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British Jews, Sport and Antisemitism

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Abstract

This paper examines the nature and extent of antisemitism in community sporting environments in one British city. Drawing on interviews (n=20) and focus groups (n=2), we explore with participants their Anglo-Jewish identity in sports-related activities and settings. So as not to inflate the salience of antisemitism, we approach the issue obliquely through questions relating to their engagement in sport and identity. We consider the stereotype of the non-sporting Jew and find it is without foundation. Participants described limited but significant instances of antisemitism in sport and a decline in terms of the frequency and severity of antisemitic abuse encountered. We discuss the different responses of our participants when they encountered antisemitism and how sporting organisations were seemingly unaware of the Shabbat and the main Jewish holidays. Participants called for better education and awareness raising on what constituted antisemitic abuse.

Key words: British Jews, sport, antisemitism, racism,

Introduction

The rise of right-wing populism has led to the greater acceptability of racism in British society with the normalisation of divisive language and behaviour creating an increasingly hostile atmosphere in sport. Britain is not alone in experiencing an increased racist climate, with a similar rise in antisemitism taking place across Western Europe[i] (Henley, 2019; JPR, 2019; Sharwood, 2020). In 2019, the Community Security Trust (CST), a group that monitors

antisemitism, presented figures which indicated a record number of antisemitic incidents; the reported incidents typically referring to the Holocaust, the Nazis, Adolf Hitler, or to the situation in Israel/Palestine (Gardner, 2020). Race and racism have been core to the study of sport with much of the research focused on 'black' and/or South Asian experiences of racism (Burdsey, 2004; 2011; Carrington, 2012; Cashmore and Cleland, 2011; Farrington, et al, 2014; Hartmann, 2012; Hylton, 2008; 2018; Hylton and Lawrence, 2016; Garland and Rowe, 2001; Long and Spracklen, 2010). Despite this substantial body of literature, there has been no specific attempt to examine antisemitism in sport, making study of Jewish experiences of antisemitism timely given rising levels of racism.

Soccer, as the most popular sport in the UK, is where concerns over racism, sexism and xenophobia are most evident. In the 2017-18 English football season, the British anti-racist charity Kick It Out reported that discriminatory abuse in football had increased 11% during the period, with 10% of all reports of discriminatory abuse relating to antisemitism. Incidents reported at professional matches increased, although the number of incidents reported at English Premier League games remained similar. Reported incidents in grassroots football rose by 35% during the 2017-18 season, the most significant being racism (71%) and disability (33%) (Magowan, 2018). In 2020, the Home Office released figures which showed that more than 150 football-related racist incidents were reported to police in the football season 2018-2019. This was a 50% increase on the previous year, and more than double the number from three seasons ago (Bassam, 2020). The European anti-discrimination group, FARE, has suggested that football fans at certain clubs were using the wider political atmosphere "as a cover for their own racism and prejudice" (Bysouth, 2018).

This paper is based on a study of Anglo-Jewish experiences and the nature and extent of antisemitism encountered in local, grassroots/ community sporting environments in one British city. While there have been historical studies on Jews and sport (Collins, 2006; Dee, 2013; 2017), and tackling antisemitism in English professional football (Poulton, 2016; 2020), there has been no research on contemporary Jewish experiences of antisemitism in sport. So as not to inflate the salience of antisemitism we approached the issue obliquely through questions relating to Jewish engagement in sport and issues of identity. The paper begins with a brief background on British Jews, sport, and antisemitism. We then identify the methods used to generate data, specifically semi-structured interviews with Jewish individuals in which we explore their sporting biographies. We consider the stereotype of the non-sporting Jew, the participants' experiences of antisemitism in sport and how they responded. We conclude by

identifying what sporting organisations could do to reduce discrimination against Jewish participants.

Antisemitism

The term 'antisemitism' first appeared in 1879 when a German journalist, Wilhelm Marr, used it to characterise his anti-Jewish movement, the Anti-Semitic League (Rattansi, 2007). Meer and Noorani (2008) suggest Marr's intention was to identify the Jews as a distinct race and chose the term in an attempt to suggest a new, scientific concept rather than simple religious bigotry. Anti-Jewish prejudice has a long history which has varied depending on specific historical contexts; it has been particularly common in Christian Europe, with prejudice often based on the accusation of being 'Christ's killers'. Other forms of antisemitism have been based on economic factors, racial, social, cultural, religious and/or ideological stereotypes (Beller, 2007; Browning, 2005; Finkelstein, 2008; Herf, 2014; Julius, 2012).[ii]

Klein (2007) recognised that the longstanding compulsion to make the Jew stand for 'the other' is at the heart of antisemitism. What is clear is that contemporary antisemitism has been informed by the dramatic events of the twentieth century: Jewish mass migration, attempted the destruction of European Jewry, the establishment of the State of Israel, and increasing secularisation. A survey of British attitudes to Jews and Israel (Staetsky, 2017) found that antisemitism existed at different scales and levels of intensity. The survey found 'only' 2% of British adults could be categorised as 'hard-core' antisemites, with varying levels of antisemitic ideas found within 30% of British society and, as a result, Staetsky proposed an 'elastic view' of antisemitism. There have been claims that many Europeans hold a long-standing (for some pathological) hatred of the Jews (Klug 2013; Tait 2013; Weinthal 2014). The rise of the 'far right' across Europe has led to increased incidents of antisemitism, Islamophobia and other race hate crimes. Right-wing nationalists point to Jews and Muslims working together to replace the 'white' population using 'codewords'/ euphemisms such as 'rootless cosmopolitans', 'global elite', 'Jewish lobby', and 'intelligentsia' (Fine, 2016; Frot, 2019; Wilson, 2018). One noteworthy point is that some far-right groups show support for Israel because their hatred of Muslims/Islam is greater than it is of the Jews, and that supporting Jewish migration to Israel would help make their own country 'Judenfrei/ Judenrein'.[iii]

Beyond the sporting world antisemitism is increasingly being conflated with anti-Zionism. There have been some who claim that traditional forms of antisemitism (which attacked

individual Jews and communities) have been replaced by a new form of antisemitism based on *de facto* criticism of the State of Israel. However, despite claims of being 'new' the term 'new antisemitism' first appeared in 1921, a generation before the State of Israel was established (Klug 2013:469). With the State of Israel increasingly proclaiming itself as a Jewish (only) state ('national state' law – see Beaumont, 2018), and some Jews electing to identify with the country, long-standing antisemitism is seen to be embodied and displaced onto the Jewish state (Klug 2003). By conflating these terms hostility towards Zionist theory and practice allows criticism of Israel to be interpreted as both anti-Zionist and antisemitic.

The term anti-semitism was weaponized during the 2010s in a vitriolic, personalised and muddled debate on antisemitism in Britain. This came to the fore during the British Labour Party's adoption of the problematic definition of antisemitism proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) (Gidley, McGeever and Feldman, 2020; Philo et al, 2019).[iv] The election of Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the British Labour Party led to claims of 'left antisemitism ' (Rich 2016; Hirsh, 2017; Fine and Spencer, 2017). It was generally accepted that it was Corbyn's long-standing support for the Palestinians that informed the sustained media coverage that he, and his party were antisemitic.[v] His critics typically conflated Jews with Israel and with Zionism, and mechanically viewed criticism of the actions of the Israeli government/state as antisemitic. There is insufficient space to discuss this issue further, beyond noting that the IHRA definition, despite its adoption, is seen by some Jewish commentators as 'not fit for purpose' (Philo, et al, 2019; Feldman, 2016; Ullrich, 2019).

In contemporary Britain, a small majority[vi] of British Jews support Zionism, which has been described by Lentin (2020) as a nationalist ideology, emerging in nineteenth century Europe, which was both racist and exclusionary in character (see also Avineri, 2017; Beinart, 2012; Weinstock, 1989). For Khalidi (2020), the experience of the Palestinians is a narrative best understood through the lenses of imperialism, settler-colonial conquest, and racist oppression (see also Chomsky, 1999; Pappe, 2017; 2011). Support for a Jewish state was facilitated by the British government's Balfour Declaration which sought to reduce Jewish immigration to the UK (Schneer, 2011). Arguments over Israel and Zionism have created tensions within the global Jewry[vii] and is emblematic of the complexities of contemporary Jewish identity, and the ongoing redefinition of Jewish identity in the twenty-first century (Friesel, 2019; Kahn-Harris, 2019). These tensions have increased in recent years with calls for a 'Jewish only' state and increased Palestinian oppression and dispossession. Jews who are critical of Zionism have been subject to *ad hominem* attacks and accused of being, variously, 'self-hating Jews', 'Jewish

antisemites’, and ‘useful idiots’ (Lerman, 2012; Marqusee, 2010; Rose, 2007). As Lerman (2019) notes, there is now “total confusion about antisemitism broadly in society, including among Jews” with Klug (2004) highlighting that “when antisemitism is everywhere, it is nowhere, and when every anti-Zionist is an antisemite we no longer know how to recognise the real thing. The concept of antisemitism loses its significance”.

Jews and Sport

Jewish sports history in continental Europe and north America has, in recent years, been an emerging field (Kugelmass, 2007; Levine, 1992; Riess, 1998). Presner's (2007) study of Muscular Judaism identifies how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Nordau (one of the co-founders of the Zionist Organization), argued that Zionism required a new type of Jew to replace the stereotype of the anxious, physically weak Jew. The idea of a strong and fit 'Zionist body' quickly developed and helped to achieve the political goals of Zionism. In their edited collection on Jews and Sports in Europe, Brenner and Reuveni (2006) examined the origins and influence of this ‘Muscular Judaism’ and how competitive sport offered Jews (individually and communally) opportunities for both ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’. One illustration of this was the Hakoah Sports Club, in Austria, which for a time, the largest Jewish sports club in Europe. For Betz (2018) the club’s foundation was evidence of a growing national Jewish assertiveness, and the Zionist politicization of sporting activities (see also Bolchover, 2017; Bowman, 2011). While sports created opportunities for Jewish emancipation and assimilation, this declined in the 1930s with increased antisemitism and the rise of fascism.

By the late 1200s, England’s Jewish population numbered around 3000. In 1290, a combination of royalty and religion introduced a series of laws designed to restrict the rights of the Jewish people. Hundreds were arrested, hanged, or imprisoned with the Jewish population subsequently expelled from England (Alderman, 1998). Their re-admission came in 1656 under Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate, when they established a permanent presence (Endelman, 2002), although full political rights were not granted until 1858. Jews from eastern Europe began to settle in Britain in growing numbers from the 1850s with a significant upturn in the 1880s as a result of increasing antisemitic pogroms across Imperial Russia. In 1882 British Jewry was around 60,000 and by 1914 it had grown to about 250,000 creating a sizable Jewish working class, especially in London’s East End. Although Britain was less hostile towards Jews than Imperial Russia, Germany, or France, antisemitic sentiment was widespread, with the

British government introducing the Aliens Act 1905 to restrict Jewish immigration (Lipman, 1990). In Britain, the Jewish population was seen as foreign, exotic, scheming and money grabbing; this stereotype of 'the Jew', based on negative physical and behavioural characteristics, is clearly seen in Shakespeare's *Shylock* and Dickens' *Ebenezer Scrooge* (Drazin, 2013), with Gidley, McGeever and Feldman (2020) drawing on this 'reservoir of myths and readily available images' in their conception of antisemitism.

According to the last census in 2011 there were 263,346 Jews in England and Wales which was a 1.3% increase (3,419) over the previous decade (Graham, Boyd, Vulkan, 2012). Based on non-response rates, Graham, Boyd, Vulkan (2012) estimate that there were a further 21,000 – this was sixth behind Christian, No religion, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and only just ahead of Buddhist. Almost 2/3 of Jews lived (65.3%) in London, with one area, Barnet in North London, accounting for one in five (20.5%) of all Jews in England and Wales. The City of Manchester recorded a loss in Jewish population over the decade, but the Jewish population in Greater Manchester increased (Graham, Boyd, Vulkan, 2012).

As noted earlier, while the history of Jews and sport in continental Europe and North America has seen activity, for Collins (2006) the history of Jews and sport in Britain has been a 'frustrating omission' due, in part, to the strength of the stereotype of the non-sporting Jew. However, since Collins lament, there have been significant studies on the relationship between Britain's Jews and sport, most significantly by Dee (2013), Clavane (2013) and Klein (2007). The migration of Jews from eastern Europe in the second half of the 19th century, to join the long-standing small community of Jews in Britain, led to the creation of a huge number of working men's clubs, youth clubs, schools, sporting organisations and charitable movements.

Collins (2006) highlights the paucity of quantitative evidence necessary to comment on the extent to which British Jews played or watched sport. However, he questions the claim that it was observance of the Jewish sabbath (Shabbat, which starts Friday evening through to Saturday evening) that was seen to be the reason for the apparent lack of participation in sports such as soccer, rugby and cricket. Collins (2006) claims that a large proportion of Britain's Jewish population was not especially observant in religious matters and cites widespread evidence that many Jews were not only watching but also playing sports on Saturdays, with many Jews more interested in going to a sports ground to watch the rugby league or cricket on a Saturday than in going to synagogue. The appeal of sport to young Jews meant that many Jewish political and Zionist groups started using sporting activities as a means of recruitment

(Dee, 2013). Collins (2006), Clavane (2013) and Dee (2013) all discuss how antisemitism played a significant role in blocking the participation of Jewish players at higher levels of sport, especially the middle-class sports such as golf and tennis, with Jews regularly prevented from joining local clubs and, in response, setting up their own clubs.

Clavane (2013) draws on his personal experiences to explore British Jewry's relationship with sport in Britain and the impact of sport on individual and community identity. He goes on to assess the process of integration and the tensions that arose between what he terms 'becoming English' and 'staying Jewish' experienced by those who engaged in sport. While sport was an agent of integration for some, this process was not necessarily a deliberate effort, but rather an incidental outcome, with the main factor being the pleasure and enjoyment of sports participation. Like Collins (2006), Clavane (2013) recognises how increasing numbers of British Jews began to play and watch sport on the Sabbath, which weakened religious and ethnic ties within Britain's Jewish communities.

Dee (2013) has also explored British Jews' engagement with sport. Focusing on the themes of 'integration and assimilation', 'religion and ethnicity' and anti-Semitism, Dee (2013) explains that individuals arriving from mainland Europe quickly recognised that sport offered them informal and individualised opportunities for integration, assimilation and social mobility. Dee (2013) notes that second-generation children, because of secularization and Anglicization, formed a Jewish identity that was very different from their immigrant parents. Unsurprisingly, Jewish community and religious leaders challenged the popularity of sport and had to accommodate selective attitudes towards religious observance. Dee (2013) also addresses the impact of antisemitism and the rise of fascism in the 1930s. In the UK, the British Union of Fascists used sport to exploit supposed racial differences and identify Jews as the 'eternal outsiders'. Dee (2013) concludes by noting the complexity of how on the one hand, participation in sport was used to reject these attempts at antisemitism , but on the other acted to entrench separation. As Collins (2006), Clavane (2013) and Dee (2013) have all shown, sport was an important site in which British Jewish identities were initially negotiated and then reconfigured and resulted in the creation of a secular, hybridized British Jewish identity.

Method

Starting with personal contacts, a process of repeated referrals was used to identify Jewish people involved in sport. All the participants had either grew up, lived or worked in a large

northern city in England in which the research took place. Participants were recruited on the basis that their involvement in sports-related activity (as participants, as fans, and as administrators) and would generate valuable insight into our research questions. We approached Jewish sports organisations in the city, but not all responded to our request to take part. One initial weakness of using a 'referred respondent' approach was that our sample was initially narrow in terms of gender and social class. This was addressed by pro-actively seeking out female participants and participants from a 'working class' background. Our final sample comprised fourteen men and six women. All identified themselves as practicing or secular Jews. Focus groups were conducted with three generations within one family, and a second group of four friends who had known each other for many years.

A semi-structured interview approach was used because it offered the ability to gather data from a range of respondents, on several core topics, in a systematic and comprehensive manner (David and Sutton, 2010). At the same time, it allowed a degree of flexibility for the respondents to explain and contextualize their comments. The interview schedule was designed to allow participants to discuss any issue they felt relevant to the study. Twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and two small focus groups, were undertaken to examine the respondents' Jewish identity in a sports-related activity and/or setting. The interviews took place in the summer of 2019 and typically lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Prior to the interview, each participant was given an information sheet and gave their voluntary, informed consent, with the study approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee.

All the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently fully transcribed for analysis. The first stage of analysis involved a close reading of all the transcripts by the lead researcher to identify patterns and meanings. Analysis of the interview transcripts allowed key categories to emerge; subsequent manipulation of these categories and extensive use of manual memos allowed for accommodation and modification on the *a priori* themes (Veal and Darcy, 2014). A deep knowledge of the transcripts allowed the clustering of data around key analysis headings and sub-themes. The data analysis package, QSR/NVIVO, was used to formally code all the themes. Thus, the initial interview transcript wordage was reduced whilst maintaining the essence of the data. The resulting sample does not purport to be representative but is seen to offer an exploratory account and one that is transparent and qualified in terms of its method. We remain cognizant of Fanapanel's (2009) suggestion that the data should not be seen as yielding a literal representation of reality, but rather a narrative account of the respondents' individual position and perception.

We now present the main findings of the empirical study, beginning with the trope of the 'non-sporting Jew', the participants' experiences of antisemitism, and how they dealt with the abuse they encountered. We conclude by addressing the role of sport organisations.

Challenging the stereotype of the 'non-sporting Jew'

The interviews began by asking the participants about their own sporting histories with discussion quickly moving to the stereotype that 'Jews don't do sport'. Clavane (2013) noted the scene from the 1970s comedy film 'Airplane' about the lack of Jewish sporting heroes although, as noted above, there is growing evidence to counter this 'joke' (Toberman 2013, Dee, 2013). Mark commented that even though Jews formed less than 1% of the British population, in some areas of society, such as the Arts and the Media, there were a large number of Jews and that the 'joke' worked because it was *"the laugh of recognition"*.

When participants spoke about their Jewishness in their interpretations of not playing sport, most recognised the non-sporting trope commenting on how few Jewish sports stars they could name. As to reasons why this was the case, some thought it was because of biological factors while others thought it was because Jewish parents, including themselves, prioritised academic study over sport and 'pushed' their children to enter the professions (stereotypically, doctors, dentists, lawyers and accountants) and viewed sport solely as a leisure activity. Suzi explained,

> *the ideal for our religion is that we go down the academic route – that is what we're taught from generations back; if I'd had said to any of my grandparents that I was going to do something sporty, they would have been horrified!*

The absence of high-profile Jewish sports men and women was explained by some because of the low number of Jews (circa. 0.44%) as a percentage of the population in England, Wales, and Scotland. However, in other areas of British society, Jewish people are well-represented and visible, for example in the media, arts, judiciary, and government. Participants noted that Jewish people, although less visible as athletes, were active in sports sponsorship, sports administration, and sports ownership. The vast majority of those interviewed challenged the stereotype of the non-sporting Jew and spoke extensively about their personal experiences, those of their family and of the Jewish community's links to sport. DJ, David, and Ava[viii] all recounted how, as teenagers, they regularly watched the local topflight professional football team and/or rugby league team, with Howard recounting how he grew up in a household where

he was the third-generation fan of the local professional rugby league team. None of those interviewed thought that, as a Jew, sport was not for them and none saw their religion as a barrier to their participation.

Within sport, Leigh, a match official, could not recall any antisemitic abuse directed at him, but did note how *"I've been abused… "fucking twat" and things like that, but nothing antisemitic. I've witnessed racism - "black bastard", black this and that, and the like"*. Football was viewed as a site of greater antisemitism than the city's other main sports, cricket, and rugby league. Few of our respondents had encountered any antisemitism in sport, Richard, who had a long career working in sport, recounted how,

> *Maybe I'm the lucky one I don't know. I mean I have heard antisemitic comments, not necessarily against me, but I have heard stuff, but it's very rare. I think I'm very lucky. People may have said it behind my back - I don't know. No-one has abused me in an antisemitic way. I've never come across any antisemitic comments against me.*

Similarly, DJ, who regularly attended football matches as a young person stated that "*You got the racism stuff and foul language and all the rest of it but never anything particularly antisemitic"*. Howard, in recollecting his attendance as a fan at professional football grounds in the 1970s, felt the "*whole atmosphere was one of increasing race hatred"* aimed at the 'black' players; he stopped going to games because he felt the club and footballing authorities were not doing enough to address the racism within the ground. When asked if he felt sport was a relatively 'safe zone', DJ responded:

> *It was for me. I can't speak for other people. I was always very comfortable playing a range of different sports to a reasonable standard and never really experienced any antisemitism. I don't think there was ever any conscious or unconscious factor about me being Jewish and working in sport. It was never felt that there was any separation between Jewish people playing sport and anybody else playing sport. I was never called a Yid*[ix] *on the pitch playing against whoever it was or anything like that. I never experienced any antisemitism or anything like that.*

While most of those interviewed could not initially identify any personal incidents of antisemitism in sport, as the interview progressed, they did recall examples of abuse they had experienced as participants. Most abuse came from 'white players and white teams', due in part because they were their main opponents. When asked how they 'knew' it was antisemitic, as opposed to being 'just part of the game', John replied *"because it was verbalised. There was*

no doubt, when the word got around, that this team was a Jewish team". Lee recounted a similar experience,

> *over the years I've been involved with Jewish junior football, there have been a number of incidents and issues. I wouldn't say is been massively prevalent. I know it's been a lot worse in years gone by ... but we had 'you Jewish this or 'Jewish that'.*

For others, the abuse was much more direct. Mark who worked in the sports industry recalled many incidents of antisemitism amongst high-profile individuals in one particular sport. He recounted one occasion when a high-profile football executive *"looked me straight in the eyes and called me a 'Yid'.* Other examples of antisemitism amongst football executives are a matter of public record including Malky Mackay and Dave Whelan's (then Wigan FC's manager and chairman) antisemitic comments (Conn, 2014; Gordon, 2014).

While our focus was on the participants' experiences within sport, it was impossible not to refer to events outside sport. It was more common for our participants to explain how it was outside sport where they encountered antisemitism more often. Many of the participants initially declared they had not personally experienced antisemitism; however, with further discussion incidents were revealed, including Sharona who claimed *"Oh, we've all experienced it, every single member of my family has experienced it. It* (antisemitic comments) *usually ends up coming out".* Antisemitic abuse was often based on historical Jewish tropes, including accusations of greed and untrustworthiness. Serena and DJ recalled incidents when, because they were Jewish, they were guilty by association for the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Sam, whose partner was not Jewish, explained how her husband had been asked on numerous occasions what it was like *"to live with a Jew?"* Similarly, Sharona laughed when she recounted that her husband *"just tells them that my horns come out at night so therefore he's pretty safe. It's the ignorance in this country ... they have this perceived idea of what a Jew is and ... actually ... we're pretty normal!"* Although none of our participants had been physically attacked for being Jewish, there had been some 'name calling'. More common was for participants to recall situations where a person assumed the respondent was not Jewish because they were making antisemitic comments. In an example of avoidance rather than confrontation/challenge, Suzi recalled an incident from her work when *"they didn't know we were Jewish ... we chose not to say anything – it was just easier I suppose. We've tried to stay clear of those people since."*

What was evident was that our respondents had mixed experiences in terms of the frequency and severity of the antisemitic abuse they encountered in a sport setting, with much of the abuse based on longstanding tropes/stereotypes of Jewish people. Our participants recognised the 'non-sporting' stereotype discussed by Collins (2006), Clavane (2013) and Dee (2013), but were quick to challenge this. For our participants, sport continued to be a site where they were 'English' and, at the same time, express their secular, hybridized British Jewish identity. There was a clear sense that 'things were getting worse' and that the increase in racism was 'across the board' and was a reflection of attitudes and events taking place in wider society (Henley, 2019; JPR, 2019; Sharwood, 2020). The extent to which our Jewish participants could share the privileges of whiteness varied but, on occasion, found themselves othered by ethnic difference. This resulted in a sense of 'conditional inclusion' in that the participants were white, but not always 'white enough' (Long and Hylton, 2002). Our respondents recognised this was not as fragile as the inclusion extended to Black and Asian ethnic groupings, but that this conditional inclusion could be withdrawn at any time (Bradbury, 2011). In the following section we discuss how they individually responded to antisemitism.

Responding to antisemitism

When participants had encountered antisemitism, they suggested it could have been a (poor) attempt at humour, or ignorance on the part of the instigator to intimidate, gain advantage, or being straightforwardly malicious. Not all the 'jokes' were automatically interpreted as being aggressively antisemitic. The humour/jokes/banter often referred to the long-standing racist tropes such as Jews not eating bacon or their supposed love of money.

For others, the antisemitic comments were viewed as ignorance on the part of those making the comment. Racist comments were viewed as coming from people with no/low levels of education, or 'parroting' what they heard at home from their parents. There was a common feeling that people were becoming more educated on what was considered antisemitic (and racist). Wanting to dismiss the antisemitism as a joke or ignorance might be accurate, it may be a rationalisation designed to protect themselves from the thought of it being born of something more malign, or relieving themselves of some of the pressure to do respond/confront. A third reason suggested for antisemitic attitudes encountered was linked to the conflict in Israel/Palestine. DJ was acutely aware of the problems of automatically conflating Jews with Israel and suggested that *"there's a perception in the non-Jewish*

community that all Jews think the same, that all Jews support Israel unquestioningly, but that's a million miles away from the reality". There was some disparity in that some participants stated they had stopped wearing their Magan David (Star of David) jewellery when they went out, pointing out the increased coverage of antisemitism in the news media, but then added how they felt, for them at least, antisemitism was not getting worse.

When there had been instances of antisemitism within sport, two very different approaches were identified with some electing to ignore it, while others wanted to 'sort it'. John, who played for a Jewish team recounted how,

> *We had players who would stand up for themselves mentally and physically. We never crossed the line, but if people wanted to ... we were very strong - not something that people would say is a characteristic of Jewish sportspeople, being slightly weak, or put off or timid, we were the opposite ... that's how we dealt with it.*

John and David, who played in the same (Jewish) football team, recalled in separate interviews, the same incident from their long careers in grass-roots football when they both felt antisemitism had been taken seriously by a match official,

> *In the final, somebody verbalised what I would consider to be racial abuse, and the linesmen heard it, and drew the referee's attention to it, and the player was immediately sent from the field of play. But that was a final, as opposed to a Sunday morning on a park pitch. If we mention it to the referee, it's whinging. The referees really didn't get involved in it and 'didn't hear it'. We never reported anything. We just dealt with it during the game, and we just moved on, and we just left it at that.* (David).

Many of our respondents were aware of a recent incident when the local synagogue had its signage defaced by racist graffiti. In response to increased concerns over safety, security at Jewish sites and community events had increased. The Community Security Trust (CST), established in 1994 as a charity, offers advice and support on safety and security to Jewish schools, community centres, and synagogues. The CST typically increases its activity after attacks on Jews such as those seen in 2012 in Toulouse, France, in 2018 in Pittsburgh and 2019 in San Diego, USA, (see McAuley, 2018, for how attacks in the USA compare to those in Europe).

Although the CST work with the Police, they believe that it is the responsibility of the Jewish community to provide security to members of their community. They can do this because of

the British government who provide nearly £14 million of annual funding (BBC 2019).[x] Some participants spoke about the support provided by the CST to Jewish sports events. David explained how "*We've had it for quite a few years now. So, if we have football on the Sunday, we have to get security … we wouldn't have anything now without security"*. Similarly, Danny explained how, when organising a sports event, he would contact the CST and they would send 'some people'. Danny went on to speak about his decision not to publicise events outside the Jewish community, in response to a request from the CST, *"a lot of the adverts nowadays for a lot of the events that go on in the community have no date on them, no place on them either. A lot of the adverts that go out I word as 'a venue in North [of city]."* While our participants recognised that the levels of overt antisemitism experienced by their parents and grandparents within sport (as discussed by Collins, 2006; Clavane, 2013; Dee, 2013), had reduced, they were acutely conscious that antisemitism was ever-present. They expressed concern over the upturn in right wing popularism, pointing to the antisemitic incidents in the USA, Hungary and France as 'proof' that they needed to remain vigilant.

The role of sport organisations

As noted previously, although it was commonly ignored, some respondents, when encountering antisemitism would either 'sort it out' themselves or make an official complaint. In a sporting context Samantha had complained to the governing body when her son had received antisemitic abuse.

> *We did have an incident in the gym with one of the coaches. He used to make different remarks about my son, to my son. He once said to my son … 'why do you do [specifies sport]? Jews don't jump'. So I said to my son, 'Let's be clear, are you sure you're using the right words?' and he said 'yeah, yeah, he said "Jews don't jump"'. He* [her son] *then said, 'oh, it's just a joke'.*

When she made her complaint, via the governing body's website, she found the NGB to be supportive, although she was not advised of the outcome of their investigation; the NGB claimed it was confidential. Although not 'officially' informed of the outcome, Samantha explained:

> *The fact that he's being extra nice to my son at the moment shows me that either he's understood what he's done wrong, which I really, really hope because I didn't want him*

to lose his job and never be allowed to coach kids anymore because that wasn't my intention. My intention was to show him 'This is not ok.'

There was a common feeling amongst those interviewed that while there had been antisemitic abuse in sport with the incidents going unreported, there was a common feeling that sports organisations (at local/county/national levels) were now better equipped to respond to claims of antisemitic abuse; incidents were now more likely to be reported.

> *It's improved, I think it's now taken more seriously. 10 years ago, they used to brush it under the carpet. If you had an antisemitic incident in junior football and reported it to the district, 10-20 years ago, they just didn't want to know. But now they do take it seriously. They will talk to the other team, and they will say to the other team 'You need to talk to your players' - to educate them. There is more awareness now about that. It still happens though. The authorities are taking it more seriously - but it's still there.* (Lee).

Towards the end of the interviews we asked what they felt sports organisations could/should do in terms of greater recognition of the Jewish faith and to encourage Jewish participation in sport. Participants offered two broad 'recommendations':

1) better awareness of Jewish religious holidays, and

2) improved education on antisemitism, particularly on the Holocaust (Shoah).

Daisy explained that her son's sports participation had been curtailed *"because everything was on a Saturday"* although she felt sports organisations were 'pretty inclusive' and did 'a pretty good job'. Those who were actively involved in sport identified how playing sport on a Saturday remained an issue for those who 'kept the sabbath'. There was an acceptance, though, that switching sport to a Sunday would impact upon Christians who might similarly be unwilling to play on their holy day. Participants suggested a better awareness was needed by sports organisations on Jewish religious holidays because, as David explained:

> *most people would still turn up and play on a religious day, but it's never mentioned. If I mentioned it at a* [sports club/organisation] *meeting ... Seder or a Passover night, they wouldn't have a clue, but if it was certain other religions, they would know about them a little bit more. Having dealt with governing bodies of sport in a lot of different contexts in education and coaching, I'd be gobsmacked if any of them knew the religious*

> *dates, there's not one thing on any website that I know of that talks about the Sabbath for example.*

It was widely noted by our participants that sports organisations were aware of significant holidays for other religions, but David had "*never hear(d) anyone talk about Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah - make sure that's in their diaries and not have tournaments on those days; because I wouldn't coach or assess or observe events on those days"*.

The second recommendation related to better education and awareness raising on what constituted antisemitic abuse. When it was noted that the advice given to black footballers up until recent times was to 'turn the other cheek' (France, 2019), David thought it was *"terrible advice to turn the other cheek. I think the duty of people who are non-Jewish - they have collectively got to take responsibility and show solidarity with whoever is the victim of racism"*. Steve felt the problem of antisemitism was compounded because of the lack of meaningful sanction/punishment from football's governing bodies to instances of overt racist behaviour, pointing to the lack of stadia closures and lack of substantive fines. Lee, who regularly attended games at the local top-flight professional football club explained that,

> *On the terraces it's very hard because they have a drink and they forget what they're saying, and they come out with stuff they think will impress their mates. It's very, very hard, but you've just got to keep working at it. Keep educating the kids and then hopefully when they're a bit older, they will understand that it's not acceptable.*

Change needed to come from (be led by) sports organisations through a programme of awareness raising and the unacceptability of antisemitism. Our research has focused on antisemitism in sport and, given how soccer is the most popular sport in the UK, many of our participants spoke about their experiences within this sport. The 'Say No To Antisemitism' campaign launched by Chelsea Football Club was positively referenced by some of those interviewed. Chelsea FC, which has a history of racism and antisemitism amongst its fanbase, has started an education scheme that invites Holocaust survivors to speak to players and staff about their experiences and takes supporters to Auschwitz-Birkenau to educate them about the horrors of the Holocaust (Chelsea FC, 2018). Supported by its owner, Roman Abramovich (one of Russia's oligarchs, of Jewish heritage, and living in London), this initiative was described by David as *"very good, clever",* although Richard suggested it was 'such an expensive and long way to teach somebody' that antisemitism was unacceptable. Asked about how such a scheme might operate at grassroots (without the significant financial investment required),

David acknowledged the challenge, but insisted that the clubs should be responsible, albeit with support from the leading anti-discrimination group in the UK, Kick It Out. When the very limited financial resources of Kick It Out were highlighted, David responded:

> *Football has got a huge amount of resources at the elite end; it's got billions of funds that are pumped into the Premier League and Champions League - so it wouldn't be too much to ask for a tiny percent of that to be diverted to grass-roots education programmes - through their community foundations, but I know that probably won't happen.*

There was a common recognition amongst participants that while attitudes and behaviours within sport had improved, and that sports organisations had become more responsive, caution was needed. The main reason cited for not 'doing more' was because of a lack of resources. The leading British antiracist organisation working in football, Kick It Out, has an annual budget of around £1 million and fewer than 20 full time staff. Sadly, but unsurprisingly, given that racism was increasing in wider society, our participants thought there would likely be a similar increase in antisemitism in sport.

Conclusion

In this paper we have present an assessment of the nature and extent of antisemitism within local sporting environments in one British city. We found that our respondents were fully cognisant that everyone has the capacity to be racist, albeit with differing levels of power and resources available to respond. It is notable that our participants were, typically, not visibly othered. Most of those interviewed thought that antisemitic attitudes had always been around and that because sport was a microcosm of society, when there was an increase in antisemitism in sport, it was because there was a corresponding increase of antisemitism in wider society. However, the overall level of antisemitic abuse they had experienced within sport was low and had declined in recent years.

Our study focused on participants based in a single city in the north of England. Given that 65% of British Jewry live in London and its immediately adjacent areas (Graham, Boyd and Vulkan, 2012), what is presented here should not be seen as representative of all British Jewry, but as offering original, qualitative insights on the stereotype of the non-sporting Jew, the levels and types of antisemitism encountered in sport, and the actions of sporting organisations. We

also recognise that this research was male-centric. Despite our best efforts we were unable to secure ore female par participants; thus, more research is needed on Jewish women's view of or engagement in sport. More research is also needed on the lived, grassroot sporting experiences (and of antisemitism) of Jewish people in other countries. Such studies would allow the experiences presented here to be subject to comparative assessment with the sporting experiences of Jewish individuals and communities in other European countries, as well as allowing comparative assessment with other minority ethnic groups and their experiences of racialized stereotyping and discrimination.

Many western European countries have seen antisemitism and Islamophobia enter the mainstream. Our participants felt there had been a general increase in racism, although they had not personally experienced recent incidents of discrimination in either sport or non-sport settings. When comparing the racism experienced by Jewish individuals, while it might be less than that experienced by other more visible minorities, we should avoid entering a situation of ‘top trumps’ or ‘whataboutism’ (see Fallon, 2017), or seeking to compare whose experience of racism is worse or more frequent. There needs to be a holistic approach to challenge all forms of racism and discrimination, and one questions whether abuse targeted at specific ethnic minority groups needs its own ‘label/category’. Our respondents reported how sports organisations had become much more active in combating overt forms of racism but were not as aware of less obvious aspects of potential discrimination. With racism originating in wider society and then brought into sporting environments, it is incumbent on all those working in sport to educate themselves, and others, on what constitutes antisemitism. Our respondents gave an often-contradictory responses on levels of antisemitism in that they felt while it was increasing, they had not personally experienced increased racism and suggested that attitudes were not as bad as they were ‘in the past’. What was clearer was the respondents were more aware of reporting mechanism and that sport governing bodies were now more willing to respond to reports of antisemitism.

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Endnotes

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[i] In this paper we use the term ‘antisemitism’ as opposed to ‘anti-Semitism’ on the grounds that there is no such thing as Semitism.

[ii] Researchers have begun to focus on the relationship between the rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism, but without reference to sport (see special edition of *Racial and Ethnic Studies*, [2013] on ‘*Racialization and Religion: Race, culture and difference in the study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia’*; Meer and Noorani, 2008; Romeyn, 2014; Werbner, 2013).

[iii] This is not a new phenomenon with antisemitic Zionist supporters of a Jewish state wanting mass Jewish migration to Israel – including the British politician, Lord Balfour (whose eponymous Declaration laid the path for the creating of a Jewish state). *Judenfrei* and *Judenrein* were terms used by the Nazis during World War Two (1939-1945) to designate an area that had been "cleansed" of Jews.

[iv] See Kelemen (2012, for the complex historical relationship between the British Left and Zionism; and Dart (2017), for the motives of left-wing activists engaged in pro-Palestinian activity within sport.

[v] It is notable, that when Corbyn stepped down, accusations that the Labour Party was antisemitic immediately stopped.

[vi] In a 2015 survey of British Jewry, 59% considered themselves as a Zionist, 31% as not a Zionist, with 10% unsure; 90% supported Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state (Miller, Harris and Shindler, 2015)

[vii] It is not possible to speak of a global 'Jewish community'; despite the claims of some individuals and organisations, there is no singular organisation or representative group that can speak on behalf of 'all Jews' with any legitimacy. Jewish communities throughout history have had a rich cultural and religious tradition of debate (see, for example, Ralph, 2019), illustrated by timeworn Jewish joke "Two Jews, three opinions."

[viii] Participants chose their own pseudonym.

[ix] Yid is slang (for some people, offensive) term for Jewish people (based on the word Yiddish). It is considered by some to be akin to the 'N' word deployed as a term of abuse against 'black' people. In February 2020 the Oxford English Dictionary, somewhat controversially, included under its definition of the word 'Yid': "a supporter of or player for Tottenham Hotspur".

[x] In the same period the British Muslim community received £375,413, despite 52% of all religious hate crimes in 2018 being against Muslims (Quinn, 2019).