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The English Premier League and Racial Discrimination from 1992 to 2024

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
Supervisor: Gary Love
May 2024

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Abstract

The thesis explores the issue of racial discrimination within the English Premier League, from 1992 to the present date (2024). It traces the socio-cultural impact of the activism against racism throughout the history of the league, as shown through specific initiatives like Kick It Out and 'No Room for Racism'. It does this, in part, by offering a digital analysis of past and present campaigns and by thinking about how digital platforms have played a role in shaping public discourses on racism in football. More broadly, the thesis examines how deeply the issue of race permeates the EPL and it measures the effectiveness of the responses given by the league. It also analyses and reflects on strategic recommendations for future efforts. In the process, it contributes to the ongoing debates about how to tackle the subject of racism in football, and sport more generally.

Reference style: APA 7th for footnotes

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This thesis draws a final curtain over a very long journey that has taken five years of my life. There have been ups and downs in this journey, but overall, the experience has been fantastic. The years I have spent at university have allowed me to meet many great students, lecturers, and people in general. You all have touched and added value to my life that I will never forget and cherished throughout the whole course of my life spent over here for 5 years, and I really appreciate and value those interactions.

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Any errors that remain are my sole responsibility.

Ola Lien
Trondheim, May 2024

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Introduction

Historical Context

The Football League Era & the creation of the Premier League

England, surrounded by the rapidly industrializing country, was passing through a period in the latter half of the 19th century in which organized football competitions emerged as a key leisure activity, creating both social cohesion and local pride. The establishment of the Football League in 1888, led by William McGregor, was an symbolic moment in the institutionalization of the sport.[1] This original Football League did not feature any club from London or the South of England.[2] This 12-team competition had six teams from the midlands and six clubs from the North of England, coming from various industrial cities and towns.[3] These teams competed in just the one division, which became the first attempt to organize football leagues, hence bringing consistency and structure to domestic competitions. The founding clubs were Aston Villa, Blackburn Rovers, and Preston North End who were, in effect, the founding members of the league.[4] By the start of the 20th century, English football had been fully developed into professional football with countrywide reach. This industrial association has been defined by its connection with both the bankrollers of the world of business, and its male working-class supporters.[5] The competition immediately got a good following and big reputation, which is the reason for its speedy expansion. In fact, just a couple of years after its foundation, the Second Division was introduced. This model of promotion and relegation represents the very important feature that the English football pyramid now has.

By the mid-twentieth century, it had become the leading sport in the country. The number of the Football League had expanded; there were now many divisions. It went on to become a staple on the English football calendar with the FA Cup. Clubs from all over the country, from north to south, and east to west. During its first years, clubs such as Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea and Liverpool have all had much success in the league.

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[1] O'Leary 2017: 23
[2] Elliot 2017: 15
[3] Elliot 2017: 15
[4] Elliot 2017: 14
[5] Elliot 2017: 15

Although, by the latter part of the 20th century, a monumental shift in English football resulted in the birth of the Premier League. However, it was not just a change in name, but significant changes across economic, structural, and cultural dimensions. The First Division clubs of the Football League became frustrated by the television revenue-sharing deal, under which they thought they recieved an unfairly small piece of the pie considering their contribution to viewers and commercial pulling power of the league. The clubs realized the financial benefits that TV deals could bring, particularly through the growing relationship between sport and satellite broadcasting.[6]

In 1991, the top clubs began to discuss the possibility of a breakaway league. The idea was to create a structure where they had greater control over TV rights, sponsorships, and, consequently, revenue distribution.[7] Its departure was dramatic, where the First Division clubs collectively resigned from the Football League in 1992 to form the English Premier League. This created the Premier League, making itself its own entity, giving independence, and a platform where they could bargain and strike a very profitable deal for television broadcasting. The first of these was with BSkyB, which in itself marked a radical departure from the terrestrial broadcasting of football, opening the floodgates of revenue for the clubs involved.[8] The live broadcast of league football was the central factor that determined the establishment of the Premier League, as a dissident league outside the Football League, concentrating coverage and earnings.[9] The English Premier League was established as a corporation managed by its 20 member clubs, who also became the owners.[10] Even though it broke away from the FA, the EPL kept a system that allows teams to move up or down in league status.[11] This links it to the second-level league, which is now called The Championship, and other lower leagues, like League One and League Two. Furthermore, to make up 38 matches per team each year, the EPL teams have a two-round game, where they play each other both home and away.[12]

The Premier League, in its founding stages, revolutionized much more than the financial dynamics, it has had a huge effect both on and off the football pitch. This provided the clubs with greater financial muscle to afford top talent from all over the world and, consequently, improving the quality of the league, which then attracted more foreign viewers. International stars such as Eric Cantona, Thierry Henry, and Cristiano Ronaldo shot to worldwide stardom

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[6] Elliot 2017: 28-29
[7] Parnell et al. 2022: 329
[8] Elliot 2017: 23
[9] Elliot 2017: 23
[10] Parnell et al. 2022: 330
[11] Parnell et al. 2022: 330
[12] Parnell et al. 2022: 330

with their performances in the Premier League. Furthermore, there were great changes in the stadiums. After implementing the Taylor Report in response to the Hillsborough disaster, clubs began converting to all-seater stadiums. Coupled with more investment, this meant that many of the old run-down stadiums were either refurbished or replaced, with the result that the match day experience for fans began improving.[13] The branding, marketing, and the global broadcasting reach of the league turned it into a global phenomenon. Fans from the remotest corners of the world started following the English clubs, buying their merchandise, and, of course, tuning in for the games all around the globe.[14] However, even though the birth of the EPL modernized stadiums and even fan experiences, it failed to solve one of the issues which, in fact, had become very prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s in English football: racism. This problem would also be highlighted by the importing of more foreign talent, and increasing media exposure. Establishment of a safer stadium further opened all fan bases of women and children, which would mean a greater focus on general fan behavior and security, however, racism was still an issue that threatened these positive changes within English football.

The Dire State of English Football Prior to the EPL's Foundation

The high-rise of black male professional footballers who compete at the elite level of English football, became idolized by football fans across the world. Ian Wright, Thierry Henry, Patrick Vieira, Les Ferdinand, Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink, Paul McGrath, Lucas Radebe, and Paul Ince are some of the players of African-Caribbean descent who achieved cult status amongst the fans of their respective clubs for their performances in the EPL during the 1990s and early 2000s. This, in some respect, was to be one of the proud moments of the EPL - a whole-hearted embracing of multiculturalism, acknowledged for many who hold power within elite football. In his foreword to the Kick It Out Equality Standard, Richard Scudamore claimed: "[w]e believe that the hard work that has gone into tackling racism has been significant in changing the culture of sport both in England and across Europe". Furthermore, in the same piece he also point to EPL clubs' "successful partnerships with their local communities", "effective methods of stewarding and policing" and "robust reporting systems" as evidence of the organization's commitment to sustain equality.[15] Similarly, some of the most famous characters in football - former Manchester United and two-time Chelsea manager José Mourinho and former FIFA

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[13] Elliot 2017: 20
[14] Elliot 2017: 16
[15] Lawrence 2017: 133

President Sepp Blatter among them, has stated that there is "no racism in football". [16] None of the sport's major stakeholders can withstand a serious evaluation of their conduct, without allegations of racialized injustice arising in some form. However, while football clubs are quick to admit that racial discrimination exists within the game, there is a rising tendency to avoid responsibility by making racial discrimination a trait among extremist hooligan-outsiders, categorizing them as not 'real football fans'.[17] It results in a somewhat paradox in that while racialism is generally accepted to be prevalent within football, at the same time, it is equally denied being a problem intrinsic to the clubs themselves, but rather one that exists elsewhere. This, in turn, excuses clubs by either pushing the responsibility on external factors, or society at large.[18]

In relation to this, it becomes necessary to assess the extent and effectiveness of the measures against racial discrimination. It would be incomplete without an insight into larger historical and cultural contexts of football. In the 1990s, there was definitely some advance in the fight against racism compared to previous decades, although, racial problems in football were persistently high both on and off the pitch. On the 15th of April 1989, football history changed when 97 lives were lost as a result of the Hillsborough Disaster, the worst ever stadium disaster. In light of the disaster, the failures within crowd control and stadium conditions came from the Taylor Report. Here, Lord Justice Taylor identified police control as one of the major cause for the breakdown, by identifying a chain of failures in the handling of the spectator access and over-crowded conditions.[19]

Although the basic objective of the Taylor Report was to improve safety and facilities in venues where football matches were played, the findings and recommendations was indirectly addressed to factors that contributed to the creation of an atmosphere convenient to the rise of racism. The report identified "a general malaise in football" with "old grounds, poor facilities, hooliganism, excessive drinking, and poor leadership" as the main contributors - situations that not only put the public at risk but also maintained a culture in which discriminatory behavior and violence were not sanctioned properly.[20] Rejecting former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's identity card scheme as a weapon against hooliganism, Taylor articulated the sophisticated understanding of football culture. He was able to distinguish the minority of followers partaking in violence, from the overwhelming majority of people willing

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[16] Lawrence 2017: 133
[17] Kassimeris, Lawrence & Pipini 2022: 826
[18] Kassimeris, Lawrence & Pipini 2022: 826
[19] Taylor 1989: 1
[20] Taylor 1990: 5

to get a peaceful experience of the match: "The vast majority of supporters abhor violence and wish only for an afternoon of pleasure at a football match".[21] Such a distinction illustrates that the complexity of eradicating any kind of misconduct or racism in football should be done without making the general fan community feeling alienated. Furthermore, the Taylor Report was demanding the renovation of critical infrastructure of EPL teams - the stadiums. These measures, although intended as ones that could ensure safety and improvement of the spectator experience, could also ensure an atmosphere of respect and a more sophisticated environment. Still, racism continued, and it showed that the measures had been necessary, but not enough to tackle racial discrimination. Moreover, in the wake of the Hillsborough Disaster, the Taylor Report's insights highlight the bigger challenges the EPL must go through in its anti-racism efforts. While advances in the infrastructure of stadiums and of better management of fans represented progress, the fight the league still has on its hands with racial discrimination is evident and thus needing far more focused and comprehensive strategies. Furthermore, English football reached a new low which has not been witnessed in the post-war era with a record-low attendance at Football League matches, highlighting the dire state of the contemporary football match experience.[22]

The tragedies that arose in this period were deep and upsetting. The Main Stand at Bradford was gutted by a fire in which 56 people died and the face of football was scarred. The Heysel disaster, taking place at the European Cup Final in Brussels, cost 39 lives due to a collapse on the terraces, more seriously underlining a need for reform in the entire organization of spectator safety and crowd management.[23] The worst of these, the Hillsborough disaster, became a tragedy that became synonymous with the great need for change in how football matches were policed and how stadiums were designed.[24] The combination of these with rampant hooliganism provide a perception of football as a place characterized by violence and disorder, which many would be disgusted to be associated with. For instance, an article published by The Times at the close of the 1980s even went as far as to label football "a scum sport increasingly followed by scum spectators", underlining the general disdain felt in the direction in which football culture had turned into.[25] John Gaustad, the owner of Sportspages bookshops, depicted the general opinion in his reminiscence in "From the Back Page to the Front Room" by stating that being a football fan meant loving conflict, and support uncivilized

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[21] Taylor 1990: 9
[22] Parnell et al. 2022: 330
[23] Parnell et al. 2022: 330
[24] Parnell et al. 2022: 330
[25] Crooks 2022: ch. 5

behavior, to the extent that the fans needed to hide the love of the game in public and amongst non-football fans.[26] Thus, as highlighted above, while measures have been taken to enhance stadium infrastructure and the safety of protocols, the minority of hooligans remained a significant obstacle to public safety and the overall matchday experience. The issue of discipline and respect for both authorities and others, combined with the challenges in battling racial discrimination, puts another complex layer onto the social problems, in which the English Premier League must deal with.

Thesis Question

This thesis examines the efforts and failures of the (EPL) English Premier League in the fight against racism. This thesis is based from the foundation of the Premier League to its current state. As has been emphasized above, the state of the game during the 70s and 80s was marred by hooliganism, despair, and disorder.[27] As a result, it was an era when many professional Black players felt ill at ease, and they were undergoing and becoming "battle-hardened to the scourge of racism, because they had to be in order to survive".[28] The English Premier League (EPL) put in place several initiatives that would nurture an environment of inclusion and respect for years and decades to come. Despite these efforts, the league still could not get rid of racism in totality. Cases of racial abuse still continued on and off the pitch, undermining efforts made by EPL to transform its image. Such persistence of racism indicates a lack of how the root causes of the problem are being addressed properly. Furthermore, it reflects the kind of complex, deeply embedded nature of discrimination inside the sport. Thus, this thesis tries to tackle the following question: Why, and to what extent, has the English Premier League failed to adequately address racial discrimination from 1992 to 2024?

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[26] Crooks 2022: ch. 5
[27] Williams 2006: 97 & Taylor 1990: 5
[28] Barnes 2021: 3

Historiography of Football Studies & Racism in Sport

Lawrence and Crawford propose that the inception of football studies can be traced back to the latter part of the 1960s.[29] The scholars then started critically seeking some cultural aspects related to football, particularly its fandom. This interest was mainly determined by the radical changes taking place in British football and, as a result, by the ever-closer connection between football and the mass media and mass commercialization.[30] However, alongside the concern over 'football hooliganism', the deep-seated issue of racism within football, present since the late 1970s, also garnered attention, highlighting how racial prejudice has been a longstanding and persistent problem in the sport. The escalating attention of the media and government on 'football hooliganism', along with the growing participation of large corporations in managing football, spurred the initial series of scholarly publications on the subject.[31] Most of the increasing academic interest in football culture during the 1970s focused on the violence and chaos linked to the sport. More importantly, studies were trying to put the culture and changing dynamics of football within a wider societal and political landscape, where they had identified that discrimination and abuse, racism being a part of that, became a central element to the football culture, which reflected broader issues within society surrounding racial tension and discrimination. This was "understood as a response to wider societal changes and an attempt by working-class (typically) white men to recovery a sense of lost community and gain in-group sub-cultural prestige".[32] In the early 1990s, scholarly studies of the sport, which had largely tended to focus on hooliganism, took a quite different turn. The issue of racism within football became more focused. It was indeed the time when the whole football world witnessed some of its most radical changes, both in the UK and worldwide.[33] In the transforming football landscape of the early 1990s, a whole new ball game emerged. This era marked the emergence of a collection of studies expanding to cover the enduring challenges of racism, acknowledging its significant impact on players, fans, and the broader community. As we entered the new century, we started seeing rapid growth and evolution within a completely different field - named 'football studies'.[34] This was due to a new generation of researchers that went further into the interaction of a more diverse fan base with the sport and their supported teams. As a result, football studies have now become a thriving and increasingly recognized discipline,

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[29] Lawrence & Crawford 2022: 57
[30] Lawrence & Crawford 2022: 57
[31] Lawrence & Crawford 2022: 57
[32] Lawrence & Crawford 2022: 58
[33] Lawrence & Crawford 2022: 58
[34] Lawrence & Crawford 2022: 56

drawing a varied demographic of scholars exploring a wide range of football-related topics.[35] More recently, there have been some examples in this expanding literature that aim to address the influence of digital technology on the current state of football.

On a more general level, it is apparent that racism runs through all sectors of society, and sport is no exception. Sport is often viewed as a universal dimension in which racial discrimination supposedly does not exist, however, the reality is completely different, particularly for black athletes, who often are burdened with barriers not only for professional engagements, but in many other occasions as well.[36] Captivating sports are central in daily life, and attract a large audience, from active participants to spectators or followers. The mobility of players across teams, clubs, and countries who consequently wants success, highlights sports' appeal towards every sports-athlete. However, as sports are more of a mirror to the larger societal prejudices and inequalities, it becomes difficult to completely remove racial discrimination from the game itself.[37] This is no different from the exclusion of black players from professional sport in the USA until the 1940s, where exclusions can point to the deep-rooted nature of racial discrimination, challenging the idea of these arenas being free from racism.[38]

The persistence of racial discrimination in sports reflects a broader continuum of institutional racism across society, hence the interest it has gained among scholars.[39] Racial discrimination does not just take place on the field, but extends to educational and post-career opportunities for black athletes. For example, although black student-athletes are recruited to win in sports, the majority do not take much interest in helping them academically, and then go on to constrain their prospects in coaching or management even though it is clearly proven that black coaches have had success.[40] Athletes find isolation from societal racism to a degree through the pursuit of success in the professional sports environment of their own individual sport. However, this is not a denial of the fact that the preferential treatment often favor their white colleagues, for instance, in regard to roles in team management.[41] Accordingly, the cases of racism were cited in all sorts of sports, from collective disciplines such as football, basketball, volleyball, etc., to the most popular individual sports such as tennis and athletics. Even if some

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[35] Lawrence & Crawford 2022: 59
[36] Ungur, Cristea, Sabău 2018: 99
[37] Ungur, Cristea, Sabău 2018: 99
[38] Ungur, Cristea, Sabău 2018: 100
[39] Ungur, Cristea, Sabău 2018: 100
[40] Anderson 1996: 369
[41] Anderson 1996: 374

of these cases are taken lightly because of a lack of interest, others have marked the sports to such an extent that they have led to significant changes in rules and practices.

Research Method, Thesis Structure and Sources

The thesis will use digital primary sources, as well as scholarly literature, to supplement the thesis' aim, which is to examine racial discrimination in the English Premier League. Furthermore, this approach gives the thesis a strong foundation to understand the historical and contemporary context of racial discrimination in the EPL, as well as the overall state of racism within the league since its foundation. This thesis will be structuralized into two main parts: First, chapter 1 will highlight the initial period of the Premier League since its formation in 1992 to 2012. It will investigate the founding discourses and subsequent actions designed to fight racism in the league. This period is especially important in order to understand the changing context of racial discrimination in football, and the emergence of initial efforts made. The second chapter will turn to the modern period of the Premier League: 2012-2024, and discuss current issues and tendencies concerning the Premier Leagues' struggle with racism. In short, this include structural challenges, the role and impact of campaigns such as Kick It Out, online racism, and leading players like Mohamed Salah, who throughout his career has fostered inclusivity and positive discrimination. Taken together, these chapters highlight the continuing war between the EPL and racial discrimination, detailing headway made and continuing obstacles.

In chapter 1: "The Issues of Racism in the Early Premier League Era", the thesis analyze the problem of racism in the early stages of the English Premier League. This paper will review some of the initiatives that were put in place, based on literature by Garland & Rowe (2001), Penfold & Cleland (2022), and Evans (2016). While Garland & Rowe specifically helps to examine the historical impact of earlier campaigns, Penfold & Cleland give an expansive history of these efforts with a view from the club and fans. The annual Kick It Out Reports document a continuing series of racist incidents. Furthermore, Evans incorporates personal anecdotes from the players which bring a human angle to the strategic debates. The 'No Room for Racism' campaign has also been understood and examined through official Premier League documents (2021a, 2021b), outlining the league's commitments and strategies. the thesis have also used other official sources created by the EPL as an organization, providing a framework for the league's aims and objectives to prevent racial discrimination. Moreover, high-profile racism scandals such as Evra vs. Suarez and Ferdinand vs. Terry are examined through a range

of journalistic and institutional sources. The Football Association (2011), Reuters (2011), Hunter (2011), The Guardian (2011), BBC (2012a), The Football Association (2012), Judiciary of England and Wales (2012), BBC (2012b), as well as Hayward et al (2012), give a range of opinions regarding these issues, ultimately approaching the same case from different angles.

In chapter 2 'Racism: A Persistent Issue in Contemporary Premier League', the thesis will comment on more recent developments and changes within the English Premier League, drawing from a range of sources. The chapter works with sources such as the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee report from 2012 and Burdsey's 2021 study that investigates structural issues within the EPL organizational frameworks, in relation to the under-representation of ethnic minorities in coaching and executive roles. In addition, Szymanski 2023 is used to illustrate the contemporary state of diversity in leadership in football organizations. Furthermore, statistics are also retrieved from annual reports from Kick it Out, focusing on the years 2009 and 2023 to examine the longitudinal characteristics of racism, bridging the gaps between the policies and real effects of anti-racism campaigns. This is complemented by a debate made by TNT Sports, underscoring the complexities involved in organizational involvement and general perceptions of racism in football. Furthermore, the chapter will also focus on the challenges presented online with the help of Kilvington & Price (2017) and the 2021 report by the National Police Chiefs' Council, discussing how digital platforms have become new arenas for racial abuse. Works of Minshall (2021) and Marble et al (2021) helps to investigate the influence high-profile players such as Mohamed Salah and Raheem Sterling, the former illustrating how positive discrimination could help in tackling racial discrimination within the EPL, while the latter shares his thoughts in his manifest regarding these issues that still prevail, providing powerful storylines of both personal experience and changes that had to be brought to tackle these challenges. Again, the official documents of the Premier League, especially of 2021, will also be used here to summarize all the commitments and strategies of the League, pointing to its place in relation to racism and modern challenges it currently faces.

On the whole, it is very difficult to find appropriate and useful sources in order to research the issue of racial discrimination within the English Premier League. This is for a number of reasons: the evolving form of racism, the very different contexts under which racism has occurred in, and the many forms it appears in. Very few sources actually discuss the relevant topics of this thesis, and as previously mentioned, it has not been prioritized among scholars until recently. Moreover, most of the information on episodes and responses to racism

is scattered across various platforms, some of which are not so easily found, others not as academical. However, the sources in this paper indeed have advantages to them. Firstly, they cover a wide range of perspectives, from academic analyses, official documents by the league, to personal anecdotes by the players, and even reports by mass media. Academic sources like Garland and Rowe (2001) and Penfold and Cleland (2022) offer a historical context helping to analyze anti-racism initiatives over time. Moreover, using official documents and reports such as the annual reports of Kick It Out and publications by the Premier League adds a level of authoritativeness to the thesis. Even personal accounts and media reports go further to display another dimension, this time showing the human and societal effects of racism in football, helping to capture the public- and personal narratives that are often lost in purely academic discussions. Thus, by integrating these varied sources, the thesis gains a base that adds to the credibility and richness of the scope of the analysis.

The issues of Racism in the Early Premier League Era

Chapter 1 discuss the initial measures that the Premier League made towards eradicating racial discrimination, and also tries to understand the leagues initial engagement and initiatives towards fostering inclusivity. In particular, the chapter works with the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign and tries to assess the achievement through specific incidents, such as Anton Ferdinand and John Terry, and that of Patrice Evra and Luis Suarez. This chapter will additionally examine the transition to more recent efforts, such as the 'No Room for Racism' campaign, to analyze the contemporary discriminatory incidents as reported by Kick It Out. This thesis, hence, tries to analyze the effectiveness of the initial initiatives made by the league, highlighting how much work still remained in order to completely diminish racial discrimination within the game.

Campaigns against discrimination in the early Premier League era

Launched in the early 1990s, 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' has become a watershed point in the history of the English Premier League: for the first time, the league has dealt with an issue regarding discrimination openly.[42] The football stadiums had grown into something where racial abuse was not only all too common from the terraces, but also from within the sport. As John Barnes puts it: "There wasn't a game in the 80s when you didn't get racial abuse as a black player".[43] The initiative called for clubs to make public declarations against racism and put in place policies that would not only discourage such behavior, but also sanction it.[44]

The campaign approach was multifaceted, offering information-based education and delivering positive messages through matches, including encouraging the clubs in working with the local communities and awareness generation.[45] Some of the clubs bought into the initiative, embedding the campaign message within their match-day activities and through community outreach programs. Others were reluctant to engage with the aims of the campaign, and just did the bare minimum. This inconsistency highlighted the challenge which shows that while it was possible to mandate policy, real commitment to cultural change in the clubs and in their fan bases was turning out to be much more difficult to achieve.[46]

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[42] Garland & Rowe 2001: 54
[43] Evans 2016
[44] Garland & Rowe 2001: 55-56
[45] Penfold & Cleland 2022: 180
[46] Garland & Rowe 2001: 57

Although the 'Lets Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign was found to be helpful, some key areas showed large room for improvement. One major area at fault was its ability to reach, especially the manner in talking with the older football fans who would attend matches on a regular basis and whose voice within the fan base was strong. [47] At this point, they would be instrumental in making real change in footballs contemporary state, or acting as an agent for change. Ultimately, this campaign did not reach out well to this particular demographic, the initiatives and activities was found less resonating among these fans, becoming one piece of evidence that some kind of strategy would be needed to bridge divides between generations.[48]

On another note, the review found that although the campaign bore a vision, it never came forth with specifics on how it would ensure that anti-racist policies among clubs would be implemented. Clubs were rather left on their own, leading to differing levels and quality of anti-racism initiatives.[49] Although some clubs issued statements, others only put up posters - without any kind of deeper engagement strategy, which risks it to become little more than token gestures, rather than a sustained effort in the battle against racism. These were findings that had led to the coordination of the Kick it Out campaign to widen their initiatives.[50] Kick It Out identified the need to go beyond simply condemning racism to actively promoting inclusion. This even extended the campaign into grassroots football and the larger football family: e.g., including minority ethnic groups that have felt excluded from the game. This was important since it recognized that the problem of racism within football was not only bred at professional levels but in local parks and amateur leagues as well, which had a responsibility for the next generation of players fans, and society at large.[51] Despite these efforts, the depth of commitment from the clubs remained variable. Some fully embraced the message of anti-racism into their ethos, others engaged with the campaign when in the media glare, treating it as a box-ticking exercise, and not a genuine commitment to change. This, in fact, has also been highlighted by former professional footballer Ian Wright:

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[47] Garland & Rowe 2001: 57
[48] Garland & Rowe 2001: 57
[49] Garland & Rowe 2001: 58
[50] Cleland & Cashmore 2016: 31
[51] Garland & Rowe 2001: 57

"I'm sick of these trendy campaigns that seem to come around once every season, are in the spotlight for five minutes and still nothing changes. One season I was criticised for not giving my full support to a campaign, but then a fortnight later Arsenal were playing Barnsley in the Coca-Cola Cup and Glenn Helder and I were booed from start to finish, not just by handful of Barnsley supporters, but virtually a whole stand [...] But how on earth is a trendy campaign going to stop such ingrained hatred? I don't pretend to know the answer, but putting posters up and waving banners around isn't going to do the trick".[52]

Thus, one of the important transition-phases in the campaign was seeking to move the initiative from being a reaction to racism towards being a proactive stance whereby the practices of inclusivity corresponded to the ideals and rhetoric of the campaign at every club and level of the sport.

Furthermore, the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign acted as a motion for the emergence of regional anti-racism initiatives, which took the principles of the national campaign and adjusted them to find local communities.[53] 'Football Unites, Racism Divides' (FURD) in Sheffield is a prime example, demonstrating a targeted approach that involved collaboration with local clubs, law enforcement, and community groups.[54] This initiative joined others in the fight against racism which has to be fought not just in the stadiums of the Premier League, but also in the local communities where football serves as a social cornerstone. Thus, the local efforts to combat racism in football during this period highlighted the potential for community-driven change. However, it was so heavily voluntary in nature, ultimately making the campaigns approach something to pick and choose from, as if there were the option not to engage with it at all. The end result was that the enforcement of these anti-racism policies varied: some clubs really tried to change, whereas others did as little as possible not to be seen in a bad light.[55]

Thus, the approach in short is summarized by well-meaning, but limited initiatives. The campaigns really were a ground for what was to come, but at the same time, they pointed out how a more integrated, inclusive approach was necessary to be applied to the whole picture in order to properly fight against these prejudices - an approach that should make clubs accountable for their pledges and fight against all areas of discrimination, rather than those

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[52] Garland & Rowe 2001: 58
[53] Garland & Rowe 2001: 59
[54] Garland & Rowe 2001: 59
[55] Garland & Rowe 2001: 58

which were either more glaring or apparent or those more generally recognized at that moment in history. The early anti-discrimination campaigns in the Premier League never really did cross the board, although the intentions were pioneering. Often, this has been more reactive in response to incidents of racism on the rise, but not necessarily to the causes of discrimination within football.[56] In retrospect, this defensive position could be partly explained as a result of the social context at the time. A time of burgeoning awareness in the 1990s of the racial question in sport, there was far less public consciousness and dialogue about the systemic quality of racism or about the interconnectedness of various forms of discrimination.[57] The early Premier League represented a critical chapter in the British football story, connecting the golden years of the 1990s with anti-racism campaigns. Initiatives like 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football,' and later the efforts of Kick It Out, were groundbreaking in standing up against the racial abuse that was all too common within the sport, and in sport in general. These campaigns provided an instrumental magnification of awareness and, in the process, catalyzed some level of change within football clubs and the community of football. Although the era became the start of this whole process of eradicating racism within English football, it still remained within the fabric of the country, which is also shown through the second chapter of this thesis. However, it has been a time that underlined the importance of proactive approach – namely one that would not react to incidents of bias, but actively work to break the structures that cause these very biases. Those early campaigns helped sow the seeds for the ongoing journey ahead, but they also still remain a clear reminder of what still was to be achieved. The Premier League, and football more widely, continuously moves forward with the following mindset: that the true spirit of the game will always lie in its ability to unite people from all parts of society, and by their shared passion for football.

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[56] Lawrence 2017: 138
[57] Garland & Rowe 2001: 62-63

The state of discriminatory incidents in the Premier League – Kick it Out

The report of the 2022/23 season by Kick It Out, being the organization at the forefront of the campaign against all forms of discrimination in English football – highlighted the worrying state of discrimination within English football.[58] The rate of alarming cases of discrimination are increasing, with the data calling for more emphasis on encouraging more inclusiveness, and the incompetency of the strategies put in place by the EPL to deal with these long-standing issues.

The most problematic form of discrimination, however, was racism, which rose by 65.1% this season compared to last. In fact, almost half of all total reports (496 of 1,007) regarded racial discrimination, further indicating a systemic problem that the EPL has yet to handle properly.[59] The increase in racist incidents, especially at the grassroots and on social media, might give an indication that their initiatives do not penetrate further into the wider football culture, or do not change fan behavior in the way expected.[60] Moreover, the analysis conducted regarding social media illustrates the role of digital platforms in the perpetuation of all manners of discrimination. The EPL also has to face a hurdle where a high percentage of abuses are conducted online, and the long-standing issues of anonymity, and the global reach of the internet continuously complicate enforcement- and educational efforts.[61] This trend of increasing reports may in fact reflect the growing tendency to report discriminatory behavior, and a societal shift toward less tolerance of such acts. On the other hand, it might have meant that it is more visible than before and that the mitigating measures in place are not standard.[62] In conclusion, the probably well-meant efforts of the league have not proven to be as forceful as hoped.

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[58] Kick it Out 2023: 1
[59] Kick it Out 2023: 1
[60] Kick it Out 2023: 2-3 & 8-9
[61] Kick it Out 2023: 10
[62] Kick it Out 2023: 13

The creation of the 'No Room for Racism' Campaign

Over the years, several institutions and organizations have launched anti-racism programs that promote equal opportunity and inclusiveness in sports. One of the most prominent ones is called 'No Room for Racism', which represents a genuine attempt to eradicate racial discrimination within football.[63] The EPL introduced the 'No Room for Racism' campaign in March 2019, which looked to highlight equality, diversity, and the continued effort of Kick It Out in the fight against discrimination. Three main goals are set out by the Premier League of 30 March: the development of an inclusive Premier League; the increased diversity of coaching staff; and finally, making football a fully inclusive sport.[64]

The Premier League's 'No Room for Racism Action Plan Commitments' is an initiative launched by the Premier League to address racial discrimination and to achieve equality, diversity, and inclusion within football and the wider society.[65] The Premier League encourages even more communication, urging all fans to report racism whenever and wherever they witness or hear it. This campaign is an epitome of the year-round activity by the league and its clubs in the elimination of racial discrimination.[66] Furthermore, the focus on education within the Premier League community programs, primarily aimed at primary and secondary school children, and football academies, is a major part of that commitment. This is further substantiated in the form of setting up an abuse reporting system that aids those players, managers, and their families who have been subject to discriminatory abuse. In so doing, the Premier League works hand in hand with clubs and stakeholders, including Kick It Out, The FA, PFA, police, and other authorities, to make sure that the support is on the victim side while appropriating due sanctions at both disciplinary and legal levels.[67] To further embed equality, the Premier League looked towards its Equality Diversity and Inclusion Standard (PLEDIS) and will reposition this to the Football Diversity Code.[68] This alignment provides clubs with clear diversity targets and guidance on how they can be achieved. Furthermore, The Premier League also commits itself to meeting EY's National Equality Standard, a measure to evaluate best practices in policies, procedures, and organizational culture.[69] For the player's pathways, the Premier League will review the academy player pathways regarding inclusion. This review will get a better understanding of the backgrounds of players from Black, Asian, and minority

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[63] Premier League 2021b
[64] Premier League 2021a
[65] Premier League 2021b
[66] Premier League 2021b
[67] Premier League 2021a
[68] Premier League 2021b
[69] Premier League 2021b

ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, the Premier League Charitable Fund has developed a 'Race Equality Advisory Group' for communities. The group advises the 'Club Community Organisations' (CCO) to ensure that maximum accomplishment is achieved, by monitoring the quality and inclusiveness of its community schemes. For the coaching pathways, the league committed to an overarching and integrated diversity target that would be applied to all the coaching schemes.[70] There is a concerted effort to invest in programs that target coaches from underrepresented groups. The former is set to make a program of investment in coaches from underrepresented groups, while the latter is in development, which will specifically aim to address the underrepresentation of first-team managers/head coaches who are of Black, Asian, or from other minority ethnic backgrounds.[71] Lastly, executive pathways set out the specific targets by the Premier League in terms of the diversity of the workforce. In this light, developed targets have been guided by comprehensive research conducted in national and regional representation, projecting staff turnover and workforce growth.[72] The primary objective is to ensure there is the equal criteria between the current staff and the potential candidate, disregarding their gender or ethnical background. The current workplace in the Premier League consists of 37% females, and 12% of Black, Asian or Minority ethnic backgrounds.[73] The plan provides for the specific targets by which female representation, Black, Asian and minority ethnic representation are to be realized by 2026 and 2031 respectively.[74]

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[70] Premier League 2021b
[71] Premier League 2021a
[72] Premier League 2021b
[73] Premier League 2021a
[74] Premier League 2021b

High-profile racism Controversies: Evra vs. Suarez and Ferdinand vs. Terry

The Luis Suarez-Patrice Evra incident: a racial controversy between the Liverpool forward and the Manchester United left-back. Emerged as one of the most noted racial abuse episodes during the 2011-12 Premier League season. Liverpool drew 1-1 with Manchester United at Anfield on October 15, 2011. During the game, Suarez had some disagreements with United's left-back, Patrice Evra. Evra then went to complain to the match officials after the game that Suarez had shouted racist abuse at him. The incident was then forwarded to the FA, which arranged for an independent committee to investigate the allegations. On December 20, 2011, Suarez received an eight-game suspension, a fine of £40,000, and "a warning as to future conduct", subject to appeal, for the incident.[75]

Subsequently, the announcement of Suarez' suspension and fine sparked a media frenzy: Liverpool Football Club argued that Suarez was innocent, stating that "[they are] very surprised and disappointed with the decision of the Football Association Commission to find Luis Suarez guilty of the charges against him".[76] Furthermore, the club argued that "Nothing [they] have heard in the course of the hearing has changed [their] view that Luis Suarez is innocent of the charges brought against him".[77] The decision further incensed Liverpool fans, who pointed fingers at the FA and the media for their stand on the issue. Yet, most others agreed with the FA in their fight against the firm approach by the FA, which, in the end, caused mayhem all over England. On December 21, 2011, the Liverpool team and even Kenny Dalglish, the manager at the time, showed their unity and support to Suarez by wearing T-shirts with the name and picture of Suarez during pre-match warm-up against Wigan. The move was welcomed by Liverpool supporters, but was mainly criticised by the rest of the footballing community. The club also stated, in support of Suarez, that they "that [They] know he is not racist".[78] Suarez's legal representatives announced his decision to challenge the suspension.

However, after the release of the report by the FA which presented the case as well as the reasoning of the punishment, Liverpool announced that they would not appeal the decision made. The club however, continued to argue that FA was mistaken in the conclusion it arrived at, by the fact that it blamed Suarez for the supposed crime against Evra:

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[75] The Football Association 2011: 109
[76] Reuters 2011
[77] Reuters 2011
[78] Hunter 2011

"It is our strongly held conviction that the Football Association and the panel it selected constructed a highly subjective case against Luis Suárez based on an accusation that was ultimately unsubstantiated. The FA and the panel chose to consistently and methodically accept and embrace arguments leading to a set of conclusions that found Mr Suárez to 'probably' be guilty while in the same manner deciding to completely dismiss the testimony that countered their overall suppositions".[79]

However, the club did not want to obstruct anti-racism, and also further damage their already tarnished reputation. This, in turn, resulted in the following statement made by the club: "It is time to put the Luis Suarez matter to rest and for all of us, going forward, to work together to stamp out racism in every form both inside and outside the sport. It is for this reason that we will not appeal the eight-game suspension of Luis Suarez".[80] These developments, and the mixed reactions they gave in backing the case of Luis Suarez, shows the complex ways in which sports authorities are called to deal with racism. As the FA report states, "if Mr Suarez said the things that Mr Evra alleged, they would be considered racially offensive".[81] While Liverpool have the right to support its players and intends to do so, if Luis Suarez were to successfully appeal and evade the repercussions of his actions - being in the event that the incident had actually taken place, it would be very harmful to football's fight against racist prejudice, as there has to be appropriate and proportionate punishment for such actions. Further, this highlights the following paradox; while there is a general recognition of the fact that there is racism in football, clubs refuse to accept that it exists within their own walls and instead, it is imputed on external factors, or to society at large, hence absolving clubs by shifting the blame from themselves. Here, there is no doubt that Liverpool finds it difficult to understand how Suarez has been accused and characterized in the way that he has, damning the FA for their findings rather than the actions of their own player: "It seems incredible to us that a player of mixed heritage should be accused and found guilty in the way he has based on the evidence presented. We do not recognise the way in which Luis Suarez has been characterised".[82]

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[79] The Guardian 2011
[80] The Guardian 2011
[81] The Football Association 2011: 112
[82] Reuters 2011

Similarly, the incident of John Terry and Anton Ferdinand also highlight the same problematics as shown above. Here, John Terry was alleged to have used "abusive and/or insulting words and/or behavior" in a match on October 23, 2011 between Chelsea and QPR.[83] Furthermore, the Football Association stated that Terry: "included a reference to the ethnic origin and/or color and/or race of Ferdinand". Moreover, Ferdinand is characterized as a "believable witness", and had also taken Terry's defense to task, saying it looked "certainly, under the cold light of forensic examination, unlikely".[84] This wording, therefore, points out an attitude of skepticism regarding Terry's justification; still, he is acquitted by the court. However, the case brough consequences: Fabio Capello, the manager of the English national team at the time, resigned from his job after the Football Association decided to strip John Terry of his captaincy while he awaited trial.

On July 27, 2012, the FA charged Terry with the use of "abusive and/or insulting words and/or behavior", including references to the ethnicity, color, or race of Anton Ferdinand. This charge was postponed until after Terry had finished his criminal trial in which he had pleaded not guilty. The day before the FA hearing, Terry decided to retire from the England national team, and stated that his position had become "untenable" because of the disciplinary proceedings. On September 27, 2012, Terry was found guilty and served a suspension for four matches, with a fine of £220,000.[85] Furthermore, the 63-page report by the FA considered Terry's defense as "improbable, implausible, and contrived".[86] It deemed it that Terry was, in fact, saying that he was forcefully denying Ferdinand's accusation of racial abuse by adding expletives to his retort. Further, the commission expressed doubt over the validness of Terry, as he repeatedly used the phrase "black cunt" as a robust denial, saying that no claim of it was found supposedly sarcastic, in any of the proceedings by Terry in his court defense.[87] Ultimately, the commission was convinced that Terry had used the derogatory term to insult his opponent and thus dismissed his defense as not credible.[88] For Ferdinand, the incident also became reminiscent of a time where he was sent a bullet among the death threats, and hate-filled letters that were posted to him for no other reason, it seems, than the color of his skin. Furthermore, he received sinister chants of "[y]ou know what you are" from Chelsea fans, and it had grown into such a vile incident that Anton Ferdinand understandably had to fear for his

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[83] BBC 2012a
[84] Judiciary of England and Wales 2012: 6
[85] The Football Association 2012: 62
[86] The Football Association 2012: 33
[87] The Football Association 2012: 34
[88] The Football Association 2012: 37

safety, as stated by Paul Finney from The Independent: "[t]hese guys [footballers] have got families and he [Ferdinand] doesn't want to go on to a football field tomorrow fearing for his safety".[89]

More generally, this speaks to an unfortunate trend in jurisdiction, it does not only illustrate the failure of the FA to manage its own profiled cases but, indeed, highlight its failure to diminish the culture of abuse in the sport.[90] The rules which the FA have to abide by, and the very way it goes about its investigations have raised issues around its efficacy and commitment to fairness for those involved. Terry was cleared in court, but it is still an incident with totemic significance for the sport's difficulties to judge cases of racial abuse. Thus, this "swamp of nasty exchanges" has become an ugly part of football culture that needs to be fixed as fast as possible.[91] The responses made by the FA to the Terry-Ferdinand incident, and before that, to the Suarez-Evra incident, reflects the difficulties regulatory organizations face when investigating such issues within the game, and leaves gaping holes in its regulatory framework. Ultimately, to clean up this "horrible culture" in football will require more than fragmented approaches. It requires a complete shift in how the FA enforces its rules and interacts with the wider football community.[92] Hopefully then, the FA and other associations can restore their authority, and move football towards a sport of complete unity and respect, rather than a sport of abuse and discrimination.

To sum up, the first chapter investigates the first efforts by the English Premier League against racist discrimination, the early 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign up to the 'No Room for Racism' campaign. The effectiveness of such programs, however, more often than not came under question from club to club due to erratic implementation and their commitment to such programs. Furthermore, the chapter also shows that the incidents involving Evra vs. Suarez and Ferdinand vs. Terry proves the fact that there is still much to be done in order to diminish racial discrimination within the league. These cases did not only show the reactive nature of its early involvements, but evidenced complex dynamics of the enforcement of anti-racism policies within the sport. Although the campaigns have good intentions at heart, the increasing, continuous and persistent rise in discrimination cases highlights the disconnection between the initial campaigns and the subsequent effect it has on fan behavior and institutional culture within the Premier League.

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[89] BBC 2012b
[90] Judiciary of England and Wales 2012
[91] Hayward et al 2012
[92] Hayward et al 2012

Racism: A Persistent Issue in Contemporary Premier League

This chapter works with the newer structural challenges within the league, online racism, and the ineffective results of the Kick It Out campaign. It also concerns a more nuanced case, that of Mohamed Salah, in which positive discrimination can affect the necessary change to help reduce racial discrimination within the league. Thus, the chapter tries to show the complications in addressing and diminishing racism within English football today.

Organizational prejudice within the EPL

Although the Premier League has been praised to be more multicultural than ever before, it still struggles to completely remove racial discrimination within their own walls. For example, the Premier League reflects the huge under-representation of British Asians, and low numbers of black managers and coaches, which points at a major dissociation between the leagues' structure and governance. By making such a sharp and immutable distinction between on-field diversity and governance spectatorship, whose ranks largely is remained preserved to white, middle-class men, it may serve as a reminder of just how much more that still needs to be done to effectively address these deeply systemic racial issues.[93]

The anti-racism initiatives put in motion by the Premier League could be described as superficial. For example, the FA 'Bringing Opportunities to Communities' plan has been described as the type of policy that is very unstructured and ineffective in furthering the aims of raising the participation of minority groups.[94] Moreover, according to the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee in 2012: "managers and board members from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds and groups are vastly under-represented […] There is a perception amongst many that the under-representation of black managers is largely due to racism".[95] In addition, "the relatively low proportion of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) players and coaches has become a measure by which football's performance on diversity is judged".[96] Burdsey uses a similar argument, and says that "the number of minority ethnic managers in English professional football at any given time has never surpassed single figures".[97] In sum, the importance of assisting individuals from diverse backgrounds in entering

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[93] Burdsey 2021: 59
[94] Burdsey 2021: 60
[95] House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee 2012: Ev w2
[96] House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee 2012: Ev w6
[97] Burdsey 2021: 62

the English football leagues cannot be overstated. This approach will "provide new ground in this important area, consequently opening the doors for others in the future", thus emphasizing the necessity of creating more inclusive opportunities within the sport.[98] Consequently, the Premier League has failed to prove, through their best, that they can develop the power to challenge any institutional, embedded authority. Ultimately, they have failed to introduce an inclusive environment that can effectively detach the league from its discriminatory issues.

Further, heated debate and lots of controversies surround the efficacy of symbolic gesturing by players, such as 'taking the knee', and the current campaigns against racism being taken on within in the Premier League. However, these behaviors play the role and become the "powerful call for equality and justice", and last for a little time and make little substantial change.[99] Lee Hughes makes a strong emphasis in his study on the point that 'taking a knee' is widely accepted all over the world, but the mentioned problem still remains extremely alarm-raising.[100] While this action is very symbolic, it has also been open to criticism for its having very little, if any, real effect on the potential that it has to effect systemic change. Wilfried Zaha, for that matter, is concerned that such issues, without proper management backing, are not up to the task of fighting racism at large. In fact, they appear quite condescending, as they bring down the players to nothing more than puppets.[101] Meanwhile, others voiced similar concerns, feeling that with symbolic gesturing comes without real action, it might risk coming off as empty and performative. For instance, QPR director Les Ferdinand has said that 'Taking the Knee' has become no more than a trendy hashtag, losing its meaning, purpose, and impact.[102] Furthermore, the lack of definite measures and substantial support by football governing bodies and teams could invite skepticism about their real commitment to fight racism. The EPL has seen increased numbers of movements and initiatives against racism, which are largely similar to other initiatives, like the #BlackLivesMatter movement. However, as Hughes points out, while these initiatives could raise awareness, they often face challenges in maintaining momentum, which could translate into lasting, institutional change.[103] Although the English Premier League has taken some positive steps towards putting more focus on the problem of racism, its work remains insufficient to change the dynamics of racial discrimination within the sport - hence, becoming a system where racism still becomes a constant factor within the league

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[98] House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee 2012: Ev w6
[99] Smith 2021
[100] Hughes 2021
[101] Hughes 2021: 2
[102] Hughes 2021: 2
[103] Hughes 2021: 3

and sport more broadly. The current organizational structures, which is also highlighted above, thus could work further to provoke and allow the continuation of racial inequalities.[104] The lack of apparent racism, combined with a claim of color blindness, can establish an environment in which discrimination can thrive.[105] In response to this, player activism has noticeably increased in response to these entrenched problems. High-profile players such as Romelu Lukaku and Marcus Rashford have previously pointed out the fault in the existing tools that do not prevent racism – a clear point of disappointment by the players towards the institutionalized system.

Equally, active players demonstrate against the league's structural racism, and wants to change the contemporary state of the league. For example, Raheem Sterling's manifesto demanded more representation of BAME groups (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) at the executive level, as well as consistency in the punishment of racial abuse and discrimination.[106] Furthermore, it is a desperate call for change in football: "so it seems a bit crazy that, in 2019, I feel the need to write a piece in a newspaper calling for radical changes to the game that I love".[107] Furthermore, Sterling said the racism "goes up and down the game, across the world," and this is where the issues are not isolated events, but systemic issues.[108] Sterling has also experienced clear racial abuse himself, for instance, while playing away for Manchester City against Chelsea, which is similar to the "nastiness that Moise Kean of Juventus endured in Italy", reminding us that racism has become normal and systematic in football.[109] Moreover, his manifesto called for harsh and fast penalties for racist behavior and, infamously, said, "It sounds harsh, but which fan will risk racist behaviour if it might relegate their team or ruin their title bid?"[110] However, for the vision quoted above, there might be a recommendation that they move towards meaningful penalties that can help in effectively deterring the racist practice within the sport.[111] Furthermore, Sterling gave an appeal to the fraternity of football with all their sponsors, "[s]mall fines do no damage to clubs and countries, but one group of people who do have the money to make them take notice is sponsors". Here, he is calling on every individual to collectively take a stand against racism and going further from the football pitch to incite the financial stakeholders.[112] Therefore, the manifesto had received a wide backing from players like Wilfried Zaha, Vincent Kompany, and Trent Alexander-Arnold, leading public figures such

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[104] Burdsey 2021: 24
[105] Burdsey 2021: 24-25
[106] Burdsey 2021: 30
[107] Sterling 2019: Raheem Sterling anti-racism manifesto is published through The Times
[108] Sterling 2019
[109] Sterling 2019
[110] Sterling 2019
[111] Sterling 2019
[112] Sterling 2019

as Sadiq Khan, as well as to Juventus Women's player Eni Aluko, in what was an indication of a unified front in the war against racism.

In relation to this, figureheads like Vincent Kompany and Antonio Rudiger have asserted that truly, there does lie a deficit of comprehension and admissibility within these structures, and diversity in decision-making has to be implemented for the issue to be resolved.[113] However, as stated earlier, the fact that there is a lack of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) coaches and managers at the very top of football stands testament to not just societal racism but some barriers that appear rooted within the sport. It is "much harder to overcome prejudice in managerial positions where assessments are more likely to be subjective and based on limited observation of actual performance".[114] This lack of diversity in leadership positions creates a ceiling for BAME groups, making it harder for these groups to attain certain levels or positions higher up in the league. For example, during the match in the Premier League between Sheffield United and Luton Town on Boxing Day in 2023, Sam Allison became the first black referee in this league since Uriah Rennie. Sam Allison, who had been in the refereeing profession for a dozen years, could be proud of being the first black official above the top-four tiers of the English football league since 2020.[115] As stated by Joel Mannix, the chairman of BAMREF, a support-group for referees from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage communities, the concerning factor of under-representation is worrying:

> "In 30 years of refereeing, we've only had two referees of color. I'm a bit sad about that […] There's been so many stumbling blocks at BAMREF, we've always talked about the three R's, which is recruitment, retention, and obviously representation. I've always been one if you can't see it, you can't be it".[116]

Thus, it develops these structural biases, which reinforce the idea that some opportunities or roles are not as available to certain people on the basis of their ethnic or racial background.[117] Therefore, the PLEDIS initiative from the Premier League is a start to repair these systemic problems. PLEDIS targets "Accountability for and leadership of EDI", one of which is the fact that clubs should rectify these inherent inequities.[118] The strategy symbolizes the transition from mere compliance with anti-discrimination policies to proving the active demonstration of the

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[113] Burdsey 2021: 30
[114] Szymanski 2023
[115] Premier League 2023
[116] Sky News [@SkyNews] 2023
[117] Szymanski 2023
[118] Premier League 2021c

impact of EDI-work (equality, diversity and inclusion) across the league.[119] Indeed, in so doing, the Premier League would be taking the lead in redressing such structural inequalities, tearing down the institutional barriers that breed racial discrimination from inside the sport, and within the league itself.

The insufficient impact of Kick it Out to combat racism in the EPL

Through analysing the Kick It Out campaign, which is instrumental in the fight against racism in the EPL, anti-racism-organizations' efficacy could be questioned. Launched to assist in the struggle against racial discrimination in a game that has always been a reserve of white demography, its impact varies much, especially on fan engagement. Penfold & Cleland's study shows that 73% of white fans admitted that they never participate in the initiatives of the campaign, consequently highlighting a disconnection in outreach and resonance of the campaign. Understanding the challenges the campaign is going through is done by examining the history of black players in English football. Despite the pioneering roles of Arthur Wharton and Walter Tull, being two of the first professional black footballers in England, their presence very much summed up the culture of the sport during the 19th and early 20th centuries: remaining predominantly white. It was not until the late 20th century that first and second-generation Black footballers began to influence the racial dynamics in English football. However, as previously stated, they were often met with racial hostility by the predominantly white fan base. Thus, it is something that really does shine a light on the long racial dynamics of the sport, that are so ingrained and still inhibit campaigns like Kick It Out, all these years later.

Furthermore, the 2008/09 Kick It Out report show that 31 clubs reached the 'Preliminary Level' of the Racial Equality Standard, including 17 from the Premier League, and 8 clubs reached 'Intermediate Level'.[120] Additionally, 'the 2008 Weeks of Action' included more than 2,000 events, another major effort towards the promotion of the campaign, and its fight towards racial discrimination overall.[121] However, these efforts, outstanding at the time for their scale and reach, often missed the point, and ended up producing minor impact in changing attitudes or behaviors for fans and players. Fast forward to the 2022/23 season, and the problems facing Kick It Out have changed, with a far higher volume of reported incidents of racial abuse, both

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[119] Premier League 2021c
[120] Kick it Out 2009
[121] Kick it Out 2009

on the pitch and online.[122] This could, of course, simply be an effect of increased awareness and reporting, but it could also serve to emphasize the continued existence and increased rate of racism in football culture. The shift of campaigns towards digital strategies, which was inevitable in the epoch of social media, seems to be aimed at the changeable character of racism.

Further, the strategy of Kick It Out is mostly reactive, rather than proactive, according to its many critics. They deplore it for responding to incidents, which do lack in the overall framework to be set for a change of culture and take away from what could possibly be its potential to affect change in the system. This position is what Rio Ferdinand has publicly come out and criticized in an interview with TNT Sports of 2018, where he said the following when being asked about the current state of battle in racism on the football pitch:

> "Well, I said a while back, though I was caught up in the bubble for this country. We're doing so great with the racism situation and then a couple of situations rear their heads and you realize that it has been put under the surface really, put under the table and just left there really not dealt with and I think that the problem is when to situate the awareness. Yes, I think we've had great strides with the awareness from different campaigns and the FA's taken a part in that but I think is then the reaction to a case when it when it arises".[123]

Here, Rio Ferdinand gives his opinion that, although there is an increase in awareness of racism going on in football, the actual response and support toward the players who are suffering from it need improvement. He gave the instance of Mason Holgate as an example, affirming that it is not about looking for who is right or wrong, but how the authorities deal with such cases. In addition, he criticizes the fact that immediate support from such organizations as PFA (Professional Footballers' Association) has not reached out properly to the related players. The fact that during racial abuse cases, the effected players have not given any kind of direct support by Kick it Out, nor other anti-racism organizations. Furthermore, Ferdinand strongly argues that the support to the players have not been instant, which does not reflect genuine care when it is needed the most.[124] Ferdinand also highlight the psychological toll it has on young players like Mason Holgate and Rhian Brewster, who have both come forward to speak on social media. Furthermore, Ferdinand continues to criticize the FA and their handling of the Holgate incident, in particular, their decision to investigate Holgate's past tweets, which he calls character

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[122] Kick It Out 2023
[123] TNT Sports 2018
[124] TNT Sports 2018

assassination and counter-productive if the FA want players to report these cases of racism.

Later on in the interview, Ferdinand talks with Troy Townsend, who is the head of development at Kick it Out, about the difficulties and obstacles that he and his organization come across on the way of tackling racism in football. Ferdinand highlights the importance of proactively supporting the players who are victims to racism and questions why organizations like Kick It Out are not at the forefront in being of help. Townsend added that Kick It Out does not enforce, but reports incidents to the FA. He said that during an FA investigation, they (Kick It Out) "would not be in a position to talk directly to clubs or players, and so support would not be provided in real time.[125] In addition, Townsend reveals that most of the entities such as Kick it Out, are hampered by jurisdiction issues, particularly in those cases that are happening abroad. He shifts the emotional burden to the young players, such as Rhian Brewster, who has had several accounts of racial abuse. Townsend had shown concern for Brewster, explaining the kind of emotional turmoil these events have on their victims. Thus, the conversation highlights the structural and procedural barriers to rendering instant and effective support to the players at the time of racial abuse.[126]

Moreover, the rise of social media has given another dimension to this fight against racism in football. The platform has proven to be the center of racist abuse, although it provides broad reach, and has necessitated the organization to change its strategy. In the very interview with Rio Ferdinand and Troy Townsend, Townsend speaks of his concern about it when he says that it has "grown over the last couple of years".[127] Furthermore, Townsend carries on the topic of online racism, which apparently many black people, especially footballers, experience every day. Townsend also says that while fans formerly displayed racist attitudes at stadiums, today they are more likely to express them via the internet, on platforms through which such fans get the opportunity and cover of anonymity. He further presented this as a growing concern, even to him, and the great need for unity in attacking back against this form of racism.[128] Townsend has blasted social media firms for not being tough when it comes to taking online racism. The companies have failed to grapple with the problem, he said, and instead, racist speech has exploded on their platforms. The question is hence huge, with the same measures that are still not in place to govern effectively and regulate the prevalence of racism. The efforts of the campaign in the digital space needs to change, including collaborations with social media

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[125] TNT Sports 2018
[126] TNT Sports 2018
[127] TNT Sports 2018
[128] TNT Sports 2018

companies and a more adaptive strategy to really take on and tackle online racism, and racism at large.[129] With respect to the EPL, Kick It Out weighs on very delicate grounds within the cultural, political, and strategic fields that have to be met in order to see a decline in racial discrimination. Its contribution is much appreciable in terms of awareness, but it is not performing up to the level of full potential, as it is held back by historical cultural biases, a reactive posture, and political limitations. Thus, an increased amount of support is needed for anti-racism campaigns, which should be more independent from the EPL and its authorities. These problems are so complex, and they have to be handled with proper care, sensitivity, and inclusiveness, and should not only deal with racial discrimination, but with an attempt to change the very attitude and structures that produce them.

On the whole, it is clear that the Kick It Out campaign grapples with a series of sensitive topics as it wanted to respond and challenge the problem of racism within the sport of football. This campaign, however well-intentioned, has been troubled in terms of bringing out any serious change in the way that racism occurs among the league. The campaign was, therefore, persistently weakened, both by the historical cultural biases and by the prevailing disengagement of a predominantly white fan base from anti-racism initiatives. This disconnection points to something more deep-seated and systemic in the culture of the sport. Most of the criticism is that most of the approaches of the campaign to racism are quite reactive and, therefore, fail to address the multi-layered, dynamic context of racism in football. With the main focus on responding to incidents rather than changing attitudes and behavior, it meant the potential impact from the campaign could be substantially held back. Further, the rise of online racism, especially on social media, formed new challenges that the campaign has managed to regain. With millions of users and the same relative anonymity from the users, the campaigns issued by racist abuse have largely been left untouched. This is evidence that, with little change in attitudes and behaviors and the continuous existence of racism both online and in the stadiums of football, the campaign has been unsuccessful in trying to bring on outright change in the fight against racial discrimination in the EPL.

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[129] TNT Sports 2018

Online racism: a new form of racism in the English Premier League

In relation to racism and discrimination in English football, recent years have witnessed a rise in racist abuse on social media platforms. Kick It Out stated that reports of online abuse had increased by 279% and that the organization had received 207 more reports than last year, related to online forums and social media.[130] Social media platforms are used as avenues for fans of football and the players themselves in such a way that they can express their genuine thoughts and opinions, bearing in mind that the platform can be safely regarded as secure and protected. Discussions and expressions previously reserved for private, behind-the-scenes settings are now openly shared in public forums. This growing trend toward increased open space tends to encourage, or at least influence, the lowering of inhibitions by users in regard to abusive behavior online.[131]

Some of the biggest racial scandals followed England's loss to Italy in the EURO 2020 final, where Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho, and Bukayo Saka all missed their respective penalty-kicks in the shootout. The whole of Britain went into uproar when people started throwing racist abuse at the players through different social media platforms. But as criticism flooded in about his performance following the loss of the game, Marcus Rashford responded: "I can take critique of my performance all day long. but I will never apologise for who I am and where I came from".[132] More so, this racial abuse also evoked strong reactions from some of the most profiled names in Britain. The then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, said: "This England team deserve to be lauded as heroes, not racially abused on social media. Those responsible for this appalling abuse should be ashamed of themselves".[133] Equally, Prince William said: "I am sickened by the racist abuse aimed at England players after last night's match. It is totally unacceptable that players have to endure this abhorrent behaviour. It must stop now, and all those involved should be held accountable".[134]

However, the reaction from law agencies across the United Kingdom was efficient. This was done under the leadership of the UK Football Policing Unit, which specifically seemed to have acted quickly with respect to the racial issues after the Euro final. This in turn resulted in the initiation of an investigation on hate crime. In fact, more than 600 hate notifications were reported to the UKFPU Investigation team by the unofficial sources comprising the public, charities, and football clubs, all of which were accessed just a month after the tournament.

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[130] Kick It Out 2023
[131] Kilvington & Price 2017: 76
[132] Holden & Phillips 2021
[133] Johnson 2021
[134] Kensington Royal 2021

Furthermore, UKFPU continued with their investigations, where they also requested vital information from different social media, to assist in ensuring accountability. Indeed, out of those reports, 207 of them were established to be criminal. On the other hand, UKFPU Chief Constable Mark Roberts placed much emphasis that it could be difficult to investigate the abuses that people are made subject to through social media. In his words, "[t]he complexities of these investigations cannot be underestimated", in addition, he highlights the challenges in identifying and addressing abusive comments effectively.[135] However, the task remains a colossal job to bring about substantial and long-term changes, great enough to lower racial discrimination, particularly those subjected through online platforms. However, The Football Association (FA), Premier League, and various other football associations had united in a social media boycott during the second quarter of 2021. Their actions would be seen collectively from the afternoon of the 30th of April to the night of the 3rd of May. It was a response to the constant discrimination both football players and many people associated with the sport got online.[136] Though this boycott was showing "English football coming together to emphasize that social media companies must do more to eradicate online hate", it also emphasized the necessity of active communication and cooperation with social media companies.[137] English football thus proceeded to formally present their demands through the open letter issued in February 2021 to the CEOs of Facebook and Twitter.[138] This letter calls for the institution of measures such as filtering, blocking, and prompt removal of defamatory posts, making the verification process tight enough so that there is no re-registration, as well as supporting the legal authorities to penalize those who post such abuse online.[139] Furthermore, English football "reiterate those requests today in an effort to stem the relentless flow of discriminatory messages and ensure that there are real-life consequences for purveyors of online abuse across all platforms".[140] It is recognized that, of course, a boycott by the football community is in itself not going to take away this problem of online discriminatory abuse. It would, however, signal the sport's willingness to take part voluntarily and proactively in a fight that is being conducted on other fronts. The letter highlights how the language used online is degrading, menacing, and unlawful, causing distress not only to the person the other side of it but also to the general public against racism. The letter shows its disapproval for the lack of action taken by these platforms,

[135] National Police Chiefs' Council 2021
[136] Premier League 2021d
[137] Premier League 2021d
[138] Premier League 2021e
[139] Premier League 2021e
[140] Premier League 2021d

which effectively has facilitated online abuse. It demands filtering and blocking all such racist or discriminatory material, along with the quick removal of the abusive content, and also the issuance of better user verification processes so that can penalize the offenders.[141]

On another note, the House of Commons further explains the question of online racism in football, giving oral evidence from 'Online Harms, HC 624'. On September 8, 2021, the Home Affairs Select Committee had a sitting where some former professional footballers, and a ambassador for Show Racism the Red Card, attended to give their testimony.[142] They said online abuses have really increased, especially on Twitter and Instagram, and they also talked about how the social media platforms' responses have been inadequate in handling the abuses reported to them.[143] This, in turn, testifies to the deep effects that this has left on the victims and on their families. They further argued that these sites must be implemented with mechanisms to increase the reduction of anonymity, hence making the abusers more identifiable, and further pressed and recommended that the latest technology should be applied to assure that the content from the abusers is not posted. This, therefore, proved how much more the social media companies needed to take into effective action to rid online racism, considering that their current efforts are not enough.

However, even after these steps are effected to control the racial abuse through the internet, the problem of online abuse continues to disturb Britain and English football. Again, of significance is the fact that such measures are being implemented as the rise in continued online abuse, which has nearly quadrupled since 2022.[144] Although this could be partially explained by the increase in reporting discriminatory behaviour, as Kick It Out received a record amount of inquires in the 2022-23 season, it does demonstrate that there is still lots to be done in order to completely diminish the issue of racial discrimination in English Football, as Twitter removed almost 2000 tweets in the wake of the Euro 2020 final.[145]

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[141] Premier League 2021e
[142] House of Commons 2021: Witnesses
[143] House of Commons 2021
[144] Kick It Out 2023
[145] Minshall 2021

Mohamed Salah – positive discrimination as a way of removing racism

The English Premier League's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Standard highlights the importance of tolerance and respect within football. It says that "[f]ootball is a diverse sport that brings people together in a shared community of different cultures and backgrounds. This diversity not only strengthens the game on the pitch but is also essential to be mirrored in all areas".[146] The effect of this diversity is exactly what Mohamed Salah represents: a Muslim footballer who, in different ways, has proven to be one of the celebrated and successful football players of the Premier League in the last decade. His career, and most recent success at Liverpool, has brought with it a lot of media exposure - most notably in the way he has affected attitudes to Muslims in the country, with newspaper titles such as: "[t]he Muslim soccer star has millions of fans. But is that enough to combat Islamophobia?", "Footballer Mo Salah is tackling Islamophobia head-on".[147] All these headings accentuate an interesting debate in the Premier League: would exposure to celebrities, particularly from a stigmatized group, help reduce prejudice against such marginalized groups at large?

Interestingly, a study by Stanford University further revealed that since Mohamed Salah signed with Liverpool, the local community saw hate crime drop 19%, and cuts on the internet to anti-Muslim rhetoric by 50%.[148] The investigation was based on the statistics of hate crimes from 25 English police departments across the period 2015-2018. It further applied a modified synthetic control method to derive a counterfactual scenario of hypothetical hate crime rates in a jurisdiction of the Merseyside police that includes Liverpool, had Mohamed Salah not joined the team. 15 million tweets from fans of major English Premier League football teams were analyzed, in addition, the data showed that after the signing of Salah, hate crimes in Merseyside dropped by 16%. Using the same synthetic control approach as in the hate crime analysis, it was discovered that post Salah, among the most popular tweets of Liverpool F.C. supporters, the share of anti-Muslim tweets by followers decreased from an expected 7.3% to an actual 3.8% in relation to Muslims. Lastly, an additional survey was conducted with 8060 fans of Liverpool F.C. to assess directly how the visibility of Salah can contribute to enhancing a wider Muslim tolerance effect. Consistent with the aforementioned study, it indicates that Salah's prominent Muslim identity plays a significant role in diminishing prejudice against Muslims in general.[149]

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[146] Premier League 2021c
[147] Thomas 2018 & The National 2018
[148] Marble et al 2021: 1
[149] Marble et al 2021: 27

The research of the English Premier League and its role in racial discrimination both point to the shortcomings of the league itself, and its potential for societal impact. The example of Mohamed Salah and his influence on the supporters of Liverpool F.C. prescribes an optimistic tendency: ongoing presentation to the picture of Salah corresponds to an important decline in hate crimes and anti-Muslim rhetoric on platforms like Twitter. While such findings might intimate the occurrence of negative incidents among those with the highest levels of exposure to Salah, it would further point to the contrary: a positive role the EPL could play in society through the use of the visibility of its players to fight long-established, inherent prejudices. This is an important observed change, even more so when one considers the less diverse demographic of Liverpool compared to other areas, and the historical struggle with hate crimes.[150] Again, the data presented above supports the assertion that celebrities can produce important effects through high-profile public work related to tolerance and other dimensions of societal inclusion. Noteworthy, the EPL's approach to players who engage in political discourse is also interesting. While athletes like Colin Kaepernick represent the potential risk that is inherent in other sports, the EPL should be capable of using the example to navigate the dangerous waters based upon levels of player activism and the media portrayal.[151] As much as the non-political stance that Salah has taken on questions to do with Islamophobia, helps sustain his appeal. Furthermore, it also means that the EPL can help its players take a stand on some of the issues that are prevalent in society. In conclusion, this is an indirect way in which the EPL contributes to the reduction of racial discrimination; hence, a very positive sign of the league's imprint on society through the influence of players such as Salah. If the issue of discrimination requires some direct and systemic effort, then the effect can give a basis for the EPL in that respect. By understanding and capitalizing on the full potential of its platform, the EPL can then lead the initiative in promoting diversity, tolerance, and inclusion within the sport and society.

In sum, the second chapter discuss the persisting issues of racism within the modern English Premier League Football, focusing on structural challenges and the limited impact by initiatives like Kick It Out. This chapter also highlight the undiversified state of managers and coaches within the league, where there has perennially been an under-representation of minority groups. It also addresses the latest challenge that has emerged, the ever-evolving challenge of online racism fueled through social media, complicating the further enforcement of the measures of anti-racism. This thesis has also brought more light to Mohamed Salah's case, in

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[150] Marble et al 2021: appendix 2
[151] Marble et al 2021: 29

which his beneficial impact suggests that visibility may, among other things, reduce Islamophobic practices by fans and alter their attitudes. Therefore, the influence of Salah and the other highly publicized controversies actualized the fact that the EPL needs stronger forward-reaching strategies, going further than mere symbolic gestures and towards building actionable policies and successfully diminishing racial discrimination in English football.

Conclusion

This thesis had set out to look at the perennial battle of the English Premier League (EPL) against racism from the beginning in 1992 to date and with a view to establishing the efficiency of the measures that have been put in place. This begs the main critical question in this thesis: why, and to what extent, has the English Premier League failed to adequately address racial discrimination from 1992 to 2024? This thesis, therefore, works to examine the many complexities involved in the efforts that the league is making, by putting these initiatives within the larger history and societal struggle against racial prejudice in sports.

The history of the EPL approach to anti-racism mirrors a critical switchover from the early sporadic, to the more wholesome, and contemporary initiatives. In that line, the initial campaigns against racism, such as 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football', were pioneering, but primarily lacking when it comes to challenging racial discrimination. The early attempts at this had failed to achieve a true, comprehensive cultural change deep within football itself, mostly because it was reactive, rather than proactive, and for its lack of cohesive strategy. Further, in the development of the thesis, it became evident that with the entrance of social media, modern trends were changing the face of racism within the EPL, and a new, omnipresent platform for racial abuse consequently opened. This really calls for a much more nuanced understanding and approach to the way forward especially for initiatives like 'No Room for Racism'. Although there is a broader recognition of the systemic roots of racism and efforts at reformation, there must be a way that the league can find common ground with reconciling organizational biases and digital discrimination. Examining the initial period against the contemporary periods of EPL's anti-racist struggle, does nothing more than symbolize the change of the league from making progress, into facing new, and evolved cases of racial discrimination. Here, the shift from overt racism to uprooting systemically and digitalized forms of discrimination subsequently underlines the multi-dimensionality of the problem.

Moreover, it becomes apparent that the English Premier League, side by side with the socio-political changes taking place in Britain, still struggle to detach itself from the issue of racial discrimination. In short, these issues are centuries old, and evolved with the changing socio-political dynamics. This analysis reflects on this journey of the league, and recognizes a huge distance covered, but also underscores that there are many innovations, collaborations, and much committed work needed to achieve racial equality. The EPL is uniquely positioned in such a way that the impact it exerts is felt across the entire world. Therefore, it could show how changes may be inspired in football. As a result, considering the league is grappling with

issues of racism in a digital environment, it must building on the experiences from the past.

Thus, the findings from this thesis aims to support in the continued debate over racism in sports, and tries to provide some ideas about the specific struggles, but also common trends that present themselves in racial discrimination throughout sports more generally. The English Premier League's development, with respect to the struggle with racism from its very beginning to the present, has shown an even broader societal battle against racial prejudice. While big challenges still exist, this at least shows that the league is trying to show some investment in developing an inclusive and respectful football culture. It continues to state that the EPL must look forward and develop by using its platform to promote diversity, inclusion, and respect - not only within football, but also in society.

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Appendix

Thesis' Relevance for My Work in the Norwegian Educational system

This past year have made me develop a lot, both personally and academically. I believe that the thesis work further solidified my belief that practice nurtures development. Since I have embraced this thesis, the process of doing the research itself has become more enjoyable. I hope to be able to translate this kind of attitude with my future students during the conduct of their projects, wherein most cases, resistance and difficulties are part of it.

Furthermore, it has been through dedicating a lot of work to the accomplishment of the project that has depicted the value of perseverance and benefits of hard work. The desire to help students with their tasks, in order for them to experience the same feeling of accomplishment as I have, and more generally, realize that tasks, no matter how daunting they may appear, are generally conquerable with consistent effort - is something I want to convey to my future students.
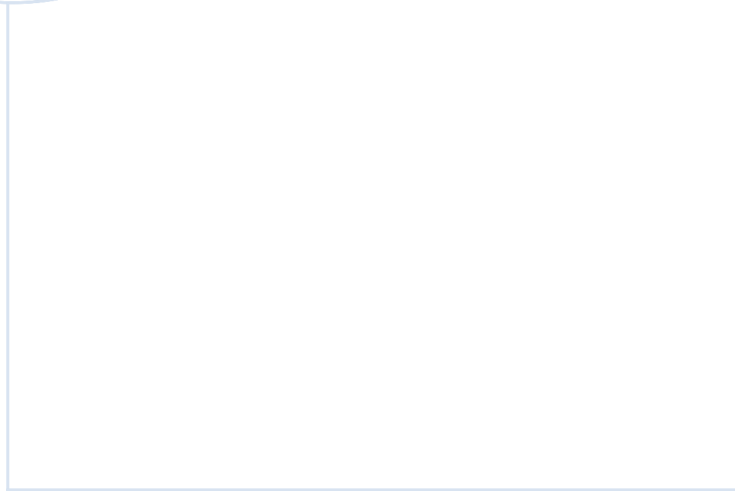
Moreover, by writing a socio-cultural thesis about racism within the English Premier League, I have learned a lot of cultural, social, political, and history related to Britain, and the aspects that football consequently effects these areas. All of which are indisputable elements that are directly transferable to English as a school subject, and shown through the Norwegian curriculum, and should in consequence be a substantial part of the strength of my role as an English teacher.[152]

In addition, through this project, I have had time and practice to reflect and learn the importance of accurate and proper use of language. Thus, this increased understanding will improve my overall proficiency in teaching both oral and textual communication of English to my future students. Some of these elements are important elements in which the students must to master, including reading, writing, oral-, and digital skills.[153] My research process has, without a doubt, added to my overall competence and comprehension of English, and will make me better prepared me to create similar development in my students.

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