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“True fan = watch match”? In Search of the ‘Authentic’ Soccer Fan

Abstract

Academics have created typologies to divide association football (soccer) fans into categories based upon the assumed ‘authenticity’ of their fandom practices. One of the main requirements of ‘authentic’ fandom has been assumed to be match attendance. The goal of this paper was to critically assess this assumption through considering how fans themselves talk about the significance of match attendance as evidence of ‘authentic’ fandom. In light of the fact that the voices of English non-league fans on the ‘authenticity’ debate have so far been overshadowed by the overbearing focus of much previous research on the upper echelons of English soccer, an e-survey was conducted with 151 members of an online community of fans of English Northern League (NL) clubs (a semi-professional / amateur league based in North East England). Findings revealed that opinion was divided on the constituents of ‘authentic’ fandom and match attendance was not deemed to be the core evidence of support for a club by 42% of the sample. Elias (1978) suggested that dichotomous thinking hinders sociological understanding and it is concluded that fan typologies are not sufficient for assessing the ‘authenticity’ of fan activities.

Keywords

Authenticity, fandom, online, non-league, soccer

Introduction: English soccer fandom and the quest for ‘authenticity’

For English soccer fans, *how* they support their club is just as important as *who* they support. Regardless of the latter, the former is often the means by which fans judge one another to determine whether the practices they engage in constitute evidence of being ‘authentic’. In

recognition of this, a number of researchers of soccer fandom have previously created typologies or classification systems that seek to categorise fan practices based on assumed 'authenticity'.¹ One of the main requirements of 'authentic' fandom asserted within these typologies is match attendance. Fans must attend as many home and away matches as possible in order to demonstrate authentic support for their club according to most of these frameworks. This is because of the high financial and time commitment that is required to attend matches, especially for away games where travel, accommodation and/or time off work may need to be factored in. As has previously been asserted by Gibbons and Dixon, using the work of Crawford, the problem with such typologies is that the prize fandom practices like match attendance more highly than other forms of fandom.² Crawford summarises that whilst

it is possible to identify different levels of commitment and dedication to a sport and different patterns of behaviour of fans, it is important that we do not celebrate the activities of certain supporters and ignore (or even downgrade) the activities and interests of others Rather than privileging the activities of certain fans over others, it is important, if we are to understand the contemporary nature of fan cultures, that we consider the full range of patterns of behaviour of all fans, including those who do not conform to 'traditional' patterns or images of fan activities.³

Taking this viewpoint, the current paper aims to address the following research questions: do academic typologies of fandom fully represent what fans themselves say regarding the 'authenticity' of their practices? Do fans themselves view match attendance as the core criterion of 'authentic' support? These research questions have been directly addressed using the views of fans of English non-league soccer clubs.

Why non-league fans?

Although there have been some notable studies of football fans who identify with teams outside of the English Premier League (EPL),⁴ the majority of academic explorations of English football fandom have focused on clubs which compete at the very elite levels of the

game.⁵ This enduring fascination has centred on the fact that EPL clubs have been those most directly impacted upon by advancing globalisation since the inception of the league in 1992.⁶ Rapid and multifarious commercialisation, the influx of hitherto unimaginably large television revenues and the subsequent domination of the EPL by overseas players, coaches and owners has occurred since this time, meaning that the EPL is far removed from life in the lower echelons of the English league system and is certainly untypical of English soccer at lower-league or non-league levels.

Globalisation processes have had significantly less impact on English lower league and non-league clubs and their fans. These clubs and fans have subsequently been overlooked in debates concerning the impact of globalisation and, in particular, an analysis of the effect that globalised competition and finance has had on the lower echelons of English soccer has been neglected.⁷ It has been easier for academics to emphasise the impact of globalisation and commercialisation and point to the demise of traditional fan practises, particularly match-day attendance and the importance of local identity, when the fans under analysis support one of the elite clubs mentioned above. This is despite King's suggestion that, based on his study of a core of Manchester United fans, as a result of new affiliations with trans-national settings, elite club fans are simultaneously showing stronger identifications with the 'locale' in the form of re-imagined connections with their city.⁸ Research on fans from leagues below the EPL and non-league soccer (where competition remains largely domestic with mostly 'home-grown' players, local coaches and owners) is lacking. It is here that the gap between the 'locale' and the ever-increasing global focus of English soccer is at its widest.

Furthermore, in a study of northern English identity specifically, Russell suggested that English national identity is "constructed in and experienced through the *locality*."⁹ Russell contends that local identities remain central components of soccer fandom and this is quite apparent when assessing the opinions of English fans, perhaps even more so for those of

smaller clubs. This is a point noted by Ruddock, Hutchins and Rowe in their study of the contradictory nature of the website 'MyFootballClub' (MFC) which allows fans from all over the world to actively participate in the actual daily running of a semi-professional non-league club based in the south-east of England which was, "previously a little-known football club for the majority of overseas and domestic...followers and members."¹⁰ Here Ruddock et al state: "'Fixing' the club's geographical location is significant...in the promotion of MFC".¹¹

The 'Northern League' (NL) is a soccer league in the north-east of England comprised of non-league semi-professional and amateur clubs. The NL is the second oldest surviving soccer league in the world founded in 1889, second only to the original English professional 'Football League' founded in 1888.¹² Fans of clubs in the NL were chosen for the current study specifically because NL fans' views and opinions on the English game have not been the main focus of academic research in the past. It is also important to note that these fans often also follow a professional club so are particularly interesting as a case study because they have experienced both lower and upper tiers of English soccer.

Methodology

A three-year empirical study into the possible contribution of computer mediated communication (CMC) to participation in offline social movement protest events revealed that online communication was intertwined with offline participation in such events.¹³ Palmer and Thompson in their case study of a group of fans of an Australian Rules football team, found evidence to suggest that fans who used online forums or message boards were often the most involved fans offline.¹⁴ Crucially, the fans they observed who were conversing online were also those who were most likely to engage in traditional and hyper-masculine fan practises when attending live matches. Similarly, Wilson mentions a number of sport-related transnational movements that have used the Internet in order to interact.¹⁵ For this reason

interactions between fans on soccer-related websites are important to research according to Gibbons and Dixon.¹⁶ Cleland and Dart have also recognised that online fan message boards and blogs create or encourage interactions between soccer fans.¹⁷ The sociological significance of these online message board interactions has also been reflected in recent online surveys of soccer fans of the English game.¹⁸

In the current study an online questionnaire was designed using 'Bristol Online Surveys' (BOS) software. The survey contained a mixture of multiple-choice and open-response questions about the relationship fans had with various aspects of English soccer and how this informed their everyday lives and social identities. These questions were created from a review of literature on English national identity and soccer fandom (specific questionnaire items are alluded to in the results section below). This methodology has been discussed in relation to its use within online soccer fan communities by Gibbons and Nuttall and therefore specific details regarding the design of the questionnaire are not repeated here.¹⁹

In order to gain access to fans of clubs in the NL the researcher (first author) attended a home match of one of the clubs playing in the league in March 2008. In the interests of confidentiality this club cannot be named, nor can any of the identities of the various gatekeepers, administrators or questionnaire respondents. During this visit contact was made with the first team coach of the club in question who suggested the chairman of the league was contacted to discuss whether access to fans could be permitted. After discussion with the league chairman via email, support for the study was agreed and the link to the questionnaire was posted within a section of a non-league soccer online message board community specifically for fans of teams in the NL. This required the researcher to become a member of the online forum and gain support from one of the most active moderators on the site who subsequently acted as a 'gatekeeper' to the rest of the message board's membership by

completing the questionnaire and suggesting other members did the same. Contact was made with this individual through the website administrator of one of the clubs in the NL.

Participants were informed that they were offering their consent for their responses to be utilised for academic purposes if they completed the questionnaire. This was detailed on the first page of the survey. Names and other contact information were not collected and IP addresses were not logged. This meant it was impossible for the researcher (or any third party) to link individual respondents to questionnaire responses, meaning all participants retained anonymity. The frequencies for the multiple-choice answers were calculated and descriptive statistics were gleaned in order to make comparisons from them. The answers to the open response items of the questionnaire were 'coded' using an inductive coding approach similar to that referred to by Miles and Huberman.²⁰

Results

A total of 151 valid responses were obtained. At the time of data collection in 2008, women made up 15-20% of football crowds according to Jones (2008), however, the current sample was only comprised of 7 female (5%) and an overwhelming 144 (95%) male respondents. The average age of respondents was 41 with ages ranging from 13 to 68 years of age (seven respondents were under 18). The vast majority of the sample was not registered as disabled (96%). A total of 82% chose to define their ethnicity as either 'white', 'Caucasian', 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'IC1' (respondents' terms). However, there were also 15% who defined their ethnicity as either 'British', 'English' or by way of religious denomination, for example 'Church of England' or 'Catholic'. Whilst it cannot be assumed that this group were also of 'white' ethnicity, no respondents defined themselves as being of 'Black' or 'Asian' descent. When it came to nationality, most respondents either preferred to define themselves as

'British' (49%) or English (42%). Interestingly 5 respondents (3%) defined their nationality in local or regional terms, for example 'Geordie', 'Northumbrian' and 'Yorkshire', with one respondent adamant that his nationality was 'Geordie first, English second'. The term 'Geordie' is a nickname given to people from the north-east English city of Newcastle, whereas Northumbria and Yorkshire are specific counties in northern England. Finally, this sample was fairly well distributed in terms of annual earnings amongst the following five of six categories: 14% earned under £10,000; 12% between £10,000 and £14,999; 12.5% between £15,000 and £19,999; 14.5% between £20,000 and £24,999; and, 13% between £25,000 and £29,999. However, 34% of all respondents earned over £30,000 per annum, making this the largest category of the six.

The range of NL clubs supported was broad considering only four out of the 42 clubs in the league were not supported by at least one fan in the sample. The average amount of supporters for each of the 38 clubs represented in the sample was four per club. The maximum amount of supporters of any individual club was 19 for Whitley Bay. As well as supporting an NL club, most respondents (88%) also disclosed that they supported a club from the English professional leagues, whereas only 12% did not. A total of 24 different English professional league clubs were supported. These mainly consisted of clubs situated in the north of England, with most fans (71%) declaring support for one of the top three north-east teams who played in the English Premier League in the 2007/8 season (when the survey was conducted): Newcastle United (40%); Sunderland (22%) and Middlesbrough (9%). Of the 88% of respondents who said they supported both an NL club and an English professional club, 62% said they were more passionate about their NL club than their other club.

It was interesting to observe that even though the majority of respondents in the sample regularly attended both home (99% for NL club games; 85% for their other club games) and away matches (89% NL; 67% other), the majority (74%) also stated that they

regularly *contributed* to web-based discussion forums for soccer fans - this may be artificially high due to the way in which the survey was distributed (via the Internet, rather than more conventional means). When asked to specify how often they contributed to such forums, fans had the following seven options to choose from: 'once or twice per year'; 'once every few months'; 'once every month'; 'twice per month'; 'once per week'; 'more than once per week'; and, 'everyday'. The largest amount of responses (32%) fell into the 'more than once per week' category, with the second most popular being the 'everyday' category made up of 24% of fans.

In order to assess whether academic typologies of fandom fully represent what fans themselves say regarding the 'authenticity' of their practices and whether fans themselves view match attendance as the core criterion of authentic support, fans were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: 'being a true supporter means attending matches in person'. Whereas the majority of fans in the sample (58%) agreed with the statement, a large proportion of fans (42%) disagreed. When asked to provide reasons for their responses some interesting elements to the debate on match attendance and authenticity of fandom were brought to the fore, especially considering these fans were users of an online discussion forum. Those who agreed with the statement about attendance (58%) were divided into three main codes which arose from the reasons respondents gave for their answers. There was also an 'other' code made up of responses (8%) that did not fit within these axial codes or that were unclear in relation to the question.

The largest category amongst those who agreed with the statement was made up of 58% of respondents who felt attendance was either *the only* or *the most* important way to support a club. The most unequivocal responses suggested that attendance was mandatory to supporting a club, for instance:

True fan = watch match (Fan no.125, Seaham Red Star, 15, male).

You should be there to give them support (Fan no.32, Seaham Red Star, 25, male).

How can you support a team if don't even go to watch them? (Fan no.127, Darlington Railway Athletic, 45, male).

Others in this category were keen to point out the difference between 'supporters' and 'fans' or 'followers':

I think there's a possibility of being a fan/supporter, two different things. A supporter supports, a fan is just that - a fan (Fan no. 124, Hebburn Town, 25, male).

If you're not there you're only a follower, supporters support the team and to do that they need to be at the ground (Fan no. 115, Morpeth Town, 29, male).

Non-attenders are fans, attenders are supporters (Fan no. 81, Marske United, 25, male).

Finally, there were those in this category who were a little less strict, allowing for non-attendance in difficult circumstances, for example:

By turning up to a game you show that you really do support the club, however, you can still support a team without turning up to their games (Fan no. 27, Durham City, 13, male).

I appreciate that it is not feasible to go to all my teams matches.... However, where it is possible, financially, logistically and distance-wise, I would expect a 'true' fan to attend matches at some point over the season (Fan no. 28, Whitley Bay, 32, male).

While support can be given in various ways, the best is to go to games, cheer on the team and get to know the players and other fans. Problems of distance can make supporting more difficult but I watch my second side when the opportunity arises and their games do not clash with my first choice team. The same situation applied in reverse when I lived close to my second choice team. Then I followed them home and away to almost every game (Fan no. 49, Whitley Bay, 58, male).

The second largest category amongst those who agreed with the statement was made up of 24% of respondents who felt that attendance demonstrates a significant time or financial commitment to a club or a sense of belonging to a locality represented by a specific club. The dependence of NL clubs on fan attendance (in the way of gate money) was noted by many respondents here, for example:

Yes if you attend matches the club gains money to continue (Fan no. 4, Whitley Bay, 52, male).

Because clubs at northern league level need the support and the money through the gate (Fan no. 64, Jarrow Roofing Boldon Community Association, 38, male).

Northern league clubs need the fans to attend matches as the revenue it brings in helps to support the team (Fan no. 75, Northallerton Town, 48, female).

Others within this category suggested attendance was important to show solidarity with, or belonging to, the club and to provide moral support, for instance:

It shows you want to be able to be part of your club in some way (Fan no. 90, Northallerton Town, 37, male).

I think it helps the team and shows someone cares (Fan no. 113, Washington, 54, male).

Makes you feel part of the club (Fan no. 47, Marske United, 55, male).

The third and smallest category amongst those who agreed with the statement was comprised of 10% of respondents who felt that the atmosphere surrounding a match or the emotions involved in a club's matches could not be experienced unless one actually attends in person. Some fans within this category focused mainly on the atmosphere, for example:

Seeing your team 'live' is the only way to truly experience the highs and lows, the match atmosphere etc (Fan no. 44, Dunston Federation, 39, male).

Get the atmosphere (Fan no. 137, Norton & Stockton Ancients, 50, male).

Nothing beats 'live' football. You watch whether your team is doing good or bad (Fan no. 12, Bishop Auckland, 45, male).

Others referred to the importance of being regarded as regular attenders by other fans:

To fully experience the emotion and be seen as a regular supporter (Fan no. 9, Chester-le-Street Town, 49, female).

I believe you'll gain more kudos and will be taken more seriously as a supporter amongst your peers and fellow football-fans having watched your team's highs and lows in person rather than via the media (Fan no. 56, Bishop Auckland, 24, male).

Nothing beats the banter on the terraces in this league (Fan no. 68, Washington, 42, male).

Finally, other answers centred on feelings related to being there to support the team on match days, such as:

What is the point of support that cannot be heard or felt? (Fan no. 147, Sunderland Ryhope Community Association, 40, male).

Living, breathing and being part of a game is being a true supporter (Fan no. 25, Ashington, 24, male).

Armchair fans cannot be seen as being passionate about their club (Fan no. 86, South Shields, 50, male).

Thus it was interesting that the views of many survey respondents often reinforced categorisations of soccer fans like Giulianotti's.²¹ However, this was not the case for all fans in the sample.

Turning now to the 42% who disagreed with the statement 'being a true supporter means attending matches in person', it was clear to see the other side of the debate regarding attendance and authenticity amongst these NL fans. These responses were divided into two

axial codes which arose from the reasons respondents gave for their answers. There was also an 'other' code made up of responses (3%) that did not fit within these two categories or that were unclear in relation to the question. The largest code was comprised of 64% of fans who argued that the practicalities of life, including work, family, money, time and distance, prevented them from always attending matches in person. Some of these fans focussed on the cost of attendance being problematic for them, particularly for their professional team's matches. Here it seems there was a real recognition that even though fans wanted to attend, they could simply not afford to:

Some people cannot afford to travel to matches. They can follow with their heart (Fan no. 142, Bishop Auckland, 40, male).

Sometimes finances dictate that all matches cannot be attended (Fan no. 62, Northallerton Town, 47, male).

I take true supporter to mean you are passionate about your club - you can still be passionate, much more so than others, but may not have the money to attend the games.... It does not mean you are any less a fan because of the number of games you attend, in my opinion (Fan no. 106, Ashington, 39, male).

Other respondents stated that they had to put their other commitments above their interest in soccer:

You don't necessarily need to be at a match to follow a team as there are more important commitments such as family and work that should be a priority, at times anyway (Fan no. 1, Esh Winning, 30, male).

I have supported Town over the years but cannot get to every game due to work commitments (Fan no. 42, Billingham Town, 60, male).

Supporters, circumstances dictate whether or not they can attend matches. Supporters living large distances away, or having other commitments such as playing themselves or family, should still be considered true fans due to their following and interest shown in the club (Fan no. 130, Whitley Bay, 24, male).

It was apparent that some respondents who had moved away from their local area found it difficult to attend games but still supported and were sometimes even still heavily involved with their NL club. The Internet was an essential aspect of this:

If like myself you are working away outside the UK you obviously cannot attend in person (Fan no. 94, Thornaby, 60, male).

Not if you live 200ish miles away now as I do! (Fan no. 8, Whitley Bay, 55, male).

Not always possible e.g. our Webmaster lives in Scotland (Fan no. 29, Dunston Federation, 48, male).

There were also some who, for various reasons, had to choose between attending their NL club's matches and those of the professional club they also supported:

I am a season ticket holder at nufc [Newcastle United Football Club] but as club official at Durham my duties may take me to Durham when my heart is at nufc (Fan no. 55, Durham City, 62, male).

I consider (myself) to be (a) true supporter of Sunderland, but distance and finances restricts times I attend. More important for ANL teams as they need money more (Fan no. 74, Spennymoor Town, 47, male).²²

Can't afford to go to Newcastle matches, only go to South Shields when my son wants to go (Fan no. 34, South Shields, 41, male).

The second category was made up of 33% of fans who were keen to assert that match-day attendance was by no means the only or most important way to support a club. Some fans in this category simply stated that attendance was not important:

You don't have to attend matches to support your team(s) (Fan no. 3, Washington, 23, male).

Attending the match is not a requirement to be a supporter (Fan no. 92, Stokesley Sports Club, 42, male).

Just because you don't go to games, doesn't mean you don't support the team (Fan no. 111, Bedlington Terriers, 28, male).

Other responses went into further detail to highlight other ways in which a fan can support a club which they felt were equally as valid as attending matches:

It isn't always possible but support is possible in different forms (Fan no. 99, Crook Town, 50, male).

People support football clubs for many reasons.... A true supporter follows the fortunes of their team through thick and thin—sometimes by attending the ground in person - sometimes by purchasing programmes or other merchandise—occasionally by miscellaneous financial support (buying scratch cards or making donations) and by avidly researching results and any other information about a game or event that they may require (Fan no. 14, West Allotment Celtic, 65, male).

Being a supporter means find out the results and news as soon as possible—it isn't always possible to attend matches in person (Fan no. 139, Chester-le-Street Town, 33, male).

Others described being a true supporter as something that is an 'emotional' attachment as much as/more than a 'physical' practice:

Supporting a team is an emotional thing as much as a physical thing. I do not live in the North East but still retain my strong emotional attachments to the area and my football teams. I attend as many games as are practical but I don't believe that my inability to attend many games makes me any less of a supporter (Fan no. 24, Ashington, 55, male).

Being a true supporter is in your heart and mind. It has very little to do with your ability (financial, geographical or any other) to attend matches (Fan no. 148, Seaham Red star, 26, male).

Supporting a team means being passionate about them, not if you spend money on them (Fan no. 97, Ashington, 34, male).

If you experience the highs/lows of the team emotionally then I feel this supports my statement. Example: totally gutted (felt sick) that M'bro [Middlesbrough] lost to Cardiff recently yet didn't attend the game (Fan no. 26, Marske United, 45, male).

There was therefore a contradiction between how individuals within the same sample of fans regarded what being a true supporter of their club actually entailed. This is something that is worthy of much further investigation considering the aforementioned categorisations of soccer fans appeared not to apply to all of the fans in the current sample. This could be due to the fact that fans of clubs at the lower levels of the English league system have been largely ignored by previous academic studies in this area. Further research is required in order to determine this.

Discussion

Using the views of fans of English non-league soccer clubs, the current paper has aimed to address the following two research questions: do academic typologies of fandom fully represent what fans themselves say regarding the ‘authenticity’ of their practices? Do fans themselves view match attendance as the core criterion of ‘authentic’ support? The e-survey findings presented above suggest that typologies of soccer fandom, such as Redhead’s and Giulianotti’s, do not fully represent the views of soccer fans themselves regarding the ‘authenticity’ debate.²³ Moreover, match attendance was not considered to be the essential element of support for a club by a large proportion (42%) of fans in this sample.

These findings suggest that typologies of soccer fandom may reinforce what the twentieth century sociologist Norbert Elias referred to as ‘false dichotomies’.²⁴ The findings presented above suggest that fan typologies that have separated fan practices into distinct categories based on assumed authenticity, do not accurately represent the viewpoints of all English soccer fans. Elias suggested that dichotomous thinking hinders sociological understanding.²⁵ Murphy, Sheard and Waddington state that Elias ‘was critical of what he regarded as misleading and unhelpful dualisms and dichotomies ... in which everything that

is experienced and observed as dynamic and interdependent is represented in static, isolated categories'.²⁶ The research conducted in this study clearly demonstrates the divided opinions of a sample of fans of non-league English soccer on the importance of attendance to fan authenticity. They also highlight the complexity of the issue that cannot be fully recognised by simply labelling fans as more or less authentic simply due to their attendance at their teams' matches. The data provided above adds further support to the following point made by Rowe, Ruddock and Hutchins in their case study of users of a specific online discussion forum for soccer fans: 'networked digital media can provide an environment for quite familiar forms and expressions of football fandom'.²⁷ This echoes the insightful analysis of Weed regarding the consumption of televised matches in public houses.²⁸ Whilst viewing live football via television has been disregarded as an inauthentic form of football fandom, Weed suggests that many of the fans attracted to this way of consuming the game are those who wished to simultaneously converse with established friendship groups, consume alcohol, smoke and (occasionally) engage in offensive chanting. Whilst smoking is no longer an option within the public house, other celebrated features of traditional football fandom are still facilitated within the pub environment if not football stadia.

Much further research is required in order to confirm or refute the findings presented here, especially considering the relatively small sample of fan respondents and the low number of women and ethnic minorities who responded to the survey. Further research is specifically required on the thousands of fans of the many clubs in leagues situated in the lower echelons of English soccer, below the EPL. Fans of EPL clubs have been the main focus in the vast majority of academic research on English soccer fandom, yet because globalisation processes are assumed to have had significantly less impact on lower league and non-league clubs and their fans the views of the latter have been overlooked. This needs to

change if research on the sociological aspects of soccer is going to be representative of the English soccer fan base.

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Notes

¹ Redhead, *The Passion and the Fashion*; Redhead, *Post-Fandom*; Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans & Flâneurs'.

² Gibbons and Dixon, 'Surf's Up!'; Crawford, *Consuming Sport*.

³ Crawford, *Consuming Sport*, 33.

⁴ Robson, *No One Likes Us*; Clark, 'I'm Scunthorpe 'til I Die'; Mainwaring & Clark, 'We're Shit and We Know We Are'.

⁵ Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology*; Giulianotti & Robertson, *Globalization and Football*; Hamil et al *Football in the Digital Age*; King, *The End of the Terraces*; King, *The European Ritual*; Lanfranchi & Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*; Millward, *The Global Football League*; Sandvoss, *A Game of Two Halves*.

⁶ Giulianotti & Robertson, *Globalization and Football*

⁷ Gibbons and Lusted, 'Is St. George Enough?'

⁸ King, 'Football Fandom and Post-national Identity'; King, *The European Ritual*;

⁹ Russell, *Looking North*, 273.

¹⁰ Ruddock, Hutchins and Rowe, 'Contradictions in Media Sport Culture', 329.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹² Hunt, *Northern Goalfields Revisited*.

¹³ Mercea, 'Digital Prefigurative Participation'.

¹⁴ Palmer and Thompson, 'The Paradoxes of Football Spectatorship'.

¹⁵ Wilson, 'New Media'.

¹⁶ Gibbons and Dixon, 'Surf's Up!'.

¹⁷ Cleland, 'From Passive to Active'; Dart, 'Blogging the 2006 World Cup'.

¹⁸ Cashmore and Cleland, 'Fans, Homophobia and Masculinities'; Cleland, 'Discussing Homosexuality';

Gibbons and Nuttall, 'Using E-surveys'.

¹⁹ Gibbons and Nuttall, 'Using E-surveys'.

²⁰ Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*.

²¹ Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans & Flâneurs'.

²² 'ANL' is an abbreviation for 'Arngrove Northern League'. Arngrove were the sponsors of the league at the time the research was conducted in the summer of 2008, however a local business called 'skillstrainingltd' took over as sponsors of the league for the 2008-9 season. At the time of writing, the Northern League is officially known as the 'skillstrainingltd Northern League'.

²³ Redhead's (1993; 1997) and Giulianotti's (2002),

²⁴ Elias, *What is Sociology?*.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Murphy, Sheard and Waddington, 'Figurational Sociology'.

²⁷ Rowe, Ruddock and Hutchins, 'Cultures of Compalint', 312.

²⁸ Weed, 'The Story of an Etnography'; Weed, 'The Pub as a Virtual Football Fandom Venue'; Weed, 'Exploring the Sport Spectator Experience'.