

Reaching the goal?

A research on the effects of measures taken against
professional football-related violence and nuisance

Summary

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Beke *reeks*

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In recent years, many different measures have been taken to reduce and combat hooliganism and nuisance by supporters. In this research we focus on these so-called football measures. Main question of the research is:

'What are the effects of the measures against hooliganism and football nuisance, which side effects do these measures have and are there possibilities for an improved game experience for football supporters without undermining safety, and if so, which measures?'

In preparation for the research, a list was made of what measures can be taken and which goals are linked to these measures. For this purpose, a desk research was conducted and important 'players' around the theme football and safety were consulted. A total of 64 measures within following eight clusters are put together:

- Transportation;
- Entrance stadium;
- Physical infrastructure stadium and immediate surroundings;
- Service;
- Surveillance;
- Consultation;
- Target groups and individuals;
- Policy measures (interventions and sanctions, legislation and rules).

During the research, 21 professionals, who, through policy, practice and research have knowledge of the effects of measures, were inquired. In relation to the football measures, we have spoken about reducing recidivism, combating nuisance by incidental troublemakers and the constraints for supporters which result from the

measures. Also public prosecutors in charge of football-related manners, public prosecutor secretaries, public order and safety officers, safety coordinators of professional football associations (Dutch: BVO's) and police officers were inquired through a digital survey. This resulted in 42 responses. Also *good practices* abroad were listed.

In addition to the interviews with and the survey among professionals, 64 supporters of a total of seventeen BVO's were inquired. In this context, a distinction was made between regular supporters (n=23) and more fanatical supporters who are part of organized supporter groups which require extra attention from the BVO and/or police (n=41). To what extent they are confronted with the measures and their impact and effect were particularly discussed. In addition, existing data was used, which consisted from answers of almost 3000 away supporters on questions about transport, reception and supporters policy.

In order to analyse on a person level and on an incident level, information from the Central Information Football hooliganism (Dutch: CIV) has been used. Developments in the type of incidents and offenders and the seriousness of the incidents have been examined per type BVO and annually. In addition, based on data of the Royal Dutch Football Association (Dutch: KNVB), developments in the number of stadium bans and the number of commenced preliminary inquiries by the prosecutor of the KNVB are examined.

General findings

The Netherlands has had a common national football policy since 1997. Initially, the focus was on a joint approach, later the emphasis shifted to normalization. This means that supporters are confronted with as few restrictions as possible when attending a football match and the approach focuses on the small group of persons who are systematically involved in violence and nuisance (notorious troublemakers). The measures taken correspond to the diversity in seriousness and frequency of supporters' violence and nuisance. The intention is to avoid conflict situations and situations which could encourage rule-breaking behaviour, while civil and criminal sanctions are used to deter and to prevent recidivism. The (clusters of) measures are practically always taken in connection with each other and the implementation of the measures differs on the local level. Therefore it is not possible to comment on the effect of individual measures.

In general, professionals and supporters consider measures which contribute to the separation of home and away supporters effective. The impact of measures aimed at the physical infrastructure is relatively low, while for instance the mandatory combination scheme for transport does have a great effect on an enjoyable game experience. Therefore, professionals and supporters agree that there have to be valid reasons to make use of the mandatory combination scheme for transport.

At the same time, professionals and supporters point to the flaws of the combination scheme and other measures. For example, the mandatory combination scheme for transport is relatively easy to circumvent and also the effect of ticket sale restrictions and the use of a club card should be seen this way. Furthermore, supporters and professionals both point out the importance of service and hospitality, where it should be noted that – if a chance is given – professionals emphasize the importance of taking security measures. However, also professionals realize that a good service and hospitality are beneficial to the game experience and to the reduction of risk of conflict situations. Hospitality is therefore considered adjacent to the safety issue.

Aiming for normalization corresponds to this. Within the person-oriented approach of notorious troublemakers, the use of supporter coordinators is considered an effective measure. Repressive measures, such as a stadium ban, can be (temporarily) helpful. Also when notorious troublemakers – in spite of a stadium ban – yet are in the stadium, they behave (more) quietly. In general, supporters are in favour of a *high trust high penalty* approach. Opposed to more liberties there are tougher sanctions for rule-breaking. Proportionality is then important. The severe (civil) penalties which can result from the usually minor offences, could lead to incomprehension by supporters.

Significant results

In addition to the general findings of the research, several findings need more clarification, also with a view to the future policy. It concerns four conspicuous findings.

1. *Wide range of measures*

The football safety policy in the Netherlands consists of 64 measures on an aggregate level. This is – also for professionals – a surprisingly high number. However, this does not mean that these measures are not necessary. All measures, except for the administrative detention, seem practicable and usable. It depends on the BVO, the local infrastructure, the own supporters, the opponent and history to what extent this occurs and is necessary. The risk classification of matches (A, B or C) and the involved measures call for reconsideration. Customization, where measures are taken based on thorough risk analysis and urgency, is needed.

2. *Support for measures*

Supporters and professionals of the different parties (BVO, municipality, Public Prosecutor, police and research), differ hardly in their opinion on the effects of measures. Therefore, they mention for the most part the same measures as being effective or non-effective and see similar (possible) negative side effects within these measures. However, between supporters and these parties, or just between these

parties, differences of opinion can arise about the exact purpose and necessity of a (cluster of) measure(s) in a specific situation.

3. A steady view

Statistics show that the number of football-related incidents over the last ten seasons show a steady view. Usually it involves incidents which are characterized as minor and moderate. Two severe incidents in 2011 and the corresponding arrests are an exception. Moreover, the share of one-time offenders within one season appears to increase compared to the number of repeat offenders. More rules and a stricter local approach and enforcement could be responsible for this increase. Relatively, there are more incidents in the Jupiler League than in the Premier League. Physical infrastructure, quality of the safety organization and the available safety budget could explain these findings, as well as effects of registration.

4. Problems involving the hardcore football fans and notorious troublemakers

Problems concerning the behaviour of hard core football fans and notorious troublemakers remain. From the supporters' view these groups are not or hardly tackled. Professionals confirm this perception. Lack of nerve and management with municipalities, fear and lack of nerve with BVO's and lack of priority and capacity with police and the Public Prosecution Service are the underlying causes. Since a part of the notorious troublemakers uses threats and intimidation, nation-wide control of the local approach, as in some countries abroad, should be considered. As well as with professionals as with supporters there is support for a solid, person aimed approach. This approach is a precondition for further normalization. Within the scope of normalization, good service and hospitality are important as well. To conclude, in imitation of foreign countries, it would be beneficial - as part of more uniformity and transparency - that also the physical infrastructure in the Netherlands would be examined by an independent body, as well as the level of *hospitality* and the required safety measures for stadiums.



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