

WHEN WE'RE GOOD
THEY NEVER
REMEMBER.

“



Has a 20-year crackdown on British soccer hooligans knocked them out—or just pushed them aside?

>>> BY SHAUN ASSAEL

”

WHEN WE'RE BAD
THEY NEVER
FORGET

BUSTED

HUNTING HOOLIGANS

THE RESIDENTS OF WEST LONDON COULD BE FORGIVEN FOR THINKING THEY HAD STUMBLERD ONTO A B-MOVIE SET WHEN THEY WALKED PAST CHELSEA'S STAMFORD BRIDGE STADIUM ON FEB. 13, 2010.

As an FA Cup match between Cardiff City and Chelsea was letting out, hundreds of rival fans faced off along the fashionable King's Road, trading taunts and punches in a scene reminiscent of soccer's bad old days. Before the situation escalated, police in riot gear and armed with clubs moved in to restore order.

Crisis averted; what could have been a major street brawl never rose past a relatively minor fracas. But because the fracas happened in the heart of the city, cameras were everywhere—on street lamps, in storefronts, on the police helicopters hovering overhead. Every second of the skirmish was captured in granular detail.

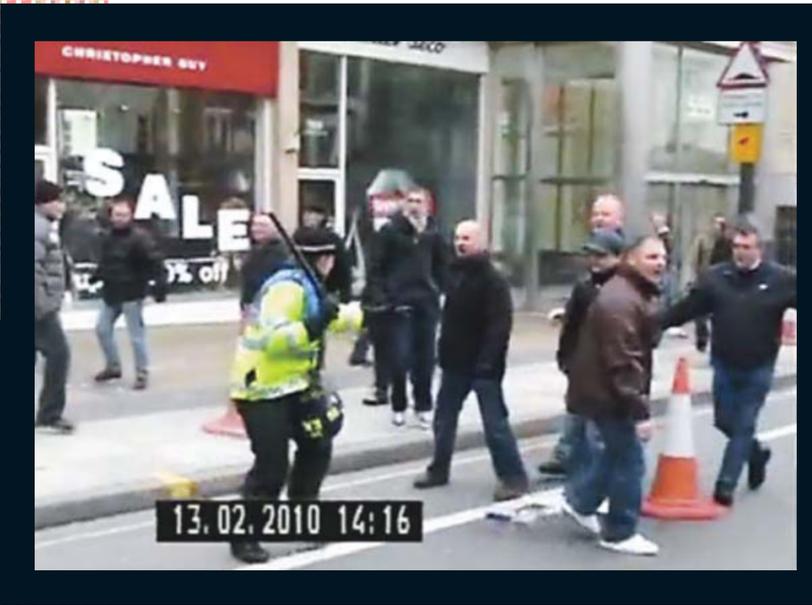
The episode, while embarrassing to a British government preparing to host the 2012 Olympics, became a defining moment for the police, who have spent much of the past two decades fighting soccer violence in Britain. Arrests were down 10% in 2010, to 3,391—a small fraction of the 39 million fans who attended games. Compared to unruly crowds in places like Turkey, Italy and Poland, soccer matches in the U.K. have become downright family-friendly. And it was those friendly fans who lit up police hotlines after the King's Road videos were posted online, leading to the arrests of 96 people. One by one they are being tried and sentenced in a stark white courtroom on the edge of the city, where the flickering images from that day are played over and over again. What they show just might be the last hooligan hurrah in a country that's made goon-hunting a science.

TWENTY-TWO YEARS ago, the U.K. experienced the worst soccer disaster in its history when a



Though Frain (center, with two unidentified men), boss of the Headhunters, may be on his way back to prison, his defiance has helped make him a celebrity in some circles.

PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: RICHARD HEATH/COTE/GETTY IMAGES; NATIONAL NEWS/ZUMA PRESS; LAURENCE GRIFFITHS/GETTY IMAGES; NATIONAL NEWS/ZUMA PRESS; RICHARD HEATH/COTE/GETTY IMAGES



The incident along King's Road was minor compared to soccer riots of old, but the justice meted out in response could have major consequences.

THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: NATIONAL NEWS/ZUMA PRESS (2)

human stampede crushed hundreds of fans against iron fences—put in place to keep hooligans from invading the pitch—at Hillsborough Stadium, in Sheffield. A task force charged with investigating the 96 resulting deaths recommended that police departments assign football intelligence officers, or FIOs, to monitor the hooligan packs that roamed stadiums with impunity. Ever since, Simon Insole has been patrolling the Cardiff soccer beat for the South Wales Police. "It's my job to find out who the hooligans are and where they'll be drinking on game days," says the 48-year-old FIO.

Cardiff, a Welsh city of 340,000, has a passionate soccer following. It also has a reputation for alcohol-related violence. There are currently 125 Cardiff City fans listed as "risk supporters," those who cannot legally buy tickets or attend matches. That's the second-highest total in the country, trailing only Leeds United, which traditionally has some of the roughest fans in the U.K. When the Football Association announced that Cardiff would meet Chelsea in a win-or-go-home tournament game, Insole wanted to make sure he knew where those banned fans were and where they'd be on match day.

WE ONLY FIGHT THE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO FIGHT US, WHO WANT THE SAME THING.

That wasn't so easy. Cardiff received 6,000 tickets for the game, a windfall for a club that gets fewer than a third of that number for away games in league play. Reforms put in place over the past 20 years allow only registered members of clubs

to buy tickets to away games, forcing banned fans to try their luck on the secondary market. Sellers risk their own ban if they're caught scalping to undesirables, but with so many tickets in circulation for the FA Cup game, "it was hard to keep track of all the risk supporters," Insole says.

While British police made huge strides against domestic hooliganism in the 1990s, their success was overshadowed by the violence that flared during the 2000 European Championship. Hundreds of drunken English fans rioted in the Belgian cities of Brussels and Charleroi, leading Prime Minister Tony Blair to apologize for "the hooligans who disgrace and shame this country."

Not long before the troubles in Belgium, a BBC

”

reporter named Donal MacIntyre infiltrated a marauding band of Chelsea followers called the Headhunters. His 1999 documentary revealed that many gang members had families and good jobs; they transformed into delinquents on game days, their team spirit stoking terror.

On a recent spring day at the London courthouse, it's easy to spot several Headhunters; they're the ones muttering curses and vamping,

When asked if any of them cares to talk about the incident on King's Road, a muscular man in tight jeans and a pressed shirt steps forward.

"What do you want to know?"

This is Andy Frain, the 46-year-old Headhunter known as The Nightmare. He's awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty to violent disorder at the Cardiff match, but he's in court today to support his mates. After being convicted of conspiracy to incite violence in 2000, Frain served seven years in jail and received an eight-year match ban. Asked if he thinks hooliganism is still a serious problem, Frain chuckles. "That's just the media frightening you," he says. "It doesn't happen with innocent people."

Innocent people?

"You don't just launch attacks," he explains. "It's about coming together as a group of lads and standing up for the honor of your team. We only fight people who want to fight us, who want the same thing."

Who might that be?

"Tottenham. West Ham. Manchester United."

He pauses, checking his math.

"And the Welsh. We hate the Welsh."

Yet, despite the real potential for violence, it's hard to call what happened outside Stamford Bridge last year premeditated. The Metropolitan Police gave the game the highest security designation possible, flooding the area with officers on horseback and helicopter patrols. But the cops also had 6,000 Cardiff visitors exit out a single gate, sending them onto

a narrow street already choked with Chelsea supporters. In the crush of bodies, bricks and bottles were thrown, and a knot of Cardiff toughs broke through a police line and ran up a side street, coming face-to-face with rowdy Chelsea fans.

Frain, who was caught on camera fighting along King's Road, doesn't think the confrontation happened by chance. "We was nicked," he says. "The police wanted to create something so they could arrest us and make a big show with the Olympics coming to town."

Among the crowd of reporters at the courthouse this day is MacIntyre, a virtual unknown when he went undercover to expose the Headhunters 12 years ago but now enough of a celebrity to have appeared on the British TV show *Dancing on Ice*. In 2009, while dining with his wife at a suburban wine bar, MacIntyre was knocked to the ground by a group of thugs. His

BUSTED

HUNTING HOOLIGANS

wife was injured trying to stop the attack. But what really chilled MacIntyre was the absence of witnesses. “No one was willing to stand up,” he says. “The worst thing I ever did for those Headhunters was to make them celebrity hooligans.”

Sitting a few seats from the celebrity journalist is Paul Corkrey, a former coal miner who walks on a prosthetic limb after losing his right leg in a mining accident years ago. Although he doesn't look the part, the 52-year-old Corkrey represents a crucial aspect of Britain's hooligan-hunting effort. Five years ago, the owner of Cardiff City approached Corkrey with a request: Help reverse the club's reputation for rampant hooliganism. Corkrey, who works part-time for a fan-advocacy group called the Football Supporters Federation, took up the challenge. “I know a lot of the troublemakers,” he says. “Piss heads, drug dealers, we have them all. Some of them are my mates. So I said I'd see what I could do.”

Working with Insole on game days, Corkrey met busloads of visiting fans to ensure their safe passage into the stadium. He also spearheaded a series of incentives for Cardiff natives. In exchange for “not smashing up the pubs,” for example, his friends received better seats, and the club earned larger ticket allotments to road games. Due at least in part to those efforts, the budget for policing soccer matches in Cardiff dropped \$325,000 last year, according to the South Wales Police. But the success of the advocacy strategy depends on the buy-in of fans like Corkrey, and something happened in the aftermath of the Chelsea-Cardiff match that made him question the cause.

After Cardiff lost 4-1, Corkrey was leading a group to its charter buses when he was caught up in the swarm. He got separated from his son, Peter, who was caught on camera hurling a traffic cone into the street. Charged with a single count of violent disorder, Peter, now 28, was urged by his father to plead guilty. After all, Peter is a former navy seaman who has a baby daughter and a factory job. Yet when he returned to London to be sentenced, Peter was cuffed and sent to prison for 16 months.

Now, watching a young bank manager get 14 months for throwing a four-inch rock, Corkrey wonders if the authorities aren't radicalizing a new generation of fans. “I asked my lads to play by the rules,” Corkrey says, “but now what we did is being turned against us.” The judge who imposed the sentence on the bank manager seems to have no such concerns. Glancing at the man's sobbing mother, he icily tells the accused: “That you should have behaved that way is a matter of tragedy to you and your family.”

INSIDE A HOLDING pen in the London courthouse stands Jason Marriner, a portly man with a crooked smile. Like Frain, Marriner was prominently featured in MacIntyre's documentary and went to jail for six years because of it. After his release, the 43-year-old Headhunter and father of three used his notoriety to commercial advantage by producing a book, a video and a website that features a snappy motto: “When we're good they never remember. When we're bad they never forget.” Marriner was at the Chelsea-Cardiff game to sign copies of his book, an example of the celebrity hooligan culture MacIntyre now regrets helping to create. When the judge enters and asks him to rise, Marriner flashes a cheeky grin, winking at his friends who have packed the gallery to support him.

“Mr. Marriner,” the judge begins, “it is clear you



**I ASKED MY
LADS TO PLAY BY THE
RULES. BUT NOW
WHAT WE DID IS BEING
TURNED AGAINST US.**

see yourself as well known to Chelsea fans. In fact, I have no doubt that you saw it as your role to exploit and encourage a response. You bear a heavy responsibility for what went on.”

Yet the judge sentences him to just two years, one fewer than police officials expected. He got off lightly because he was only a provocateur; he didn't actually hit anyone at Stamford Bridge. All he did was light the spark and stand on the sidewalk watching a motley mix of old-timers and imitators try to figure out what to do next.

“In the '80s and '90s we had real violence,” says Insole. “It wasn't people bouncing up and down on police lines, trying to be in fashion. The kids watch the films about hooligans, but when they're in the middle of it, they really have no idea how to act.”

If the King's Road incident proves anything, it's that decades of intense policing has isolated Britain's old-school hooligans, letting a new soccer economics take hold. Frain may hate the Welsh, but he saves his greatest contempt for Chelsea's owner, Roman Abramovich, the Russian oil magnate who is trying to wring every

Two decades ago, women and children were rarely seen at U.K. soccer matches. Today, it's the thugs who are unwelcome.



family-friendly dollar he can out of his fan base. “It's not the same as it was years ago,” Frain says. “Chelsea is ruined, in a way. It's all the high prices. The middle class has been kicked out. That's why we take to the streets.”

The farther the hooligans are driven from stadiums, the more they become just regular thugs fighting in bars. It's a brilliant strategy: Drive the violence away from soccer stadiums and it's no longer categorized as soccer violence.

Still, with the May 28 Champions League final at Wembley and the 2012 Olympics on the horizon, British authorities aren't taking any chances. After Marriner's sentencing, police officials move outside the courthouse for interviews. Over and over, their message is the same: If you come to the matches intending violence, there is every likelihood you will be filmed and caught.

Listening to them, Corkrey shrugs his shoulders. He put himself on the line to change his city's reputation. But now, with his son in jail, he feels more used than useful. “What my son did was wrong,” he admits. “But the punishment should fit the crime.”

He's asked what he thinks about the argument that these stiff sentences are necessary to stamp out the final embers of soccer violence.

“Hooliganism is an illness,” he says. “It may be in remission, but it can come back at any time.”