

An aerial photograph of a lush green football pitch, showing the white markings of the field. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down at the grass. The lighting is even, highlighting the texture of the grass and the crisp lines of the pitch.

# **BIGOTRY, FOOTBALL AND SCOTLAND**

EDITED BY  
**JOHN FLINT AND  
JOHN KELLY**

Foreword by  
Lord Jack McConnell of Glenscorrodale

# Bigotry, Football and Scotland

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## 2 Outside the Hothouse: Perspectives Beyond the Old Firm

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*Michael Rosie*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the events of the 2010–11 football season from outwith the perspective of Celtic and Rangers, attempting to put ‘sectarianism’ in a broader context. It begins with an overview of the events in the first two-thirds of the season, culminating in a controversial Scottish Cup replay. Broader evidence for sectarianism is then examined which suggests that the public’s perception – or indeed, fear – of sectarian conflict far outruns their actual experience of it. The views of non-Old Firm fans are then explored through the platform of a popular football discussion website. The chapter concludes that football clubs themselves – and in particular the Old Firm – could and should do more to reduce misbehaviour on and off the pitch.

### THE 2010–11 SEASON

Observers of the first half of the 2010–11 Scottish Premier League (SPL) would have been forgiven for thinking that they were seeing the most petulant and disputatious season for many years. Increasingly heated and fractious exchanges between various spokespersons of the two dominant clubs, Celtic and Rangers, came as the latter maintained a modest but stubborn lead in the league table. After Celtic were denied a penalty in a match at Dundee United, serious questions were asked about the match official’s explanation. It emerged that the referee had given an inaccurate, perhaps deceitful, version of the decision process to Celtic manager Neil Lennon. An assistant referee, who had been persuaded by the match referee to obscure the decision-making process, subsequently resigned, criticising the Scottish Football Association (SFA) and making claims of a bullying culture within Scottish refereeing. Unsurprisingly, Celtic insisted the match referee should resign. The picture was further muddled when it emerged that SFA Head of Referee Development, Hugh Dallas, had circulated a scurrilous e-mail image of the Pope (whether the e-mail

was 'satirical' or 'sectarian' is a moot point). Trust was disintegrating, with multiple claims of impropriety and bias, victimisation and intimidation. This was not limited to ordinary supporters. At his club's annual meeting, Celtic chairman John Reid played to the gallery, warning of 'lies, conspiracies and cover-ups' against Celtic: 'We're not asking for special treatment, but neither will we be treated as less than anyone else. Those days are gone' (BBC 2010a). Such grandstanding – by a former Cabinet Minister – amplifies the claim by Bill Murray (1998: 154) that 'Celtic supporters have been obsessed throughout their history by the idea that the SFA and its referees are biased against them'.

Reid's insinuations came weeks after the referee of an Old Firm encounter had reportedly received death threats after awarding a penalty against Celtic (BBC 2010b). The fallout from the Tannadice debacle – for which the referee eventually resigned – and the ongoing e-mail scandal intensified pressure on referees facing the 'hothouse' of Old Firm rivalry. Here almost *every* game played by either team is a 'six pointer' and every decision 'for' one team (regardless of their opposition on the day) is seen as 'against' the other. To some degree the key battle lines and characters were all too familiar. Celtic and Hugh Dallas had history.

Old Firm tensions had risen as Rangers won nine titles between 1989 and 1997, equalling Celtic's 1966–74 record. Celtic halted Rangers' aspirations for a world record ten-in-a-row on the last day of the 1998 season. In May 1999 Dallas refereed a title-deciding Old Firm derby. In a frenzied match – which was won by Rangers 3–0 and which saw over 100 fans arrested – Dallas was injured by a coin thrown from the Celtic end and several attempts were made by Celtic supporters to confront Dallas on the pitch. That evening windows at Dallas's home were smashed by a Celtic-supporting neighbour (BBC 1999a; 1999b; 2000). Quite remarkably, Celtic responded by commissioning a behavioural psychologist to scrutinise the referee's 'body language'. Celtic subsequently claimed that 'the inescapable conclusion is [that] tension in the stands was created by certain gestures made by the referee'. Outwith the club there was strong feeling that Celtic should have been looking rather closer to home (Keevins 2000a; 2000b; Paul 2000).

Dallas was sacked over 'Popagate' but by November 2010 pressure on Scotland's referees led to near collapse in the operation of the game. With referees under unparalleled pressure with claims of 'bias' and 'conspiracy', and feeling inadequately supported by the football authorities, they voted to strike. Their decision came just days after Reid's allegations of 'lies, conspiracies and cover-ups'. Publicly referees noted only that their integrity had been subjected to 'incessant and adverse' questioning, leading to 'an unprecedented level of abuse and genuine concerns for [their] safety' (STV 2011). A recently retired senior referee, however, did not hesitate to single out the complaints from Celtic (BBC 2010c).

Yet things had only just begun. Celtic overtook Rangers over the festive period, including a 2–0 New Year win at Ibrox. With such a tight scramble for points, every single game became meaningful, every incident scrutinised and endlessly replayed, and tensions continued to rise. And it increasingly became personal. In January 2011, with Rangers slipping behind their rivals, it was reported that bullets had been sent to Celtic manager Neil Lennon. Lennon had become a key love/hate

figure with little room allowed by Old Firm supporters for any shade of grey. Again Lennon has – and has suffered – ‘history’. Lennon represented Northern Ireland with distinction until he signed for Celtic in December 2000. At his next international, in February 2001, he was abused by a section of the Belfast crowd. What riled these ‘supporters’ was not so much his religion – the previous seven years playing for Northern Ireland had passed without incident – but the fact that he now played for Celtic, a club associated with a particular version of Irishness. For the next international Lennon received widespread vocal support from the Windsor Park crowd, but prior to a game in August 2002 he received a death threat, ostensibly from a Loyalist paramilitary group. Lennon, understandably, retired from international football.

A victim of bigotry both in Northern Ireland and in Scotland, Lennon became a symbolic rallying point for Celtic fans, a clear example of anti-Catholicism and racism (see Reid 2008: 75 and this volume for a series of claims that Lennon has been victim to ‘racist and sectarian narratives’ within the Scottish press). For many Rangers fans Lennon epitomised all that they loathed – an Ulster Catholic, Republican in hue, promoting a sense of Celtic’s victim-status. Lennon increasingly became, simultaneously, a folk devil and a folk saint, a cipher with no in between, simplified and dehumanised by *both* sides in the hothouse. A boyhood fan, player, captain and coach, there was no mistaking Lennon’s commitment to Celtic: he has proved a passionate and capable young manager from his appointment in 2010. Lennon kicks every single ball from the touchline, just as he seldom shirked a tackle as a player. What is seen as being passionate and shooting from the hip, of course, may also be seen as being blinkered and unreasonable. Yet the hothouse, with an enthralled media cashing in on the recurrent headlines, seldom allows for nuance.

In early March 2011 Celtic defeated Rangers 1–0 in a highly fractious Scottish Cup replay. Three Rangers players were dismissed, there were repeated confrontations between players, coaches and officials, and thirty-four spectators were arrested. Rangers’ El-Hadji Diouf was at the centre of controversy, at one point confronting Lennon in his technical area. Amid angry scenes at the final whistle, Diouf was red-carded. He then defied stewards and police by going towards the Rangers supporters behind their goal. If this was a tawdry scene, there was worse to come. As the back-room staff interacted with the customary handshakes, Lennon sportingly embraced Rangers assistant manager Ally McCoist, who made some sort of comment. Lennon responded furiously and was dragged away from the melee. The authorities had, apparently, seen enough. Stewart Regan, chief executive of the SFA, condemned ‘the inflammatory and irresponsible behaviour’ which had ‘deeply embarrassed’ Scottish football:

We have already launched an investigation into all incidents that occurred and will do everything in our power to ensure there is no repeat. [. . .] The unedifying sight of two of the country’s most recognisable and respected coaches engaged in an angry confrontation was not only unsavoury but exacerbated an already incendiary atmosphere inside the stadium and throughout the West of Scotland. The clubs have a duty of care to ensure that the image and integrity

of the game is upheld at all times. This was not adhered to last night. This week, Strathclyde Police reiterated their concerns over the heightening violence and public disorder around Old Firm derbies. It is incumbent on Rangers and Celtic to ensure a far more responsible level of behaviour. (Scottish Football Association 2011)

The same day First Minister Alex Salmond told the Scottish Parliament that a crisis summit with the clubs, SFA and Scottish Government had been requested by Strathclyde Police. Salmond insisted that 'the disgraceful scenes last night cannot be ignored' (Scottish Parliament 2011). The Old Firm replay of 2 March hardly exhausted the drama and hysteria of the 2010–11 football season. Indeed, as other chapters in this volume detail, it descended further with 'viable' explosive devices being sent to individuals employed by, or associated with, Celtic; Neil Lennon being attacked by a Hearts supporter at Tynecastle; and the league title going to Ibrox on the final day of the season. Here, though, it is instructive to dwell on the Cup replay and the summit that followed it. The focus will be on how the game and summit were seen by fans outwith the hothouse. Before doing so, however, stepping even further back from the Old Firm offers a very different view of conflict and sectarianism in contemporary Scotland.

## SECTARIANISM THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE OLD FIRM

If the Old Firm rivalry represented a prism through which we might understand Scottish society, we would see a very worrying picture of tension, hatred and simmering violence. In fact, there is an all-too-common truism that assumes/claims that the rivalry represents broader and worrying divisions within Scottish society. Tom Gallagher (1985: 44) was correct to argue that 'The hate and hysteria on display at Old Firm matches does not tumble out of the social void', but there is danger in assuming that attitudes expressed on the terraces are straightforwardly imported from, or exported to, other areas of life.

This unreflective focus on football allowed one contributor to a Celtic-inspired collection to conclude that Scotland's sectarianism, more specifically anti-Catholicism, represented 'a problem perhaps every bit as bitter, poisonous and debilitating as that which infests Northern Ireland' (Donaldson 2004: 219). The attacks on Neil Lennon, according to one blogger, sprang from 'an ugly society that harbours and authorises a deep visceral hatred of Catholics in general and Irish Catholics in particular' (MacGiollabhain 2011). There was long an assumption that the Old Firm rivalry was a relatively 'safe' and manageable 'pressure valve' through which sectarian tensions could be channelled, pre-scheduled and largely symbolic, through song and tribalism rather than through riot and politics. Thus, the argument went, Liverpool and Belfast had communal riots and sectarian politics, Glasgow had the Old Firm. Such a view seems misplaced now that Liverpool's sectarianism is little more than a historical memory. As Tom Gallagher (1985: 46) argued, regarding the football as a 'safe channel' for sectarian tensions:

. . . is to see the Old Firm as a symptom, not a cause, of community disorder; in the past such a view may have had some validity but it is surely the wrong way of looking at today's situation. Disorders at Old Firm ties worsened in the 1960s and 1970s even as community relations improved in other important areas, so the hatred seems to have been a self-generating mechanism and not an outlet for other discontents.

A decade later, Simon Kuper (1994: 217–18), examining global football enmities, concluded that 'the Old Firm rivalry has outlived religious rivalry . . . and . . . has survived as a phenomenon because the fans enjoy it so much. They are not about to give up their ancient traditions just because they no longer believe in God.' Almost twenty years on, is the Old Firm rivalry, far from providing a safe conduit, in fact sectarianism's beating heart?

In support of such a – surprisingly heretical – view it seems highly suggestive that in a football season marked, at least from within the hothouse, by recurring complaints of bigoted conspiracy, that two events passed almost without comment. In September 2010, with the season underway, Benedict XI visited Scotland. Arriving in Edinburgh, he met the Queen before heading to Glasgow's Bellahouston Park. Here, remarkably, were two of the key symbolic characters in Old Firm mythology meeting cordially in Scotland. Just as remarkably, the Pope's visit sparked none of the controversy or fears of the 1982 visit of John Paul II. That event was prefigured by two years of campaigning by Orange groups, and there were real fears over the scale and mood of protests. In the event the 1982 protests proved small and poorly organised. In 2010 key grumblings sprang not from Orangeism but from secularists and there were no significant protests. The area set aside by Strathclyde Police to facilitate protests outside Bellahouston remained empty. Just as remarkable was the visit of the Queen to the Republic of Ireland in May 2011. Two days after the final round of SPL matches, the Queen laid a wreath in Dublin's Republican Garden of Remembrance, bowing her head in honour of those who had died in Ireland's struggle to free itself from British rule.

It seems difficult to reconcile the sectarian version of Scotland refracted through the Old Firm with that suggested through the highly successful Papal Visit and the remarkable – and largely unremarked within debates over Scotland's 'sectarian problem' – Royal Visit to Ireland. Yet the circle is easily squared: the sentiments and behaviour of the football terrace (or, indeed, the touchline) cannot be simplistically read off as 'emblematic' or 'representative' of Scottish society, culture or politics as a whole. It seems highly telling that accounts of sectarianism in Scotland are framed by, prompted by, and often limited to, accounts of rivalry and tension in football. Sporting tensions in the 1990s led to the composer James MacMillan's (2000: 15) claim that 'anti-Catholicism, even when it is not particularly malign, is as endemic as it is second nature', a claim that prompted an outpouring of debate and criticism. The centrality of football – or, rather, one particular rivalry within Scottish football – seems all the more significant when one considers that there are very few published accounts, popular or academic, on sectarianism within Scotland's politics, economic structure, employment, housing, social policy, resource allocation or constitutional

debate. Indeed, what studies there are in these areas downplay the impact, or even refute the presence, of sectarianism (see, for example, Paterson 2000; Rosie 2004; Bruce et al. 2004; Paterson and Iannelli 2006; Raab and Holligan 2011).

A generation ago, Steve Bruce (1988: 151) argued that ‘the relatively rare public displays of sectarian animosity are not the visible tip of a submerged mass of ice but are rather all that is left’. Since then the emerging empirical evidence has bolstered Bruce’s claims about the ‘sectarian iceberg’. Whatever the position in the past (on which evidence remains sketchy), it is now clear that in terms of key *life chances* – access to education, to jobs, to opportunities for social mobility – there are no significant, let alone systematic, differences between Protestants, Catholics and the irreligious. Indeed, in *life choices* – political values or choice of partners/spouses – there is very little evidence of sectarian preferences. The Census of 2001 revealed widespread religious inter-marriage and cohabiting partnerships (Scottish Executive 2005). Scotland’s Protestants and Catholics think and act like each other, and indeed *love* and *live* with each other, rather more than the prism of football would suggest (see Waiton in this volume). Likewise, that prism tends to ignore those Scots who do not fit within the easy formula of Protestant *or* Catholic: in the 2010 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, for example, by far the largest response to the question ‘Do you belong to a religion?’ was that of ‘No religion’ (48 per cent).

Recurrent scares over sectarianism have been driven by the Old Firm rivalry. Patrick Reilly (2000: 33) insisted that a focus on social structure and the labour market (regulated as it is by laws against discrimination) was irrelevant in the search for the ‘cancer’ of sectarianism:

Crucially important though employment is, it is *not* the only thing that counts. And the trouble is that sectarianism does not disappear, but simply moves to other lodgings. That a cancer moves from lung to colon is not really a cause for celebration. It is pointless to look for discrimination where, by definition, it can no longer exist . . .

Reilly’s argument had begun bullishly: ‘To ask if there is anti-Catholicism in Scotland is like asking if there are Frenchmen in Paris.’ It seems highly significant that once he concedes that sectarianism is no longer prevalent in the occupational lung, he turns to football to provide the colon. Indeed, what other candidates did he have?

## SECTARIAN HATE CRIME AND EXPERIENCES OF SECTARIANISM

Concerns over sectarianism fed into the introduction of a ‘religious aggravation’ in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003. For the better part of a decade, therefore, sectarian offences (among other hate crimes) have been monitored and liable to heavier sentencing. Examination of sectarian crime is illuminating, with the usual caveats that, as with other crimes, ‘recorded’ incidents will not exhaust the full and

actual picture. Notably, religious hate crime is substantially and consistently lower – around one-seventh the frequency – than racist hate crime, and only somewhat more frequent than hate crimes based on (perceived) sexual orientation :

**Table 2.1** Reported hate crimes in Scotland (number)

	Race	Religious	Sexual orientation	Transgender identity	Disability
2003–4	3,322	272			
2004–5	4,019	479			
2005–6	4,287	704			
2006–7	4,367	699			
2007–8	4,394	608			
2008–9	4,319	669			
2009–10	4,314	629			
2010–11	4,165	693	448	14	50
2011–12	4,518	897	652	16	68

Sources: Doyle 2006; Cavanagh and Morgan 2011

Official analyses of religious offences (Doyle 2006; Cavanagh and Morgan 2011) reveal consistent patterns: half of such offences (51 per cent in 2010–11) occurred in Glasgow, and most of the remainder (31 per cent) in the surrounding west of Scotland. Most offenders were young (61 per cent aged 30 or under), and almost all (95 per cent) male. Around two-thirds of the offences were described as alcohol-related.

Media attention here has headlined a supposedly disproportional victimisation of Scotland's Catholics (see, for example, BBC 2011a; Carrell 2006). A narrative around 'victims' and 'attacks' fuels the impression that sectarian crime in Scotland is violent and 'targeted' at Catholics. In fact, the figures suggest quite a different picture. Firstly, relatively few such offences are physical attacks – 6 per cent in 2010–11 related to an assault charge. The overwhelming majority (92 per cent in 2003; 81 per cent in 2004; and 73 per cent in 2010–11) related to a 'breach of the peace'. The lower figure for 'breach' in 2010–11 related to a new offence of 'threatening or abusive behaviour' from 2010 which accounted for 14 per cent of sectarian offences. Secondly, where an actual person was the 'target' of such behaviour, it was most likely to be a police officer (victims in 42 per cent of cases in 2010–11) or someone doing their job (11 per cent). In less than a quarter of cases (23 per cent) were 'members of the public' the targets of abuse – rather more (33 per cent) featured misbehaviour towards the 'community' at large.

In other words, the bulk of Scotland's recorded sectarian crime is conducted by young men, often drunk, in the west of Scotland (see Goodall and Malloch's chapter for a similar analysis). Offences are overwhelmingly anti-social and sometimes abusive and threatening. If anyone is 'targeted' it is police and other public service and retail workers. This is a dismal picture of urban incivility, a reminder that rather too many Scots – and particularly young men – drink too much, fail to behave

themselves and when rebuked respond with foul-mouthed abuse. Depressing certainly, but less conducive to good headline-making than the *Sunday Mirror*'s (2004) spin: 'Catholics face Scots bigots hell'.

Official figures do indeed show that most sectarian crime is 'anti-Catholic' in nature. In 2010–11, 58 per cent of offences involved behaviour 'derogatory towards Roman Catholicism' while 37 per cent involved behaviour 'derogatory towards Protestantism'. Media reporting suggests Catholics being 'attacked' or 'targeted', but in fact no data is collected on the religious identity of the victim (where there are specific victims, rather than the world at large). Yet the seeming disparity in the figures has a less sinister explanation. Given the broad religious demography of the west of Scotland, it would require only that a roughly equal (and small) proportion of Catholics acted in anti-social and 'anti-Protestant' ways as Protestants acting in 'anti-Catholic' ways to produce a supposed 'disparity' in offences. To put this in simple terms: if in a town where there are twice as many Protestants than Catholics each community has a 0.01 per cent minority who behave in a religiously bigoted manner on an alcohol-fuelled Saturday night, then two thirds of sectarian offences would be 'anti-Catholic' in nature. That is not to say that in the real world Catholics and Protestants are indulging equally in sectarian hatred – we simply do not have the data to know – only that the underlying disparity in the numbers of Catholics and Protestants points towards a rather less frightening explanation than media coverage suggests.

The disjuncture between the football season and broader events, and the depressingly tawdry – rather than violent and widespread – nature of sectarian crime highlights a paradox. We all 'know' about religious bigotry, yet relatively few of us report having experienced it. Sectarianism appears to operate on two distinct levels. In terms of *perceptions*, sectarianism is seen as a widespread and fairly serious problem. But when people are asked whether they have *personally* experienced sectarianism, reports are – relatively speaking – infrequent. Sectarianism often seems to be something that happens to *somebody else*.

Here the findings of a study commissioned by Glasgow City Council (NFO Social Research 2003) are illuminating. The study, notably, received almost no media coverage and is little known outside academic and policy circles despite being made freely available to researchers. It strikingly illustrates a sharp disjuncture between how widespread Glaswegians felt different forms of 'sectarianism' were, and how rarely they claimed to have suffered them personally. Two-thirds of Glaswegians felt that sectarian violence and sectarian vandalism were 'very common' or 'quite common' in their city; over half felt the same about sectarian threats and sectarian intimidation/harassment. Smaller proportions felt that other forms of sectarianism were common.

Yet when these same respondents were asked whether *they* had experienced these things over the previous five years the numbers dropped very substantially indeed. For every *hundred* respondents who felt that sectarian violence was common in Glasgow, just *one* reported having suffered from it. We see a very similar pattern across all eight forms of sectarianism explored (Table 2.2).

This disjuncture between perceptions and experiences mirrors what we find in

**Table 2.2** Perceptions and experience of sectarianism in Glasgow.

Form of sectarianism:	Perception (% believing 'very' or 'quite common')	Experience (% claiming to have suffered in past five years)
Sectarian violence	65	0.7
Vandalism	65	0.6
Threats	58	0.8
Intimidation or harassment	54	0.4
Employment discrimination	24	1.1
Different treatment by police	20	0.3
Different treatment by public services	15	0.2
Different treatment by council	13	0.5
Base	1,029	1,029

Sources: NFO Social Research (2003) and author's own analysis of dataset

the fear of crime. What makes people fear crime – even if the likelihood of being victims, particularly of violent crime, is very low – are the *discourses* around crime. Here media is a key player in constructing and sustaining public worry – and the fact that the Old Firm dominate back pages and sports bulletins means that their rivalry is a permanent feature of Scotland's news agenda, and 'sectarianism' becomes *familiar*, even to those who will never experience it. The Old Firm rivalry, therefore, is a highly partial and distorting lens through which to view Scotland. But it is also a major and everyday part of our news, and thus contributes to a widespread discourse about – and resultant worry over – sectarianism.

## BEYOND THE OLD FIRM HOTHOUSE

But let us return to *that* season, and *that* Cup replay. Not all Scots are obsessed with football, and even among the obsessive not all are interested in Rangers or Celtic. But how did football fans outwith the Old Firm see the events of the fiery Cup replay and its aftermath? There are several mainstream media outlets through which we might monitor such views, not least phone-in radio shows and comments in print and online newspapers. Such outlets, however, may suffer from editorial selection: bearing in mind that the Old Firm 'sells', it is reasonable to assume that editors will prefer 'controversial' Old Firm-centred views to stimulate sensation and debate. Online newspaper comments are heavily moderated and prone to 'trolling' – indeed some outlets, such as the *Scotsman*, do not allow comments on Old Firm stories because of the levels of abuse posted. Here, then, I will examine an internet discussion forum run by football fans themselves. While abuse, trolling and impersonation are hardly unknown on such sites, they are generally free of editorial pre-selection.

The site examined here attracts fans from a wide range of clubs: *Pie and Bovril* (henceforth *P&B*) was set up in 2003 and currently has 21,500 active members

(<http://www.pieandbovril.com/>). It hosts separate fora for the SPL, the three SFL divisions, and several other leagues. Notably it has a special forum which seeks to segregate Old Firm sniping: 'Rangers and Celtic fans can battle it out in here, safe in the knowledge that everyone else will steer well clear and leave them to it! If you must goad each other – please do it in here!' Non-Old Firm contributions to three specific threads will be examined:

**'Rangers vs Celtic'** – opened on 14 January 2011 to cover the original Cup tie. The thread is examined from 1 March when discussion of the replay commenced. The thread continued until 4 March and had 340 posts. <http://www.pieandbovril.com/forum/index.php/topic/138178-rangers-vs-celtic/> (last accessed 31 August 2012).

**'The Old Firm . . . Scotland's Shame'** – opened on the late evening of 2 March 2011 immediately after the replay ended. The thread continued to 11 March and comprised 157 posts. <http://www.pieandbovril.com/forum/index.php/topic/142028-the-old-firmscotlands-shame/> (last accessed 31 August 2012).

**'Summit of decision-makers: sectarianism'** – opened on 30 March 2011, several weeks after the summit meeting had been reported in Scotland's media. The thread continued until 31 March and contained fifty-three posts. <http://www.pieandbovril.com/forum/index.php/topic/144069-summit-of-decision-makers/> (last accessed 31 August 2012).

The most cursory reading of *P&B* (as other football fora) demonstrates the widespread hostility that many football fans have towards the Old Firm, as well as a tendency to treat both clubs as a single entity. Most of the *Rangers vs Celtic* thread was taken up before the game by Old Firm fans, but other fans came to dominate as the game began to boil over. Throughout there were repeated references to dominant motifs in the criticism of both Glasgow clubs, most notably the comment by 'Richie' (a Motherwell fan) which poked fun at Celtic's reputation for 'paranoia' with the possibility that the tie might be decided by a penalty shoot-out: 'Let's hope it doesn't go to a shootout . . . Can you imagine the Celtic fans after Rangers are awarded 5 penalties?'

As the game progressed a key theme was disavowal of what fans were seeing on their television screens: it was seen as 'pathetic', 'embarrassing' and perversely entertaining (see Goodall and Malloch in this volume for a further discussion of the example of misogynist language evidenced in one of these posts). Views were often robust and earthy (minor editorial tidying has been undertaken with the views presented below, but profanities have been retained as in the original). Where specific blame was given, it tended to be towards the Rangers players in general and to Diouf and McCoist in particular. The key criticism of Lennon was for 'rising to the bait' of a deliberately provocative Rangers side:

**yoda** What a complete and utter embarrassment some of these players are.  
*Ross County*

**utdtillidie** Embarrassing Scottish football for 110 years [. . .] Both teams should be thrown out the cup.  
*Ayr United*

**djchapsticks** Aside from Lennon being a prat and rising to McCoist's bait, I don't think Celtic did much wrong there. Rangers completely lost it, Diouf's show was one of the most pathetic things I've ever seen.

*St.Mirren*

**Big River** That was laughable, disgusting and pathetic . . . but incredibly entertaining.  
*Motherwell*

**shedboy82** Car crash football, but very, very funny. It was a bit like watching two drunken, pockmarked, tracksuit-clad tarts tearing the peroxide from each other at bingo night. But not as sexually arousing, obviously.

*Dundee United*

In the immediate aftermath of the replay a thread was opened which identified both the clubs as, collectively, The Old Firm . . . Scotland's Shame. Just as with the 'in-game' thread, many posters focused on the on-field action and with similar conclusions. However, this thread also saw a number of posters reflect on issues around sectarian bigotry and whether and how it might be tackled. A very strong and clear view was that both Old Firm clubs and both sets of supporters were at fault. Just as clear was scepticism that Scotland's football authorities had the will or the where-withal to address 'the same old story':

**Unleash the Nade** And so it goes on, same old story, yet again. Two teams pumped up by their respective bigoted fans, ensuring the hatred and bile is carried forth in its usual 'traditional' manner [. . .] to top it all off, the respective 'leaders' square up like a couple of wee lassies [. . .] How totally embarrassing!

*Hearts*

**steward17** Bigotry in Scotland puts bums on seats. The old firm mandarins and the SFA know this and god help anyone in Scottish football unwise enough to challenge this.

*Scotland*

**Milo** Two Cheeks of the Same Arse [. . .] that's what the Old Firm have become.  
*Partick*

As the thread wound down and media began to report the Old Firm Summit, little confidence was expressed in the effectiveness of the proposals:

**The Scarf** These measures won't make fuck all difference. The only way to tackle the issue of [Old Firm] bawbagery from both players and fans is to start introducing points deductions.

*Inverness CT*

The much-vaunted Old Firm Summit agreed six major points of action. Three focused on the police's role in managing fans (including 'greater enforcement of

existing legislation to deal with sectarianism and drink-related offences’); another called for further study into the link between football matches and violent crime. The two remaining points related to the Old Firm. Firstly they committed ‘to playing an enhanced role in a partnership approach to encourage responsible drinking’; secondly they agreed to reinforce the existing ‘code of conduct for players and officials’ (BBC 2011b). Notably, given that tensions had arisen from the misbehaviour of players and coaches on the park and on the touchline, the emphasis of the Summit was very much on misbehaving *fans*. One of the longer-term outcomes of the Summit, and the later tensions of the season, was the controversial Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, which criminalised offensive chanting (including sectarian songs) at and around Scottish football matches.

For those on *P&B* the outcome of the summit seemed unimpressive and, perhaps, had missed the point. A key solution, posters on the Summit of decision-makers thread felt, should have come from within football itself:

**FuzzyBear** Sectarianism has been a problem in this country for a hell of a lot of years and will be for a long time to come as the powers to be do not seem willing to do anything about it. The SFA/SPL have had numerous opportunities to come down hard on Celtic and Rangers but have done nothing.

*Hamilton*

**Audioslave** [The SFA/SPL] should be focusing on how to quickly eradicate it from grounds with bans/fines to individuals and clubs – these things are in place but it seems no one has the bottle to actually carry it out.

*Hearts*

**Pride of the Clyde** [. . .] hitting both clubs hard is the only thing that will make any difference and will then force them to address this problem.

*Clyde*

The summit, then, seemed – in its presentation at least – to deflect attention away from the Old Firm clubs themselves, and from the Scottish football authorities. In a joint press conference the chief executives of the two clubs argued that much of the coverage and debate around the Cup replay had been ‘ill-informed’. Martin Bain of Rangers insisted that ‘There are undoubtedly major issues for society in Scotland and with the best will in the world they cannot be blamed on a football club or cured by a football club’ (BBC 2011c). For Celtic, Peter Lawwell argued:

While many of the issues surrounding the Celtic v. Rangers fixture have been blamed on the clubs, clearly there are a number of societal issues which need to be addressed. Celtic has and will continue to address these. How much more can the clubs do? We need help. The stigma always attaches itself to Celtic and Rangers. How much more can we physically do? (BBC 2011c)

Such claims received short shrift on *P&B*. Ric, a St Mirren fan, argued that ‘Sectarianism is a practice generally indulged in by the fans of the [Old Firm]. Perhaps the clubs would like to take the lead on this rather than trying to shamefully blame society as a whole. Just a thought.’

## CONCLUSIONS

How much more *could* the Old Firm do to combat the ‘societal’ evil of sectarianism? First of all, it is essential that credit is given where credit is due: both clubs contribute financially to and participate in anti-bigotry initiatives such as Glasgow City Council’s *Sense Over Sectarianism* programme and have repeatedly asked their fans to refrain from bigoted singing and other sectarian behaviour. A BBC Scotland documentary at the heart of the troubled season revealed that Rangers had issued bans to over 500 fans across seven years for singing sectarian songs (BBC 2011d). Undoubtedly the regularity of sectarian and other offensive chanting at Parkhead and Ibrox has diminished. In part this is due to the steep rise in the number of season ticket holders at both clubs – such fans are easy to track at home games and are sensitive to losing their seats through misbehaviour. The travelling support of both clubs has proved rather more difficult to wean from their ‘party’ tunes. However, alongside such (undoubtedly valuable) efforts, both clubs have also pandered to the more ‘tribal’ instincts of their followers and have a tendency to circle the wagons when criticised. Murray argued in the 1980s that ‘While arrogance stands as one of the features of the Rangers club and its supporters, paranoia belongs peculiarly to Celtic’ (1984: 104). There may be some truth in this but from the outside it is easy to detect *both* features in *both* clubs alongside a heightened sense of defensiveness.

If Scotland’s leading clubs are serious about their responsibilities around bigotry – and there is substantial evidence that they are – then it should not be beyond their capacities or influence to instigate heightened penalties for misbehaviour on and off the park. While UEFA has begun to investigate and punish clubs (including both of the Old Firm) for offensive fan behaviour at European games, the Scottish footballing authorities have felt hamstrung by the lack of clear guidance and powers in their Articles and Regulations. The onus, and the responsibility, has thus passed to the police and the Crown Office to apprehend and prosecute miscreants in the football stands – no easy matter when faced with several thousand fans. Here the Old Firm could take the lead and make a difference. It is surely time for the *clubs* themselves – all Scottish clubs – to equip the football authorities with the powers and the mechanisms to punish clubs for the misbehaviour of the supporters. The clubs, after all, *are* football. When clubs begin to lose valuable league points because their fans sing racist obscenities, or glorify terrorism, or indulge in sectarian abuse, or throw missiles, the minds of decent football supporters will be focused on the misbehaviour around them and we will see change. If we are to move beyond the claim that ‘bigotry puts bums on seats’ then radical and bold leadership by both sides of the Old Firm is essential.

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