markedly lower among the 'away' fans. We had assumed that fans travelling to support their teams away from home would be more committed and would also be aware of what was happening at a larger number of clubs. Consequently we expected that it would be they who would be more aware of such campaigns.

When asked how they found out about anything, respondents in most leisure surveys identify word of mouth as the most common channel of communication. For our respondents, however, knowledge came from rather more direct experience: 63 per cent from PA announcements, 40 per cent from programme notes and 33 per cent from reading papers and magazines. This is another reflection of the involvement of the fans with the game. The major variations from the overall pattern presented in Table 7 were the large proportion (43%) at Leeds who referred to the placards, and the even greater prominence given to the PA announcements at St Helens.

Table 7: How Fans Knew of Campaigns to Stop Abusive Chants

Knowledge of Campaigns	Percent of Respondents
Posters / placards	17
PA announcements	63
Programme Notes	40
Friend told me	7
Papers / magazines	33

The vast majority of respondents thought that such action was a good idea (only 5% thought it a bad idea). More importantly, less than one per cent thought the campaigning had made things worse, 34 per cent felt it had had no effect and 48 per cent thought it had made things better (the remainder felt unable to make a judgement), with the most positive response coming from Leeds. Observation by members of the research team support this generally favourable impact on the chanting at matches, though it may sometimes be short-lived. Home fans were more likely to believe that the campaigns had had a beneficial effect, perhaps reflecting what appears to have been a greater level of activity by their clubs.

Respondents were asked who they had heard abusive chanting directed at (Table 8). For each category respondents at Keighley recorded the lowest proportion who had heard abusive chanting. As expected, overall it was the referee whom most identified as having been the butt of abusive chanting. Similarly, the referee was also identified as the most frequent target. The wonder is that anyone attending a rugby league match has failed to hear abusive chanting directed at the referee. Maybe for some it has become so normalised that it is no longer recognised as being abusive.

Table 8: Percentage of Respondents Hearing Abusive Chanting Against Different Targets

Target Groups	Percentage of Respondents
Referee	91
Club, coaches, managers, etc.	33
Black players	46
Other team generally	70
Supporters own team	30
Supporters of the other team	48

Almost half the respondents reported that they had heard abusive chanting directed at black players and five per cent even said that they were the most frequent target. The highest proportion reporting chanting against black players was at St Helens, where the club regularly has three or four 'black' players in the first team.

To try to get an indication of supporters' views of the acceptability of racial abuse they were asked:

> *All the players get abuse, but sometimes players get abuse because of the colour of their skin. Do you think this is:*
> > *Acceptable/just part of the game?*
> > *Sometimes acceptable when they play badly?*
> > *Never acceptable?*

Responses from all the surveys revealed that the vast majority of respondents (87%) feel it is never acceptable for players to be abused because of the colour of their skin; this was slightly less pronounced among the away fans than among the home fans. Viewed from another perspective it may be worrying that that should leave 13 per cent who thought it was either acceptable as part of the game or sometimes acceptable.

We also wanted to know how people reacted to racial chanting. The majority said they ignored it and did nothing. Only 2 per cent were prepared to admit to laughing or joining in, and at the same time as many as 16 per cent were prepared to complain direct to the people chanting abuse and 6 per cent complained to stewards. The latter may be a function of the availability and accessibility of stewards within the crowds. This overall response was reflected in replies from each of the clubs, home and away. We have to recognise that there is probably a certain component in this response of what people would like us to think they did rather than what they actually did. It is therefore a mix of what actually happened and what is seen to be proper. Interestingly, replies were largely unaffected by the type of group respondents were with, though people who were with their family were slightly more likely to complain directly to the chanters themselves.

Fans Attitudes

Table 9 shows supporters' responses to a series of attitude statements. The first two related to issues of crowd control. While changing ends at half time is a thing of the distant past for football fans who support Premier and Endsleigh League teams, it is still commonplace in rugby league, though changes in stadium design as a result of the Super League may change that. More than half the respondents believe that supporters should be allowed to change ends, whereas almost a quarter felt that it should be forbidden. Supporters were fairly evenly divided over how good a job the stewards did in sorting out troublemakers, with slightly more agreeing that they did a good job than disagreed. The highest levels of support for the stewards were at Keighley and Leeds.

Table 9: Attitudes of Fans

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
		Percentage of Respondents	
People should not be allowed to change ends at half time	23	20	57
Stewards do a good job sorting out trouble makers	36	39	25
I tend to ignore crowd announcements on the PA	14	24	62
There should be fewer foreign players in British rugby	36	32	32
Black players tend to be lazy	2	8	90
Asians are unsuited to playing rugby league	4	12	85
Women are unsuited to playing rugby league	19	22	59
Rugby League is no longer a family game	4	6	91

The next statement was included to provide an indication of the likely effectiveness of one of the channels of communication most readily available for the clubs to convey messages to the fans. Overall 62 per cent denied that they ignored crowd announcements on the PA. So that represents an appropriate means of communication for a substantial sector of the support, but others will have to be investigated.

Opinions were almost evenly divided on whether or not rules on the numbers of overseas players should be stricter. While some of those who believe that there should be stricter rules on the entry of overseas players to the British game may be driven by their prejudice against foreigners, there are other rationalisations to do with the health of the domestic game and being able to encourage home grown talent. Featherstone fans were the most likely to support stricter controls.

One of the populist assertions about black athletes has been that they are lazy, not good trainers and with a poor work rate during games. However, very few supporters subscribed to this view. Even adding the neutral responses to those who agreed amounted to only one in ten of the respondents. Interestingly, some of the supporters accused us of being racist because of this question; it was because we recognised its racist content that we felt the need to include it.

Just as in football, one of the explanations offered as to why there are so few Asians involved (none in the top four divisions in football, only one in the top two divisions in rugby league) is that they are not suited to the game, sometimes because of temperament, but more commonly because of physique. While some people did agree with this statement, over 85 per cent disagreed. The highest proportion disagreeing were at Featherstone, which was the team of the only Asian player, but the lowest proportion disagreeing with the statement was at Keighley where there is a substantial local Asian population. Despite the growing number of women's teams, rather fewer people (59%) disagreed with the proposition that women are unsuited to rugby league. Although being challenged, the idea of the man's game still lingers.

The last question was an open-ended invitation to identify how the club could make supporters more welcome. Although relatively few, some took that opportunity to

address racial issues (well down the list after cheaper admission and free beer). For example:

Kick out the racists.

At Halifax I had to report two Halifax fans to the police for calling Owen Simpson 'black bastard' and Ikram Butt 'Paki bastard'. The police had words with them, then they were quiet for the rest of the match.

Employ police and stewards to eject abusive fans who swear and make racial jibes.

Ban all racist fans.

Organise open days or have match days where groups of Asians or Blacks can come and see for themselves free of charge (e.g. a coach load with one of the Leeds RLFC representatives looking after them.

Rid the crowd of abusive so-called fans. Actually do it, don't just say it.

Introduce a hall of shame in the local paper showing photos of people ejected from the ground for abusive behaviour.

Encourage one or more match mascots from each local ethnic group for each match.

Stop racist chants.

This is a racist questionnaire as it is a non-racist sport (see black captains etc.).

You are trying to make something out of a black issue that doesn't exist.

Too much has been made out of too little. Our game is very family orientated. You take the rough with the smooth and get on with it.

Different Fans

In the analysis above, some mention has been made of variations in responses from different groups of fan (between clubs, home/away, men/women). This section focuses more directly on our analyses of any differences.

<u>Men and women</u> - we examined whether men had a different relationship with, and attitudes towards, the game from the women supporters.

Men tended to have been a supporter of the team for rather longer and were more likely to be aware of campaigns against abusive language. Perhaps because of a slightly closer involvement with the game they were more likely to have read of such campaigns in programme notes or the press. Rugby league is even more of a family experience for women, with as many as three quarters coming with others from their family.

There was rather less suggestion of racism from the female supporters. Men were more likely to favour stricter rules on overseas players; women were less tolerant of abuse because of the colour of a player's skin; when they heard racist chanting women were more likely to complain, either direct to the offenders or to police/stewards (31% compared to 19%); women were more likely to disagree with the proposition that black players are lazy. And men were rather more likely to suggest that women were unsuited to playing rugby league.

<u>Age of the fan</u> - For the purpose of this analysis, respondents were split into three age groups: under 30 (younger), 30-49 (middle) and 50+ (older).

Generally, the older the fans the more likely they were to have heard of the campaigns against abusive language, to think that they were a good thing and that they had made things better (Table 10).

Table 10: Effect of Campaigns by the Age of Respondents

	Made things better %	No effect %	Made things worse %	Don't know %
0-29 years	44	38	1	17
30-49 years	48	35	1	17
50+ years	55	27	<1	17

While younger fans were least likely to find acceptable the abuse of players because of the colour of their skin, they were least likely to do anything about it. Older fans were more likely to want stricter rules on overseas players and were more likely to consider women unsuited to playing rugby league.

<u>Length of time as a supporter</u>

Longer term supporters were more aware both of abusive chanting and the campaigns directed at it. While they were more likely to support stricter rules on overseas players, longer term supporters were less likely to believe that Asians are unsuited to rugby league.

<u>Home and away fans</u> - since following the team away from home implies a high level of commitment, we investigated whether this was associated with different responses. Away fans were less likely to disagree with the assertion that black players are lazy and were slightly less likely to consider it unacceptable for players to get abuse. Home fans were more supportive of the idea that the stewards do a good job and were also likely to pay attention to PA announcements. We might have expected that away fans would go to more matches at more grounds and so be more aware of the various campaigns against chanting, but in fact they proved to be less aware. Not surprisingly then, home fans were more likely to think that the campaigns had been effective.

CHAPTER 4: THE VIEWS OF OFFICIALS

Having written to the Chairman, Secretary, Coach and Head Physio/Trainer, or their equivalents, at each club we got similar levels of response from each section apart from the Chairmen who are probably rather more distanced from the day to day practice of the club. Of the respondents, 16 per cent were Chairmen, 32 per cent were Secretaries, 25 per cent were Coaches and 27 per cent were Physios/Trainers. Half had been employed for twelve years or less, half for longer. They tended to have a slightly older age profile than our respondents in the survey of supporters, and 38 per cent had been or were still professional players themselves.

Campaigns Against Chanting

Like the supporters, the officials were asked about the abusive chanting they had heard, but they were asked specifically about what had happened at their own club. Again, almost all had heard chanting against the referee. Table 11 shows their responses, with the responses from supporters in brackets for comparison. For some reason they were rather less aware of chanting against black players than the supporters were, and much less aware of the chanting by supporters that was directed at opposing fans. Secretaries and physios/trainers were twice as likely to have heard chanting against black players as chairmen and coaches.

Table 11: Respondents Hearing Abusive Chanting Against Different Targets

Target Groups	Percentage of Respondents	
Referee	93	(91)
Coaches, Managers, Physios etc.,	34	(33)
Black players	33	(46)
The other team generally	63	(70)
Supporters' own team	25	(30)
Opposing fans	18	(48)

Two thirds (68%) said that their club had been involved in a campaign to combat abusive chanting (though that probably underestimates the number of campaigns because nine out of ten secretaries said their clubs had been involved) and a similar proportion (67%) thought that such campaigns did make things better (and again, it was the secretaries who were most likely to think they had been beneficial). As with the fans, the older respondents were more likely to believe that such campaigns had a beneficial impact. Action had most commonly taken the form of programme notes (Table 12), but half reported the use of the PA to convey messages to the crowd.

Table 12: What form the Campaigns have Taken

Means	Percentage of Respondents
Programme notes	59
PA announcements	49
Posters and placards	11
Direct action by stewards	40

Two respondents specifically mentioned that ejecting some of the troublemakers from the ground had served to cut down the number of offences. Another suggested that the same effect had been the result of declining attendances. Others also referred to positive steps that had borne fruit:

> *Less abuse. At Featherstone an announcement was made during the game and the obvious abuse stopped immediately.*
> *We are now breaking down the large numbers that used to congregate into smaller numbers which are more manageable.*

However, there were also those who felt it had been achieved as a result of appealing to supporters' better nature:

> *People were made aware of their responsibilities.*
> *Generally most people recognise it is either racist or uncalled for.*

The role of the other supporters was also recognised:

> *Keighley Cougars has a strong reputation as a family club, and spectators help to influence the others.*
> *When I approached a supporter myself and requested him to stop the use of foul language I was applauded by supporters and sponsors. He had the option to stop or leave the ground - he stopped.*

One official offered a word of caution that though welcome, it might be only a temporary reprieve:

> *It has immediate effect and then is forgotten.*

Some said that the campaigns had had no effect because such behaviour was beyond the ability of the clubs to affect:

> *It's the way of today's world.*
> *Generally people who do it don't care.*
> *There is an element of abusive language from a minority of the crowd which seems to see no wrong in this action.*

The majority agreed with the statement that, 'There is never any racist chanting from our supporters'. However, a third disagreed, recognising that there is sometimes racist chanting from their own supporters (interpretations of this question are, of course, influenced by what they recognise as being 'racist chanting'). The position was reversed when asked if their ethnic minority players were picked on at some of the clubs they visited. Over half reported that that happened, with less than a third disagreeing.

Table 13: Respondents' Attitudes on the Extent of Abuse of Ethnic Minority Players

"There is never any racist chanting from our supporters."

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
15	40	11	33	1

"If we have ethnic minority players in the side they get picked on at some clubs."

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7	44	17	23	9

Attributes of Players

Club officials were asked if they thought there were any special characteristics of ethnic minority players (asking specifically about Asian players and African-Caribbean players) that suited them to playing rugby league and to particular positions in the game, or limited them in their playing.

While they were quite likely to identify such characteristics among African-Caribbeans (41%), only 11 per cent did so for Asian players. A quarter of the club officials also identified characteristics that suited African-Caribbeans to particular positions. Respondents were slightly more likely to identify limiting characteristics among Asian players, but six per cent did so for African Caribbean players.

Table 14: Perceived Attributes of Ethnic Minority Players

Special Characteristics	Asians	African-Caribbeans
	Percentage of officials	
Suited to rugby league	11	41
Limiting in rugby league	14	6
Suited to particular positions	9	25

Most of the limitations identified related to Asian players:

> lower pain tolerance
> lack of tradition - skills more suited to soccer
> culturally non-violent and not competitive or as aggressively competitive
> generally small in stature
> lack of present players
> appear to dislike the physical intensity of rugby league

In the research team's discussions with people around rugby league these have been quite commonly expressed views, but, apart from the lack of tradition and players to act as role models, they do not match Ikram Butt's interpretations expressed in recent television broadcasts.

Some suggested limitations of African-Caribbean players too:

> their handling and catching of the ball sometimes lets them down
> sometimes handling skills are not as good - sometimes uncoordinated
> some tend to be lazy and find it difficult to focus

Most of the comments though were based on beliefs that African-Caribbeans are, in fact, well suited to rugby league. Phrases like natural athletes, pace, strong upper body, elusive runners, speed and suppleness, power and speed, strong in distance and stamina events, and all-round athletic abilities, typified the responses. Of those identifying the suitability of African-Caribbean players for special positions, most suggested the backs, particularly the wing. Two exceptions identified other 'running positions' at second row forward.

A closer analysis of the views of the officials reveals that the chairmen were far more likely to hold stereotyped views about the assumed biological and cultural characteristics of African-Caribbean and Asian players than the other officials. For example although 41% of those surveyed believed that African-Caribbeans had characteristics which suited them to rugby league the percentage for the chairmen was 80%, with most of these chairmen feeling that black players were 'naturally athletic'.

Though many of the chairmen believed that black players were physically suited to the demands of rugby league they were more likely than other club officials to feel that African-Caribbean players were limited in other ways to playing rugby league. This was expressed in terms which questioned African-Caribbean players cognitive and motivational abilities. One chairmen remarked *"Some tend to be lazy and find it difficult to focus"*. Also the chairman seemed to be more sure than the other officials that African-Caribbean players were suited to playing in particular positions, i.e. the wing and back positions (44% of chairmen felt this compared to the average of 25%).

By comparison the chairmen were also twice as likely as the other officials as seeing Asians as being unsuited to playing rugby league. The most common reason expressed was the belief that Asians, as a group, lacked the physical strength and courage to play rugby league. As one chairmen put it, *"They appear to dislike the physical intensity of rugby league"*. Some talked of the cultural and religious barriers they saw as preventing Asians from playing the game, summed up by one chairman when he replied, *"Asians cannot wear turbans in the scrum!!"*

The stereotyped views of the chairmen are of particular importance as they hold powerful positions within the clubs in terms of initiating club policies and even in influencing the buying and selling of players. If chairmen hold stereotyped views based on racist assumptions they will be in a position to affect the club as a whole, and so their views cannot merely be dismissed as being the (unimportant) views of an individual.

Respondents were asked specifically why they think it is that there are more African-Caribbean players than Asians in rugby league. Their responses were divided into physical, social and cultural reasons, for example:

Physical
> *Afro-Caribbean players are more suited both physically and mentally.*
> *Afro-Caribbean players are generally larger in stature.*
> *Perhaps their characteristics of speed and elusive running make them more suited.*
> *African-Caribbeans tend to be more powerful and explosive.*

Social
> *Where they are born and with whom they make friends.*
> *More tend to play at school and amateur level.*
> *Willingness to mix more.*
> *They have tended to mix easier with the white population which has lead them to the game via schools and youth teams.*

Cultural
> *Because they have adapted more to English culture.*
> *Religious beliefs lead them to non contact sports.*
> *I have heard it said that they do not take kindly to being covered in mud - I understand it to be a religious thing.*
> *Afro-Caribbeans first language is English and this is not always the case with the Asian community.*

Two respondents suggested it was just a case of historical development in that African Caribbeans have been here longer, took to the game sooner and made the breakthrough first. Some also suggested that the discrepancy is partly due to the (lack of) action on the part of rugby league clubs.

Possibly more coaching opportunities.
Perhaps clubs in areas of large Asian communities do not encourage involvement in their local clubs.
The lack of encouragement to Asian persons.

Some of the reasons quoted are quite spurious, like the suggestion that there are more African-Caribbeans than Asians. It is important to note, in the light of these suggested reasons that:

- there is no scientific basis for the suggestions that Asians are either physically weaker than African-Caribbeans, or that they have different psychological make-ups. There is no one body type that is essentially 'Asian' or 'African-Caribbean' or 'white', as these categories are ultimately political and social categories, not ones based on genetic make-up.
- According to Ikram Butt there *is* interest in the game by young Asians so the argument that 'they're just not interested' also appears to be wrong. Further, many of the black players interviewed in this survey only started playing rugby league at a later age so the alleged lack of Asian children playing the game at an early age is not really the 'problem', as the same could be said for the black players, many of whom are now playing professional rugby league.
- There is nothing in the Koran that prevents physical contact (Islam is the most practised religion within the Asian community, certainly within the Bradford area).

There was little support for the idea that ethnic minority players are difficult to manage; only five per cent agreeing with the statement put to them, and 82% disagreeing.

Club Policies and Practices

Having observed that few people from ethnic minorities watch rugby league, we asked whether the clubs thought it important to try to encourage them. One in ten felt this was not a relevant issue because there were no ethnic minorities in their area. Two thirds of officials said that people from ethnic minorities were welcome at the club if they wanted to come, though less than a quarter said their club actively encouraged them (Coaches and Secretaries were more likely than the others to identify action). Beyond the open door policy there appear to have been few positive steps taken. The Cougar classroom which has attracted a thousand Asian youngsters to visit, has rightly had considerable media coverage. Five other clubs also mentioned working through the local schools. Four clubs mentioned work with African-Caribbean community centres and local leaders.

Another club reported:

> *We offered free admission on production of a voucher printed in Urdu in local Asian newspapers. We have also advertised in these papers.*

Three of the clubs said that they used their black players to try to encourage greater involvement from ethnic minority communities. While this is sensible practice, it is only likely to have a significant impact if it is part of a broader, more intensive strategy. If the club is committed to getting rid of racism it is perfectly reasonable to expect (all) players to play their part, otherwise however, why should players from ethnic minorities be encouraged to bring friends and relatives into an environment where they may experience racist abuse?

A quarter of respondents (but 46% of secretaries) said their clubs had taken steps to try to make sure there was no racism shown by staff. Slightly more (32%; but 63% of secretaries) reported steps taken with the supporters. The most common were attempts to 'educate' supporters through PA announcements and programme notes. Others mentioned their use of stewards to deal with problems as they arose and one club said it had been prepared to ban offenders from the ground. Some of the clubs saw the most significant contribution as being the presence of black players in the team who became local heroes. One physio said that he challenged racism by players personally. Such direct personal action is perhaps the most difficult to take, but may be the most effective if handled properly.

There was little evidence of combating racism being considered an issue in the day to day running of the club as good business and employment practice. A third of respondents maintained that their club had a race equality policy, but for most this did not extend beyond an assertion that black players would be selected if they were good enough:

> ** Basically all are treated equally and we have signed several coloured players both seniors and juniors over recent seasons.*
> ** The best player for the position irrespective of 'race'.*
> ** They are all treated equally, there is no positive or negative discrimination.*

Almost exactly the same responses were given by those explaining why they did not have a race equality policy. Respondents, of course, are operating in an environment in which any written policy is rare, but there seems to be little appreciation of what might be included in a race equality policy. The most positive action mentioned was that, *"all employees are briefed with regard to our standards and attitude"*.

When club chairmen and secretaries were asked what proportion of their committee members were from ethnic minorities there was an almost complete nil return apart from one respondent who recorded that *"four members of the Board are Jewish"*. A quarter replied that they had at least one member of their permanent staff who came from an ethnic minority (this was taken to embrace coaching and medical staff).

The coaches and physios/trainers were asked instead about the playing staff. The picture there was very different. Four out of ten respondents reported that ten per cent or more of their players were from ethnic minorities. Less than ten per cent said there were none and one respondent suggested that players from ethnic minorities represented 30 per cent of their club's teams, but the norm was much lower.

Racism in Rugby League

Over half the respondents (52%) had witnessed racist behaviour at some clubs (most commonly reported by chairmen and secretaries). The Hull clubs topped the list of where this had occurred, but the list of clubs named and the more inclusive responses ('Yorkshire clubs', 'the Cumbrian clubs', 'to varying degrees at all clubs', etc.) emphasises that racism cannot be dismissed as being a purely local phenomenon. Of those who identified what form this racism took, over half (57%) said it had been chanting. Most of the other comments related to abuse from individuals, though there were also three references to banana throwing incidents.

Yet two thirds still insisted that racism is not very widespread in rugby league and few of the others thought that it was much of a problem. Almost all (83%) agreed that 'too much is made of this black/white thing - in rugby league they're all the same'.

Given the media coverage accorded to it, we were surprised that the majority (58%) had not heard of the campaign to 'Kick Racism Out of Football'. Perhaps that is why less than 40 per cent thought such a campaign would be a good idea in rugby league (only 17% said it would not be a good idea).

Some of those in favour of such a campaign were simply implacably opposed to racism in any form, but there were a range of other views too:

a) A social responsibility argument - "Society in general is trying to reduce racism. The Rugby League should also do its part" or "There is a general unawareness that racism is something to be ashamed of" or "To encourage equal opportunities".
b) A desire for the development and spread of rugby league - "We need to develop the game to include multi-ethnic/cultural communities, both as players and spectators" or "We should all try to encourage people to rugby league whatever colour they are".
c) To defend rugby league's position in the family entertainment market through encouraging 'family values' - *"Rugby league provides family entertainment and parents don't wish their children to hear such remarks"* or *"No place in the family game of rugby league for racism in any shape or form"*.

One respondent suggested that if there were to be any campaign it should be formulated by the game itself and be rugby league wide instead of being left to individual clubs.

Those who were not in favour of such a campaign (against and don't know) most commonly argued on the basis that *"I doubt that the problem is serious enough to warrant it"*. Some were worried about the adverse publicity that might be attracted and concerned that it might do more harm than good. On this basis one respondent suggested that an awareness campaign might be more appropriate.

Postscript

Former professional players among the club officials were less aware of racist chanting or racist behaviour at other clubs. They were also more likely to stereotype the attributes of black and Asian players. While they were less likely to think that campaigns to stop abusive chanting had made things better, they were more likely to think that a campaign like 'Let's Kick Racism out of Football' would be a good idea.

CHAPTER 5: THE VIEWS OF PLAYERS

Careers

No consistent route into rugby league was revealed by the Asian and black players. Some had the opportunity to play rugby league at school and had continued that later, while some had been encouraged to play by others, notably school teachers and friends. Most of the black players had only started playing rugby league seriously quite late in their teenage years. Phil had only started playing competitively at the age of 16 and only took it further after the encouragement of his English teacher at school to take up the game, while another player (Geoff) had only taken up the game aged 17, after being persuaded to try it by some close friends, as his school only played rugby union which he did not enjoy much. As he went on to explain:

> *Once I left school I wasn't really interested in playing [rugby league] and then a friend of mine asked me if I'd like to go to the local amateur side and I went there and I took it from there*

For most of these players there was no great pressure or encouragement from their families to take up the game, with most players being their own motivatory force. Most had had the opportunity to play other sports, such as professional football, as well and had fallen into rugby league largely by chance. Geoff could have become a serious athlete but the financial opportunities of rugby league meant he followed a rugby course instead. Others too saw the move to rugby league as a purely financial one, a way of *"earning a quick income"*. One player had chosen rugby league as his father had also played the game, but he added that there was no professional football team in his area.

The paths into the game of rugby league taken by the white players were smoother. Unlike the black players, all of the white players described their entry into the game as unproblematic. One player said it was *"just natural progression really",* while another said the game of rugby league was *"in the blood"*.

With one exception, the white players had been playing the game from a very early age. John had joined a team when he was five years old and Carl started as a seven year old with his local amateur club, as did his team-mate Brian. Where there was no youth team available to them the players began at school. The one exception to this early start in the amateur ranks was Andy, a young player who only played at school until following his older brother into an Academy team, from where he was signed professional. That player, though, came from a strong rugby league background through family. His father had played professionally, and this was a big influence on Andy. He said *"the first thing I touched was a rugby ball",* and when he took up football his father *"gave me a stick in the ribs"* to make him return back to rugby league. So although Andy never joined an amateur team, rugby league was very much part of his upbringing. Other players also identified key individuals in their family and social circles when young who encouraged them to play the game. For John it was his father and the fact that he lived in a rugby league town:

> *Mi dad played rugby league... I lived in ... a rugby league town. It all stemmed from mi background, wi mi father.*

Mark's father, although not a player, was a big fan of the local club, as were all his family. Carl was taken to his first amateur club by a neighbour who played professionally, and was related to a famous International. Another player said rugby league had *"always been in our family",* though he then suggested it was a lad next door who encouraged him to take up the game. Even the two players who did not identify any family connections with the game saw that environment was a key factor in their early careers. Brian had been playing at school and for an amateur club since he was nine, and his family was very supportive even though they were not a *"sporting family".* Lee went to a school that has produced dozens of professional rugby league players, and he *"just joined in really, just kept playing".* Again, his family was very supportive, and watched and encouraged him from being a schoolboy to being a first division player.

Entry into the professional ranks was seen by all the players as something that happened naturally. It was a logical career stage by the time they were in their mid-teens. Both Carl and Brian were *"headhunted"* by their local professional club, where they are aiming to break into first team rugby and gain international honours. Mark was also picked up by a scout, after a youth career that had seen him gain schoolboy International honours. The other young player, Andy, was more introspective, realising that he had to take things one step at a time. The older players were still ambitious, even those that had gained honours, though they were aware that they had to play well to keep their places. They felt everyone had to do this and each player was judged on their merits alone, an attitude that stands in contrast to that expressed by some of the black players, who felt they had had to work harder to get and maintain a professional contract because of their skin colour.

Chapter 3 confirmed rugby league as a family game for supporters. The rugby careers of the white players reveal a different aspect of the family game. However, for the most part black youngsters do not benefit from the same social environment and networks, and have to find alternative routes into the game.

Perception Of Innate Biological Differences Between Ethnic Groups

As we observed at the outset (p.4) there are various stereotypical beliefs about the physical attributes of different ethnic groups that make them more or less suitable for participation in various sports. The previous chapter also reported how club officials regard such attributes.

The responses of the black players interviewed as to the physical characteristics of ethnic minority groups and their suitability, or otherwise, to rugby league was varied. However even those who saw such differences couched their responses in qualified terms. Roger thought that it was *"60/40 true"* that blacks were naturally athletic and felt that:

> *Various races have various builds, Asians do tend to be a lot skinnier, blacks, to a percentage, are more athletic.*

Talking about the assumed biological differences between groups of players, Billy remarked, *"there is a little ounce [of truth] in it, but it's no great thing"*. Even where there were some perceived differences players also argued that that did not mean that rugby league was not suited to everyone. As Billy noted, rugby league could be played by anyone *"no matter what race you were"*.

Most black players, though, strongly rejected both the idea of biological differences between ethnic groups and the idea that certain groups could not or should not play rugby league. Sarfaz also rejected the much quoted line that 'religion holds them back', asserting instead the idea that religion helped him overcome the (racist) constraints he had faced:

> *I firmly believe that I haven't lost anything from my culture or my religion. Actually I feel the reason why I've been so successful has been the fact that my religion has helped me so much in my faith and my belief... I'd go so far as to say it's the only reason I've been successful, simply because of my belief in Islam.*

The white players were more divided in their opinions about the relevance of physiology to playing ability. Ian, a player coming towards the end of his professional career, described the ethos of rugby league:

> *There's no problem... whether black, white, yellow or brown... if you're a good rugby player you're a good rugby player.*

This, of course, is in contrast to the opinions of many of the black players who did not feel that they had been treated with parity. It also seems to contrast with some of the physiological misconceptions the white players have about the attributes of black players. As Ian later went on to say:

> *You always thought blacks (sportsmen) as being skilful and agile, looking athletic... shown in athletics now, sprinters and runners are black because it's... it seems to be a sport they do excel in*

Whilst Ian seemed to be doubting physiological assumptions, Lee seemed to believe in them when he said *"obviously the majority of black players are really strong runners"*. He admitted there were black props, but said *"I wouldn't say they were suited but y'know, you'll find they're quick"*.

This assumption that black players are quick seems to be supported by the observation that black players seem to play on the wing or in the second row, where pace is essential. The assumption does seem to be under question by some of the white players. Andy raised the misconception, then wondered about it:

> *Look at Olympic 100 metre finals, black people do tend to be quick... whether it's just coincidence I don't know.*

Others dismissed the idea that black players were restricted by physiology to certain positions, and suggested it was all down to the individual player's ability. Neither of them were able to say, however, why there are no black scrum-halves. Another player followed this line of reasoning, dismissing the physiological assumptions by saying:

> *You look at our guys, a big guy plays in the pack, another's quite lean, he's got pace, so he plays on the wing... it's build, whether they play a particular position... colour's irrelevant.*

While these players did not believe in the physiological assumptions about black players that restricts them to certain positions, others did have them. It is clear that these assumptions, although contested, do have some influence among players and others in the game.

On the question of the lack of Asians playing the game, most of the white players focused on lack of sports development among the Asian community, or cultural reasons. Only one suggested it was a physiological hindrance, when he wondered *"maybe some are scared cos they seem the most timid"*. Brian felt Asians could be intimidated because:

> *A lot might think it's a northerner's kind of sport, pits and all that, all white men, aggressive, hard... they just don't want abuse.*

Asian culture was seen as the biggest factor in holding back Asian involvement in rugby league. Lee summed this up when he said , *"they like their cricket, don't they?"*, while Ian was more thoughtful, feeling that it was religious factors and family life that was a hindrance to Asians playing. This, of course, contradicts Sarfaz's assertion that it is his religion that has helped him become a professional rugby league player.

Abuse

All the black players had received racial abuse of one kind or another. One player felt that the crowd were more likely to be abusive if he was playing well:

> *I always find that if they're not shouting at you then you're not doing well, you're doing nowt, you're not standing out, so they're not bothered, they leave you alone. If you're playing well and you're causing their team problems then they're more likely to give you more abuse. The better you play the more abuse they'll give ya.*

All the black players had learnt to deal with the abuse from an early age and had adopted a 'professional' attitude towards it. This means that even though they are aware of the abuse in general, and racial abuse in particular, they do not let it affect their performance and have learnt to 'just live with it'. Some players also felt that they received more abuse of all sorts, more than their white colleagues, the kind of 'double burden' Holland (1994) investigated. One remarked:

> *I think in general most players are pretty broad shouldered cos it's a very grizzly affair being a professional sometimes. You have to put up with a lot of flak. Some of it mediocre, some of it maybe not so, maybe more for the coloured players.*

Some of the players also complained about the racist remarks made by colleagues. Phil said he constantly received *"sly little remarks"* from fellow professionals and that the dressing room 'banter' often contained racist comments, which he felt he had to ignore, or *"take the joke",* else he would be ostracised from his colleagues even though the jokes made him feel uncomfortable.

Geoff had received racial abuse from the crowd on many occasions, and even from opponents on the pitch:

> *Obviously you do get it from your opponents, and it's their way of trying to get you riled, so you retaliate... and get angry and do something irrational and give a penalty away... but you laugh in their faces and carry on playing the game.*

Sarfaz too had suffered racism in the forms highlighted by the other players, but had also suffered from the racism of prejudiced coaches:

> *The knocks I got on the way had a lot to do with racial abuse... I received knock backs from coaches. Even school teachers didn't give me enough time and encouragement cos they thought cos I was Asian, they thought I wouldn't be interested, I wouldn't be good enough, which I thought was unfair. I felt I always had to try harder [than white players]. I had to show more commitment and determination just to show I was as good as them... even now I feel I have to work harder cos I'm Asian.*

Francis, who has played rugby league for over a decade, saw the racial abuse declining in some areas of the game, notably from opponents, as the number of black players had grown and they had earned respect from their white colleagues. He felt that the abuse from the fans was still prevalent:

> *Racial abuse is still there. It's probably not as prominent but it's certainly there. I'll be quite honest, in the professional game (I've been playing for the last 10-12 years or so) I would say in the last 5 years I can't remember being verbally abused cos of my colour, but I'm talking about the players, the opposition, I'm not talking about the spectators because believe me it happens. Even before you get on to the field; going to the likes of Castleford, Featherstone, St. Helens, Warrington, you name it, anywhere you go it's very apparent and very prominent in certain sections. Very sad and it's very ignorant of these people and it'll take a lot to stamp it out.*

Every white player said rugby league had a small but significant problem with racial abuse, in the form of taunts and jibes from the terraces. While there was some consideration over whether abuse about the colour of a player's skin was just like calling someone *"baldie"* or *"bastard",* an exclamation of jealousy or despair at a rival team, each player came to the conclusion that it was in the end an issue solely about colour: there was no excuse for racist abuse from the terraces. They felt it was common knowledge that this abuse occurred to a small extent at all grounds and clubs. As one said:

> *Some supporters have a go... people who shout summat... I wouldn't say it's one particular club, just general... it happens here sometimes.*

The attitude appeared to be that while there is racial abuse on the terraces, it is not as bad as football, and it comes only from a minority: 'a part of life'. Even though it is a minority, the black players have stressed how much they have received in terms of abuse. One white player spoke of how his black team-mates get called racist names every week. He felt at clubs that didn't have black players his black team-mates were far more likely to get called racist names. Mark cited an incident at Hull FC where a team-mate suffered a tirade of abuse throughout the match, and his opinion reflected that of the other white players when he suggested:

> *They're just being silly, calling... it's not nice for black players to be called... if there's a policeman or police around the area (these people) should be ejected from the ground.*

The attitude among the white players reflected that of the black players: racist abuse from the terraces does exist and it is unacceptable and unjustifiable. One player said he always heard it when he wasn't playing and stood on the terraces with his mates. The white players in general did not see it as a large problem, however, as they felt rugby league specifically did not have a problem with racism. Two felt it was not as bad as it had been: *"yeah, there's abuse from crowds... but a lot more so a few years ago, it's died down now... but I mean, it shouldn't happen anyway."*

On the subject of abuse on the pitch the white players were more reticent to answer, and those that said it never happened contradict the experiences of the black players who all said they had suffered racist taunts from other players. Two believed it just did not happen, that players were too professional to resort to racist abuse. Andy and Mark, two younger players, were a bit more cautious, saying they had never heard it but they felt it could go on. Andy said a black team-mate had complained, though he felt it was more a winding-up tactic than intended malice. This idea of racist abuse being a tactic in the game, *"to put a guy off his game",* as one described it, was supported by the other white players. John felt racist abuse from players did not happen a lot, but *"in the heat of the moment"* and *"I don't think it's meant"*. Carl felt such abuse was unprofessional, and that in doing it a player was likely to offend any black players on his own team.

Only Brian was ready to talk at length about racist abuse from players, and he was quick to condemn it. He said:

> *You get some, a bit of abuse, they're called all kinds of things... it's not on. A lot of players, especially some who are more traditional, they come out with some things... they're gonna give some abuse especially to black players. A black player is more likely to get abused [than a white player]... if he scores a good try or if he does a big tackle or whatever then yeah, he probably will [get abuse].*

Although rugby league was seen by the white players as open to all, they were aware of the racial abuse that black team-mates had to put up with, from the terraces and from some players. That said, they thought the game at large was mainly free of racism, and the abuse was from a relatively small section of fans and a small group of *"traditionally"* minded players. This is in broad agreement with the experiences of the black players, though they might disagree over whether or not racist abuse constitutes a legitimate 'winding-up' tactic. It should also be noted that none of the white players commented on the racist stereotypes black players thought were used by coaches.

Action

All the black players roundly condemned the racism they had received and felt that action needed to be taken to address the issue.

Phil suggested that people heard shouting racial abuse should be immediately ejected from the ground and not just told to quieten down, as he saw such views and comments having no place within rugby league. The suggestion that there should be an awareness campaign was accompanied by a request that it should be a Rugby Football League initiative and not just left to individual clubs. Roger saw rugby league as having a wider role to play in being able to bring people together, as a way of *"breaking down racial barriers"*. He thus supported the promotion of rugby league to all sectors of the community:

> *As it would be a shame to miss out on an Asian Ellery Hanley, or a Chinese Ellery Hanley, or a white Ellery Hanley.*

Sarfaz suggested that contrary to popular opinion young Asians were interested in the game and that there was a pool of talent waiting to be tapped. He suggested that there needed to be action taken in schools, with the assistance of Asian Sports Development Officers who would be in a better position to relate to the young Asian players than a white Sports Development Officer.

Robbie too thought that rugby league was not promoted enough within the Asian and black communities. He suggested that the black players should be promoted more as a way of both encouraging more youngsters to take up the game, and encouraging more ethnic minority groups to come and watch matches:

> *No one's gonna come and watch if they don't see black players playing at the highest level.*

He also felt that rugby league had an image problem anyway which may have put off many people, its image being that of *"fat, white, beer swigging men"* which was unattractive to many people. He also thought that the amateur level had a problem that was as bad as, if not worse than, that of the professional game. Encounters at that level may have stopped young black players from becoming professional rugby league players, and instead caused them to try other less hostile sports: *"a lot of them fall at the first hurdle"*. His suggestion was that any campaign should include the amateur level as well so as to remove this unnecessary 'first hurdle'.

All of the black players believed that action needed to be taken, and to be taken quickly. Although they felt that the level of racism present was below that in other sports, such as football, they all felt that the present racial prejudice they had suffered was still intolerable and needed to be countered in case it grew into an even bigger problem. Geoff's view was that:

> *It does need more coverage to stamp these idiots out cos obviously we don't want it getting like football is.*

Although some of the white players did not see enough of a problem to act on, the others felt it would be sensible to take some action. The most common suggestion was for stricter measures in combating fans who shouted racial taunts. John mirrored the thoughts of all the white players interviewed when he said:

> *It's bang out of order... it shouldn't be acceptable, things should be done to people who say black or whatever, it should be stamped out of stadiums.*

Since the significance of racism among players was played down, it did not attract their attention in terms of action. Only Brian commented enough on abuse on the pitch to make a recommendation that it should never be allowed, though he said nothing as to how it could be stopped.

They were not aware of anything that had been done to encourage ethnic minorities to watch and play the game. As professional players, they had the game's interests at heart, and saw opportunities for good players and more supporters if the game was developed amongst these communities. It was felt by Andy that introducing Asian and black people into the crowd would reduce the likelihood of racial taunts. Unlike Ian who saw cultural barriers, Andy felt there was no reason why Asian kids wouldn't take the game up, as "youngsters are youngsters". Here the importance of role models such as Ikram Butt and Ellery Hanley were stressed by all the white players interviewed. As one said of Ikram:

> *Where I [study]... there's... a lot of Indians and Pakistanis... and they worship Ikram Butt, they really do, he's like a hero to all of them.*

Ian pointed out that there were more Asian and black players coming into the amateur game, though he said racist abuse was more prevalent at this level. He felt this increase in numbers was due to the positive influence of role models:

> *Ellery's a legend in rugby league, Ikram's proved that no matter the background you can become a pro player.*

Encouragement and support were seen as vital to introduce and keep these players, who would then, according to Andy, bring Asian and black faces onto the terraces. It was realised that racist abuse put ethnic minority players and fans off the game. John suggested that some kind of attention to attracting ethnic minorities to certain matches should be undertaken, as it would help rugby league develop and prosper:

> *The game's not been pushed to that side of the community, I think if we want to go world-wide we've gotta get people like [Asians and blacks] playing the game... the hierarchy's got to get it all sorted, to get to these people... start pushing it more, get 'em all, cos when they watch the game they all love it... we should have, I won't say special days, but mixed... cos they feel left out, cos people say "oh he's an Asian they don't really play rugby league". Let's give everybody a chance... [the Rugby Football League] could push it right.*

Those white players who did see a lack of ethnic minority involvement all felt some form of positive development was necessary, agreeing with the black players who suggested the game needs to promote itself amongst ethnic minorities.

On a final note, one of the black players called for more to be done to reduce racism within the game and saw the game of rugby league as the beneficiary of increased participation by all sections of the community, his words echoing all the Asian and black players, and many of the white ones, when he said:

> *It would be nice to see as many people, whatever colour or creed, joining the game of rugby league cos it's a wonderful game and a great sport, and I think that the more people who watch it and take part in it, the game will get bigger and get better.*

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Having accepted the challenge of trying to cast light on the nature and extent of racism in rugby league, we recognised that we were not going to get *the* answer but would unearth different shades of meaning. These we have tried to present here to represent the range of views expressed during the course of the research. At the same time we have tried to respect the confidences shared with us. We are most grateful to those who took part in the various surveys, ensuring through their cooperativeness high levels of response which lend credibility to the findings. The rugby league fans in particular were very tolerant of those crazy researchers. This, we believe, represents their desire to be involved in everything associated with the game, a commitment that can be used to good effect by the RFL and the individual clubs.

Discussing racism in the sport you love (which was how most of our respondents regarded rugby league) is uncomfortable, because for most of us it is one of those things that is 'not nice' and we would prefer it if it were not really there. That meant we felt we had to be especially careful with the questions we asked and the way they were presented in the surveys.

We cannot speculate on the views of those who did not respond, but the following quotes represent two of the most commonly held positions:

> *I feel we could be highlighting a problem which by and large does not exist. Our supporters are not moronic flag waving National Front supporters. (Club Official 102)*

> *We need to stop [racism] before it spreads. It is there in the game and there is no point hiding it. (Club Official 89)*

Our research suggests that the first of these is probably the more frequently held, and there is a third set of people who flatly deny that there is any racism in rugby league. However, while our research confirmed that racism in professional rugby league is not on a par with what has been evidenced in professional soccer, there is a small but significant problem. Our evidence also suggests that although the intensity may vary, racism is evident throughout the game and should not be dismissed as simply being the preserve of a minority of rogue clubs. People on the inside refer to rugby league as the greatest game, which has been taken as the name of one of the fanzines. This kind of pride is obviously one of the game's great strengths, but can also encourage complacency, making it difficult to alert people to significant issues. It is important that people should be honest enough to recognise problems and seek to address them appropriately. It should be possible to appeal to the pride that fans have in the game to enlist their support in ridding the game of racism and setting an example for other sports to follow.

Among the supporters almost half had heard chanting against black players. While 87 per cent feel that it is not acceptable for players to be abused because of the colour of their skin, that still leaves 13 per cent; while 90 per cent disagreed that black players are lazy, that still leaves ten per cent. There is still a message to be conveyed that while an individual player who happens to be black may be lazy (or have any number of other attributes, including positive ones), it is not because they are black that they are lazy.

Fewer club officials reported hearing chanting against black players, but a third were aware of it even at their own club and over half had witnessed racist behaviour at other clubs. Almost all clubs were named or included within a more general category so would be ill-advised to consider racism as just somebody else's problem. Many of the club officials (especially the chairmen) had stereotypical views of the attributes of ethnic minority players, most commonly relating to the athletic prowess of African-Caribbean players. Black players experiencing racism are rather ambivalent about that kind of stereotyping because some of it appears favourable to them. Other aspects about suitability only for certain positions may be very limiting.

Players were more aware of racism within the game than the coaches and other club officials. All the players interviewed acknowledged that there is racist chanting from the stands and terraces. They know that it is a small number but identified a significant problem. The players were also aware that racial abuse was not just confined to the stands and terraces. All the black players and some of the white players talked about the racial abuse they were aware of on the pitch. While this was considered to be a 'winding-up' tactic, the players felt there was no justification for it. Not surprisingly, players were reluctant to point the finger at their own team, but some of the dressing room jokes were not felt to be funny. Some coaches were also identified as adopting racist stereotypes.

It is important for it to be recognised that abuse because of the colour of a player's skin is racist and not 'just one of those things' that can be laughed off. Clubs can and should do something. On balance the feeling of club officials was that the anti-chanting campaigns had had a beneficial effect, and the supporters also thought they had been a good idea. However, beyond that club officials identified very little that had been done to date to counter racism and promote the game within ethnic minority communities. There have been some notable exceptions like the Keighley Classroom and the Batley free ticket scheme, but Asian and black people are still extremely rare among rugby league crowds. The players in particular saw the need for development initiatives to make sure that as many as possible be introduced to a great game and that talent be encouraged.

The black players we interviewed felt that when they encountered racism they just had to get on with the game, but did not see why they should have to accept it. Whether or not racist abuse was directed at them personally, they as black players were affected by it. There was also a feeling that many had been deterred along the way, deciding that if that was what the game was going to be about there were better directions they could go in. Of course, there are many reasons why people stop playing, but any sport should be concerned about an avoidable loss of talent. Moreover, experiencing racism like this may affect the form of black players, so it is in the interest of coaches and team-mates to try to counter anything that has a detrimental effect on their players.

Not surprisingly, when confronted with racist chanting the majority of supporters ignored it. In the pressures of the crowd it is not easy for the individual to know what to do. Part of the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football campaign was to suggest to fans what they could do if they came across racist behaviour in football.

While beginning to question that it is, people do still want to see rugby league as a family sport and an environment in which racism is evident is not conducive to that image. If racism were to spread it could hit clubs in their pockets through lower attendances.

For the white players it was clear that rugby league is indeed very much a family game. Their families and network of family friends and social contacts had been instrumental in introducing them to rugby league clubs. Lacking that kind of introduction, Asian and black players had had to find other routes into the game. To avoid missing out on talent in the various ethnic minority communities, rugby league needs to offer the kind of support that few youngsters will get from their networks of family and friends.

We have tried not to create a scare about 'a cancer sweeping through the game'. We are persuaded that such a conclusion would be unwarranted. However, we also believe it would be wrong for those in rugby league to shirk their responsibility and hide behind the protestations that there is no issue to address. Although racism is a problem in society at large, that is no reason for inaction within the game, which should instead acknowledge its social responsibility. There is an opportunity for rugby league to take an initiative for the good of the game and the communities that support it.

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