

Female fan experiences and interpretations of the 1958 Munich air disaster, the 1966 World Cup finals and the rise of footballers as sexualised national celebrities

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Abstract

The experiences of female sports fans have largely been neglected in academic research to date with socio-historical accounts focusing almost exclusively on male fans. Through an excavation of the sporting histories of female football fans this article aims to make one contribution towards changing this. Drawing on Glaser and Strauss's 'grounded theory' approach, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with female football fans in England, aged between 50 and 80 years old. My findings begin by examining female fans' memories of the 1958 Munich air disaster. I move on to examine female experiences and interpretations of the 1966 World Cup finals, before finally discussing the rise of football players in England as sexualised national celebrities. To conclude, I call for further socio-historical research to explore female experiences of football in earlier decades.

Keywords

fandom, football, footballers, Munich air disaster, women, World Cup

The experiences of female sports fans have largely been marginalised in academic research to date. This has especially been the case in socio-historical research on female fans (Allon, 2012; Lewis, 2009), with socio-historical approaches mostly focused upon the experiences of males (see, for example, Bull, 1992; Shiel, 2000; Taylor and Ward, 1993). This paper draws on an interdisciplinary approach, combining sociology and history to examine female experiences and interpretations of two sporting events which are

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now considered iconic in English culture: the 1958 Munich air disaster and the 1966 World Cup finals. It also examines female interpretations of the concomitant rise of football players in this period as stars or sexualised national celebrities. By focusing on female fans the article makes an important contribution towards addressing the dearth of research on female fans in socio-historical work (Allon, 2012).

Both the Munich air disaster and the 1966 World Cup finals were largely consumed as television events and occurred at a time when there were major transformations taking place in televised sport and in English football more widely. Some of these changes were largely driven by these two events, including, for example, the rise of Manchester United as a 'super-club' (Mellor, 2000), the importance of European competition to British clubs, fans and players (Taylor, 2008), and the rise of football players as national stars or celebrities. This period therefore marked an important transition in the development of English football with some of the changes that occurred at this time continuing in the sport to the present day, illustrating why this period is an important focus for study. The article will consider how these events, along with the rise of football players as sexualised national celebrities, impacted upon females.

Drawing on Glaser and Strauss's (2008) 'grounded theory' approach, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with female fans of men's football in the East Midlands city of Leicester in England. The article begins by discussing the dearth of research on female football fans. I provide an overview of the 1958 Munich air disaster and the 1966 World Cup finals, along with the transformation of televised sport and the rise of the sports star in this period. My findings begin by exploring female memories of the Munich air disaster. I move on to examine female experiences and interpretations of the 1966 World Cup which was held in England, before finally discussing the concomitant rise of football players in this period as sexualised national celebrities.

The invisibility of female fans

Lewis (2009) critiques how historians of women's leisure have virtually ignored female football fans, and football researchers more generally have not explored this topic in any depth. Perhaps the relative neglect of the female fan experience can, in part, be attributed to the tendency for researchers to focus upon issues that are considered 'exciting' and 'politically interesting' (Dixon, 2013: 335). For example, there is no shortage of studies in earlier decades and in recent times, which examine the arena of male hooliganism (see, for example, Armstrong, 1998; Dunning et al., 1984, 1990; Stott and Pearson, 2007). Thus, it could be argued, that there is a need for researchers to move away from focusing on 'exceptional' forms of fandom (Dixon, 2013: 335). Such an approach would and should incorporate women's everyday experiences as fans.

Only a few studies can be located worldwide which have centralised the experiences of female sports fans (see, for example, Jones, 2008; Mewett and Toffoletti, 2008; Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012). Furthermore, as Allon (2012: 29) notes, much of this emerging research is focused upon women's fandom within contemporary sporting cultures and the lack of research on female fans historically is especially striking. Not only have female football fans in England been largely invisibilised, but it is also interesting to note that women have been widely blamed for declining attendances after the post-war

spectator high of 1948–1949. For example, Fishwick (1989) argues that football had always encouraged men to spend time away from women and so the trend towards family based leisure pursuits in Britain in the 1950s also coincided with declining attendances. Walvin (1994: 166) similarly attributes the declining attendances in England in the 1950s and 1960s to women drawing their male partners away from spectator sport, in which they allegedly had no interest:

From the first, football had been a man's game; played and watched overwhelmingly by men. In the changing climate of a prospering Britain, more and more men were no longer able... simply to do as they wished... The sexually segregated world of masculine pleasures – of which the male team games had been (along with the pub) the best examples – were less attractive to women. And more and more of those women were able, unlike their female forebears, to have their say in the way their menfolk spent their free time – and money.

This suggestion that as a result of a changing balance of power between the sexes women are somehow responsible for declining football attendances can also be seen in a 1962 Football League survey which states that, 'women themselves do not display much interest in football' and proposed that attempts should be made to encourage women, 'to be a little more self-sacrificing by letting their menfolk out to watch League matches' (see BBC Sport Website, 2014). It is certainly interesting to note that the role of women in English football in this period is often defined by their alleged negative impact on male attendance rather than research based accounts of the experiences of active female fans in the 1950s and 1960s (see Pope and Williams, 2011).

Iconic sporting events

The Munich air disaster

Johnes and Mellor (2006) describe how the 1953 FA Cup Final between Blackpool and Bolton was the first UK club football fixture to reach a mass television audience, with Stanley Matthews becoming a 'national hero'. This represented a significant moment of change in how football was typically presented and consumed. The Munich air disaster was also largely consumed as a television event and perhaps built on this style of coverage so that this was similarly experienced as a shared national event. This disaster began to signal a change in how the sport and its players were typically presented in the media and is also likely to have contributed to the growing national importance of football in England.

In 1956 Manchester United Football Club became the first English club to compete in the European Cup (later replaced by the UEFA Champions League in 1992), demonstrating the early globalisation of the game (Taylor, 2000). In February 1958 Manchester United played a European Cup quarter-final against Red Star Belgrade (in Serbia, formerly Yugoslavia) in which they qualified for the semi-finals. The next day, on 6 February 1958, they flew from Belgrade to Munich's Reim airport (in Germany) to refuel for the journey back to Manchester (in England). Following two failed attempts to take off on a runway covered in snow and slush, on the third attempt the plane crashed (Ward and Williams, 2009). Holt and Mason (2000: 99) describe how Manager Matt Busby's young

Manchester United side went from 'heroes' to 'martyrs' after eight of the team were killed in the crash. This tragic event can be said to have changed the 'identity' of Manchester United and a 'legend' was created (Ward and Williams, 2009: 77). The Munich air disaster has served as a foundation myth for Manchester United and has been argued to have effectively 'made' the football club (Taylor, 2000). The myths around Munich became embedded in the day-to-day culture of the club, symbolised by the memorial plaque and the Munich clock at Manchester United's Old Trafford Stadium (Ward and Williams, 2009). This mythology around the Munich air disaster seems to have grown more powerful with the passage of time (Walvin, 1994). The death of England international Duncan Edwards came to personify the Munich disaster for future generations and symbolised the unfulfilled promise of the young United side (Taylor, 2000).

Following the disaster, the local community pulled together with Manchester City fans sympathising with Manchester United fans and sharing their grief (Ward and Williams, 2009). Evening television viewers had also grown to recognise the Manchester United players as pioneers threatening to dominate the new European game and there was enormous public sympathy for the club across the nation (Ward and Williams, 2009). Chelsea Football Club had initially rejected an invitation to compete in the inaugural European Cup in 1955 on the advice of the Football League, so Manchester United and Manager Matt Busby's decision to enter this European competition was also highly significant in the development of English football (Ward and Williams, 2009: 74). English football would be transformed by the wider challenge of European competitions and the financial rewards this brought, with the winning of domestic trophies increasingly valued as a means of entry into European competition (Walvin, 1994).

In the Post-World War Two period football clubs and their supporters were still strongly embedded within local communities. Football players were seen as 'ordinary citizens' who, like their supporters, lived within close proximity to the home stadium (Phelps, 2005). However, the Munich air disaster arguably challenged this localism and precipitated the transformation of Manchester United into the first 'national' club side in England in the 1960s, with United's support extending to the nation and even internationally (Taylor, 2000). Mellor (2000: 155) discusses how Manchester United began to draw support from outside Manchester and away from other clubs throughout the North West in the 1950s and 1960s and although it is usually assumed that 'super-clubs' emerged after the formation of the FA Premier League, by the 1960s Manchester United may have already gained 'the aura of a super-club'.

The 1966 World Cup finals

The death of so many young United stars at Munich was said to blight England's chances in the World Cup finals in 1958 and 1962. But 1966 saw England host the World Cup and England's first and so far only World Cup triumph. It is perhaps surprising then that although a few studies have focused upon the 1966 World Cup finals (see, for example, Chisari, 2004; Mason, 2006; Porter, 2009), research on this event has been somewhat limited. As Chisari (2004: 95) suggests: 'in spite of the huge impact that that famous victory had, and still has on popular culture, it has been a very much understudied topic by academics'. Furthermore, accounts of female experiences and interpretations of this

event are also extremely limited. For example, although Shiel's (2000) collection of memories of the 1966 World Cup does include a small number of short oral history accounts from women, this is mostly focused upon male recollections. Women are also largely invisible in oral history accounts of sports fandom more generally (see, for example, Bull, 1992; Taylor and Ward, 1993).

Ward and Williams (2009) describe how the 1966 World Cup was the first really global football event, with 400 million people watching the final around the world and around 33 million in England either watching on television or listening on the radio. Sandbrook (2006) discusses how initially the England team failed to capture the imagination of paying spectators with nearly 30,000 empty seats at England's opening two games. But by the time England reached the World Cup Final against West Germany the nation had succumbed to 'World Cup fever'. Taylor (2008) suggests that the twists and turns of this World Cup final match are probably better known than any other sporting event in England. After West Germany equalised to make the score 2–2, extra time was played in which England scored a controversial third goal and then with seconds remaining Geoff Hurst completed his hat-trick to make the final score 4–2. Widespread expressions of patriotism and euphoria are said to have followed this victory and connections have been made by writers between 1966 and previous occasions of national victory and celebration, such as the Coronation of 1953 and Victory in Europe (VE) night (Taylor, 2008).

Both the Munich air disaster and the 1966 World Cup occurred at a time when televised sport was being transformed, which also contributed to changes in the nature of sports stardom. I will now briefly overview these changes.

Transformations in televised sport and the rise of the sports star

It is important to recognise that British society was undergoing a number of significant social and cultural changes at the time these events occurred. Goldthorpe et al. (1969: 157), for example, have famously described the alleged 'embourgeoisement' of the working classes in the post-war period as Britain slowly recovered from war and then entered into a period of rising aspirations and consumption. Improved living standards became a defining feature of post-war Britain as relative affluence spread: it was estimated that average earnings of industrial workers increased by more than 20 per cent between 1951 and 1958. Taylor (2008) notes that the car and television were important symbols of this new affluent society, and although ownership of television sets was minimal in 1950, three-quarters of all homes owned a television set by 1961. This period has generally been taken to signal the decline of collective working class entertainment as attendances decreased rapidly. In the 1948–1949 season in England, Football League clubs sold 41 million tickets but this fell to 28 million by 1964–1965. With more disposable income available, working class men were able to choose to devote more of their leisure time to their families and home, and there were also more leisure activities to choose from (Sandbrook, 2006).

However, Sandbrook (2006) makes the point that football was extremely well suited to the requirements of television, and that in the 1960s it replaced county cricket as England's national sport. Although there had been little televised football shown in

England in the 1950s, millions would watch the major matches on television in the 1960s, including 'middle class' families who were perhaps happy to become armchair fans in preference to attending live matches. BBC's *Match of the Day* highlights programme was also broadcast from August 1964. This programme is still televised to the present day, continuing what Walvin (2001: 146) describes as a 'Saturday night ritual'.

Both the 1958 Munich air disaster and 1966 World Cup finals were largely consumed as television events. Holt and Mason (2000: 98) describe how after the Munich air disaster, 'the sight of their broken plane lying in the snow was on every television screen'. Viewing figures for the 1966 World Cup Final suggest that the equivalent of almost half of the English population aged over five years old watched this on television (Chisari, 2004), and Mason (2006) suggests that television: 'made the 1966 World Cup the sizeable shared national experience that it became'.

These events also occurred at a time when televised coverage of sport was being transformed. Whannel (1992: 30–31) found that in the 1950s, British sport producers were concerned to try and extend TV sports' appeal beyond the sports fan to those with a more marginal interest in sport. He concluded that: 'one distinctive feature of the assumed audience model during this period is that two oppositions – expert/novice and male/female – become condensed together. The implicit assumption becomes one of male expertise and female ignorance'. An illustration of this can perhaps be seen in how during the 1966 World Cup finals television coverage offered the opportunity of instruction on understanding the off-side law and other aspects of the game's complexities which was aimed specifically at female fans – presumably males were assumed to already understand the laws of the game (Williams and Woodhouse, 1991: 23). Conventions adopted during this period have remained with televised sport to the present day. In addition to changes in commentary styles, the use of 'close-ups' was also part of an attempt to 'liven up' a broadcast to appeal to 'novices' or female viewers (Kennedy and Hills, 2009).

Modleski (1984: 99) discusses how the close-up is characteristic of the popular female genre of soap opera. The focus on the face, and thus emotions, allows the audience 'to witness the characters' expressions' and this is said to appeal to 'the gaze of the mother'. Kennedy and Hills (2009: 66) apply this analysis to football; they argue that 'since televised sport has long been considered a masculine media genre, the increasing prevalence of close-ups has the capacity to alter the way the viewer is positioned' and suggest that close-ups can construct 'an intimate viewing position for the spectator'. For Kennedy and Hills (2009: 62) televised sport is a 'gendered genre', containing features designed to attract a male audience but also techniques associated with programme types attracting female viewers, including close-ups and never-ending narrative structures.

These developments in televised sport would in turn transform the nature of sports stardom and Whannel (2002: 98) identifies the period between 1945 and 1965 as marking the age of transition in sport stardom. This period began in post-war austerity in the pre-television era, where a star's image was circulated principally by newsreel and cigarette card, but by the mid-1960s television was well established, the sponsorship boom was imminent and some football stars were familiar faces even to those with no interest in the sport. The rise of television also changed the nature of stardom and the nature of sport. The actions, words and – importantly here – the *appearances* of sports stars,

'attained a more generalised familiarity beyond the more narrow world of sports fandom. In particular, television shifted focus onto the face' (Whannel, 2002: 34).

Consequently this is likely to have led to new kinds of relations between female fans and these new kinds of football stars. As Whannel (1998) notes, televised sports place male bodies on display making them accessible for both a female and male gaze. However, although pleasure is central to sports fandom, little research has considered how fans understand fandom pleasures (Obel, 2012). Toffoletti and Mewett (2012) bemoan how sports fandom research lacks a nuanced examination of how women look at the male athletic body in sexually desiring ways.

I have argued that female fans have been largely invisibilised in existing socio-historical research to date and critiqued how the role of women in the 1950s and 1960s is often defined by their alleged negative impact on male attendance rather than research accounts of female fans in this period. Having briefly examined two events that were important in the development of the game in England in the 1950s and 1960s and wider changes that were occurring in televised sport and sports stardom in this period, I will now overview the methodology that was employed for the research.

Methodology

The material for this article comes from a wider, comparative semi-structured interview study with 85 female fans of men's professional football and rugby union, using the English East Midlands city of Leicester as a case study for the research (Pope, 2010). The city of Leicester is located approximately 100 miles from Manchester (home of Manchester United Football Club) and London (the location for England's 1966 World Cup matches) making it an interesting case study to consider whether the events that form the focus of this article had a wider impact and extended to this region of the UK. Historically there has been a strong public interest in football in the city of Leicester, with Leicester City Football Club largely competing in the top two tiers of English football from the post-war period to the present day.

The sampling frame used to select respondents was original survey replies from a postal questionnaire survey which had been undertaken previously in Leicester (Williams, 2004). I used systematic sampling techniques (selecting every fifth questionnaire) to select potential interviewees from three broad age groups, using the age delineations from the survey. The final sample was made up of 10 'younger group' fans aged 20–27 years old, 25 'middle group' fans aged 28–59 years old and 16 'older group' fans aged above 60 years old. This article draws primarily on the 16 Leicester City fans from the 'older group' but I also draw on a small number of respondents from the 'middle group' ($n=5$) who also had some memories of the 1966 World Cup. In total, the findings draw on 21 semi-structured interviews with female football fans aged between 50 and 80 years old. All of the women who agreed to participate in the research were heterosexual. Many of the interviewees were season ticket holders (or STHs) who attend all home matches or club members who attend the majority of home matches, but the sample also included some occasional attendees. The respondents in the study were active fans, but whereas some were already attending live football matches at Leicester City in the 1950s and 1960s, others were yet to develop an interest in football as active fans at this time. The

recorded interviews typically took place in the homes or workplaces of respondents. The oral history interviews averaged around two hours in length, with a small number lasting over four hours. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of respondents. Berg and Lune (2012: 318) have described how newer approaches to social historical research have moved away from privileging the views of the ruling elites and instead look for evidence of 'the day-to-day circumstances of "the people"'. Social historical research and oral histories therefore serve as a powerful tool for capturing these details before they are lost in time. This was especially the case in my research as women's voices and experiences as sports fans in socio-historical accounts have been largely marginalised.

The use of retrospective accounts needs to be acknowledged as an important issue in research of this kind. Iconic status is conferred in retrospect (Whannel, 2002); thus although both of the events under study in the article are considered iconic cultural events today, it is not possible to directly determine from retrospective narratives if they were iconic events at the time. Whannel (2002: 56) notes that representations of sport's past are constructed largely around 'magic moments' in which popular memory is evoked. This process occurs through the oral transmission of mythologised moments and the media representational process, which both operate in parallel. England's World Cup victory of 1966 could certainly be considered one of these 'magic moments' and the failure of the national side since to match this achievement has helped to preserve its iconic cultural status (Porter, 2009). The mythology around the Munich air disaster has also grown more powerful over time (Walvin, 1994) and the enduring stories of the disaster have lived on through mediated literacy and visual forms and practices (Mellor, 2004). Thus, respondents will look back on these events with much greater knowledge and changing understandings.

I found 'grounded theory' a useful theoretical tool for purposes of data collection and analysis. Glaser and Strauss (2008: 1, 5) define 'grounded theory' as 'the discovery of theory from data'; grounded theory is thus 'derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data'. Although Glaser and Strauss's (2008: 32) classic text stresses the importance of studying an area: 'without any preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, "relevancies" in concepts and hypothesis', this has been somewhat contested. Bryant and Charmaz (2007), for example, propose it is necessary to have some familiarity with existing literature before data collection and claim anyone commencing research will already have some preconceived ideas relevant to the research. This approach also raises questions around the use of interview guides in grounded theory research, but Charmaz (2006) argues that an open-ended interview guide is not of the same order as imposing pre-determined codes on data and Corbin and Strauss (2008) also suggest that a researcher can turn to the existing literature to formulate questions for interview. This technique was adopted in my research; drawing on literature to generate questions, an interview schedule was designed which was divided into eight different sections and given the dearth of research on female fans historically, one of these sections included open-ended questions about women's experiences and memories of football in earlier decades, including the 1950s and 1960s.

After I fully transcribed the interviews, data was coded by drawing upon the 'constant comparative method' (Glaser and Strauss, 2008: 101), an analytic process which involves comparing each incident with other incidents for similarities and differences (Corbin and

Strauss, 2008). I aimed to reach a point of 'theoretical saturation' whereby similar instances are seen over and over again and adding new data makes little or no difference to the findings (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 2008). Glaser and Strauss (2008: 32) propose that grounded theory can be used to generate two basic kinds of theory: substantive and formal. Formal theory is defined as: 'that developed for a formal, or conceptual area of sociological inquiry' whereas substantive theory is: 'that developed for a substantive, or empirical area of sociological inquiry'. Charmaz (2006: 8) notes that: 'most grounded theories are substantive theories because they address delimited problems in specific substantive areas'. My research on female sports fans largely produces substantive theory. I will now turn to my findings.

Results and discussion

Female interpretations of the 1958 Munich air disaster

Walvin (1994) argues that 1957–1958 marked a turning point in English football and that the Munich air crash had important ramifications for football in that country. As well as the mythology that was created after Munich, the tragedy also prompted a debate about the advantages and disadvantages of European competitions and led to competing in European football becoming the main ambition of Britain's leading clubs. Here I will explore women's memories and experiences of this extraordinary event.

The extensive media coverage of the Munich air crash in 1958 reveals how this event was increasingly followed and reported nationally, with 11 out of 16 'older group' respondents having some personal memories of this event, thus demonstrating the national importance of this event in England. The Munich air crash precipitated the transformation of Manchester United into the first 'national' club side in England in the 1960s (Taylor, 2000) and the deep sense of national loss and the conversion of the players and the United club into a national sporting cause – or even a cause *beyond* sport – echoed in accounts even from women who were based in Leicester:

I remember that sort of made heroes of people that were just football players before in a way [...]. There was this sort of sentiment about those remaining football players, the whole country felt it would be brilliant if they won something after the disaster...And that sort of elevated them into rather more than the mundane. Now they were like heroes [...]. And then of course the whole sort of press changed...there were always small papers and tabloids but the whole of the way football was treated became quite different. I didn't realise that at the time, it's with hindsight that you realise. (F40, age 64, STH)

This account also highlights issues around the use of retrospective accounts in research. As respondents look back on events retrospectively they do so with greater knowledge and changing understandings. Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) have referred to the ubiquitous nature of football, the Premiership and its 'celebrity' players today as a kind of late-modern 'soap opera' and having witnessed changes in the media presentation of the sport over time, F40 now looks back to pinpoint the Munich air crash as signalling the beginning of these wider changes.

The Munich air crash resonated with many sports fans in England. After all, much of the press and TV coverage centred around rhetorics of family and loss, and followed highly personal narratives which perhaps female fans especially may have identified with:

Football didn't feature an awful lot, but that [Munich] did. That covered the papers for more than a week I would think. And then into the funerals and then into Matt Busby getting better in hospital and one thing or another. (F47, age 78, STH)

I do remember the Munich air crash...I remember all the things in the paper and everything. And Bobby Charlton and whether he'd recover and Matt Busby was unlikely to survive, and oh there was a very young player, Duncan Edwards, who was going to be the player of the future sort of thing...It was a big thing. It was a massive thing. (F42, age 68, occasional attendee)

Respondents were clearly deeply moved by Munich and used phrases such as 'heart-breaking', 'shook up', 'absolutely dreadful', and 'I won't ever forget that...it was a tragedy' (e.g. F43, F47, F50, F51) to describe their feelings. Walvin (1994: 170) argues that the Munich air crash carved out 'a special place in football history and in the memories of any sports fans old enough to remember those cold February days'. But arguably the impact of the Munich air crash in some cases may have extended beyond sports fans. For some respondents there was a sense that the extensive media coverage around the Munich air disaster was widespread and reported across the nation as a national issue (e.g. F39, F40, F41, F47, F50); at the time this was said to have been 'really really big news' (F41, age 64, STH). For F47 (age 78, STH) this meant that: 'People sort of latched onto that, it didn't matter whether you were a football person or not...Because it sounded awful'. The uniqueness of this news story may have also contributed to its wider impact, as F51 (age 71, occasional attendee) explains: 'I would imagine it would have affected everybody. I mean an air crash, you didn't hear; sort of hear much about aeroplanes crashing at that time'.

Munich is likely to have played a role in raising the profile of football more generally in England and consequently may have generated increased *female* interest in the sport throughout the country, especially given that a small number of respondents who described their vivid memories of the event were not actually following football as active spectators at that time (e.g. F36, F39, F42). Tragic events such as this receiving mass media coverage and involving loss of young lives were also likely to be seen to signify social change in a society still caught up in the privations of the aftermath of war (Marwick, 1990):

You've got to remember that late 40s, early 50s, was still sweet [candy] rationing... There was an awful lot of austerity post-war, it took a long time for the country to get back into sort of normal [...]. I suppose Manchester United and Busby, that era might have been something changing. And that awful plane crash, that seemed to sort of bring it into more profile. But up until then...sport wasn't a priority. I mean everyone was just sort of licking their wounds really and trying to get back into normality. (F39, age 60, STH)

The Munich air disaster arguably represented an early step in a series of changes which would see top players gradually start to move from being 'ordinary guys' (F47,

age 78, STH) who were local heroes (Taylor, 2000), to becoming national celebrities. The lifting of the maximum wage in 1961 began to lead to changes in relationships between players and spectators, but England's World Cup victory in 1966 also played a crucial role in enhancing the profile of the sport and its players. I will now turn to examine female interpretations of the 1966 World Cup finals.

Female experiences of the 1966 World Cup

The World Cup of 1966 has been argued to have had a considerable impact upon women – as both players and spectators (Lopez, 1997; Ward and Williams, 2009). This World Cup tournament was held in England which is likely to have played a role in the social significance attached to the event by respondents living in that country. Chisari (2004) suggests that although male viewers outnumbered female viewers in the early stages of the competition, the final viewing figures were fairly balanced between the sexes on BBC, with female viewers actually outnumbering male viewers on ITV. For a minority of women in my sample the 1966 World Cup finals were the first time that they had encountered football so this event was their first memory of the sport (e.g. F23, F29, F30). Many remembered watching as part of a family audience in the home (e.g. F30, F34, F37, F41, F43). Porter (2009) suggests that because consumption of the World Cup Final largely took place in people's homes this helped to ensure that the event was not exclusively male.

Events such as this could be said to represent authentic national occasions – football's traditionally class and masculinist frame is relaxed temporarily at such moments and women and people from the higher social classes are invited to be part of the national celebrations. Respondents sensed this moment of relative national unity via sport and the temporary relaxation of the usually masculine barriers to sport. Although F47 (age 78, STH) suggested that it was 'football people' who were already attending football matches that were most heavily involved in the 1966 World Cup, some respondents described how they believed 'everyone' followed this event (e.g. F29, F37, F38, F40, F43, F49):

Everybody got very excited about that, ordinary people, people that didn't even know anything about football got very involved with that... most people really, really got absolutely caught up in it. (F40, age 64, STH)

That was brilliant...More than ever I think the whole country was behind the team. It was a one-off, it's never been done again. I think everyone was interested...they were all out in the streets, yeah, yeah, cheering in the streets. (F38, age 60, STH)

The victory led to temporary feelings of national unity perhaps not seen on this scale since the Coronation in 1953. Sandbrook (2006: 323) describes how in London this victory led to the wildest celebrations since the end of the Second World War. Taylor (2008: 290) suggests that 1966 was crucial in sealing football's position as a barometer on the nation's well-being and the victory was connected to broader notions of modernisation and economic renewal. F47 described the impact of the victory on the mood of the country, the unusual celebration of 'Englishness' and the nature of discussions in the largely 'female' realm of shopping:

Oh Jesus! Flags everywhere. Cars hooting...Everyone got into it, because it were England you see? Everybody were delighted. You couldn't even go down the shop and somebody would say 'What did you think about that match?' 'Oh yeah, it were brilliant' you used to say [...] England welcomed it really because it boosted us a bit. You know, it boosted everybody... It were just that it were the England flag, and you were flying it, and it was our country, and we'd won the World Cup. It was a fantastic time, a big achievement. (F47, age 78, STH)

However, although England's World Cup victory is now considered an iconic cultural event, it is important to note that these are retrospective accounts – respondents look back on such events with much greater knowledge, and indeed with an awareness that this has been England's only World Cup victory. The collective memory of the English is also constantly being jogged by reminders of 1966, including replays of matches on television (see Porter, 2009). F41 describes how she has since watched match replays from the 1966 World Cup finals and certainly for this respondent the level of importance that is attached to this event today was not attributed at the time it occurred:

I suppose at the time it didn't dawn on you just exactly what they'd done, but as it's the only time they've ever won anything, and you keep thinking they won in '66, and they keep showing you it, and the games that lead up to it, you think oh that's how it was. Because at the time you don't. It's like most things, when you're there and experiencing it, you don't appreciate it until you've moved on a bit. You take it as you see don't you? (F41, age 64, STH).

Whilst it has been suggested that the success of the men's national football team in 1966 prompted an upsurge of interest in the sport among women as players and spectators (see, for example, Lopez, 1997; Ward and Williams, 2009), these data illustrate that this event impacted upon women to varying degrees and so perhaps caution needs to be exercised around the extent to which this event affected the lives of women. Although there was a tendency for some respondents to discuss the sense that 'everyone' was involved in the 1966 World Cup finals, many respondents who discussed their interest in watching this event were women who were already attending live football matches at Leicester City FC and so were active fans of football at this time (e.g. F37, F38, F40, F41, F43, F47, F48, F49, F51). Thus, their interest in this event was an extension of their fandom because their interest in domestic football was already well developed.

But a small number of respondents discussed how traditional gendered roles and expectations meant that they were unable to develop a connection with the 1966 World Cup. Gendered assumptions have typically surrounded notions of caring, with mothers undertaking much of the caring for the family (McKie et al., 2002). This can be seen in F50's account of the 1966 World Cup Final. She was also compelled to take a 'fan break' from attending live football after having children, despite her husband continuing to attend:

Researcher: Do you remember the 1966 World Cup?

F50: Yes, yes. I was on holiday with my little boys and we were camping but on the camp site they had got like the shed with a black and white television screen and there sat my husband watching the whole match and I took the children [out]... We watched the highlights of it on a television in a shop window [...]. When I had the children I had to sort of, I

couldn't go to football because I'd got these two little ones to look after and my husband was a great supporter so he used to go... There was only one of us could go, there was no one I could leave the children with. (F50, age 73, STH)

Sandbrook (2006) claims that whilst it is tempting to imagine that just about *everyone* in England celebrated the World Cup victory, in reality many would not have been interested in football and would not watch the World Cup Final. In my research, F27 was unable to develop a meaningful connection to the sport through the 1966 World Cup finals as football was still strongly associated with *men's* leisure and was very much a 'male preserve' (Dunning, 1994):

Researcher: Did you accompany your dad to matches?

F27: No, no. Girls didn't tend to do things like that in those days... I think it really was more a man's... a man's thing [...].

Researcher: What were girls doing if they were not at the football?

F27: Shopping I think. In fact I think that's probably what I was doing when the 1966 World Cup was on. I mean everybody will say I can remember exactly where I was when England won and I think, well I can't, why can't I? Because I must have just been out shopping or something. That's how disinterested I was. Whereas I wouldn't not dream of not watching the World Cup now. (F27, age 56, member)

My final section will consider the rise of football players in England as sexualised national celebrities.

Football players as sexualised national celebrities

Munich represented one of a series of events that occurred in this period which contributed to the rise of some football players as sexualised national celebrities. Ward and Williams (2009: 81) describe how the style of football reporting changed after the Munich air disaster: whereas reporters typically approached stories in a 'restrained manner' in the 1950s, after Munich the British tabloid newspapers became more aggressive in their coverage and articles increasingly featured issues away from football, such as players' nightclub visits. From the 1960s, a new style of popular journalism emerged, with some tabloid newspapers increasing their coverage of sport and focusing on human interest stories and entertainment (Mellor, 2004). This media strategy to focus on specific players in order to build consumable narratives would also have contributed to the development of some football players as 'stars' or 'celebrities'.

Whannel (2002: 108) describes how transformations of the media industry led to changes in the nature of sport stardom between 1945 and 1965 and the rise of television, 'with its ability to bring the faces of the famous into the domestic sphere and make them familiar, enabled the stars of sport to acquire a greater degree of celebrity, becoming known to non-sport fans'. Thus, as Britain became a more prosperous society from the late 1950s onwards, the best and the most photogenic young football players could now

reap the benefits of this growth in consumerism and the rise in televised sport. The abolition of the maximum wage and the rise in players' salaries in England also contributed to create a new type of football 'star' so the early to mid-1960s is often seen as a turning point in the identity construction of professional football players (Taylor, 2000).

The World Cup victory in 1966 also signalled important changes in the game and helped to generate greater national status for some of its players. For F40 (age 64, STH): 'Certainly the World Cup promoted the idea of footballers as individuals and players that were worth special regard...because we'd won something' and F49 (age 70, STH) suggested that: 'I think they [players] were held in some sort of awe. Of course, the World Cup, 1966 made them stars in their own right'. Chisari (2004) describes changes in the presentation of matches for the 1966 World Cup, including technical commentary being accompanied by off the pitch stories, supposedly for the benefit of female viewers. For the first time football players began to be seen as *personalities* rather than just footballers, representing the beginning of the 'football stars' age whereby sporting celebrities would draw attention not just for their skills but for their public/private lifestyle.

These changes also coincided with being able to follow players on BBC's *Match of the Day* highlights programme from August 1964. Television helped to transform the nature of sports stardom, with close-ups in this new medium foregrounding faces and personalities (Whannel, 2002). The use of close-ups in televised sport, with a focus on the face and thus emotions can create an intimate viewing position for spectators (Kennedy and Hills, 2009), and perhaps this intimacy or 'personalisation' of players (Whannel, 1992) appealed to some female fans. F49 remembered the social impact of players being interviewed on BBC's *Match of the Day* in this period:

Match of the Day, I couldn't wait to watch *Match of the Day*, and then of course they would interview players, so you would see them. And then of course, you're only seeing it on a screen, but they really are talking as if they're in your living room, so you get to know them. You get to know the players more, oh that's so and so. And you would hear their opinions and they would talk to you about what they were doing and all this. The media glamorized them a lot, and they still do of course. (F49, age 70, STH)

These changes in the media industry also meant that some women could now admire these newly packaged and affluent players for their skills and football ambitions, as well as their looks and lifestyles. Women, more generally, were now being encouraged to think about their own sexuality in much more explicit and personal ways. Marwick (1998: 18), for example, describes one of the characteristics of this so-called 'unique era' as 'permissiveness – that is to say, a general sexual liberation, entailing striking changes in public and private morals and...a new frankness, openness, and indeed honesty in personal relations and modes of expression'. This is a rather sweeping account and its occurrence may be exaggerated, but the sense of sexual and personal liberation for women in the 1960s was also reflected in changes in legislation which allowed easier access to abortion, contraceptives and divorce. As Sandbrook (2006) argues, these changes illustrated the growing independence and assertiveness of ordinary women. The development of birth control provided some women with greater opportunities to pursue their own careers and led to the female body becoming 'increasingly associated with

eroticism rather than reproduction' (Sandbrook, 2006: 696). In short, and in comparison to the traditionalism of the 1950s, the sixties brought both a generational and gender shift and it imported some of this new emphasis on sex and glamour into English football:

Researcher: Were the England players glamorous then? Were there any players women watching would have liked?

F37: Oh yes, oh dear...Bobby Moore. He was always...yes. He was quite young I think. I think it was his blond hair. And in those days, they always used to have longer hair than what they have now. And I'll tell you what I do notice from those days to this...is the hair and also the shorts. In those days they were short, whereas now I mean they're not. I mean you've only got to see old footage haven't you? And you can see, God, yeah! Whatever next! And they used to sort of wear a jersey top and it always looked tight. (F37, age 63, occasional attendee)

These changes were not absolute of course; some footballers – such as Ashington's Charlton brothers, Jack and Bobby – continued to convey in style and appearance their older class and occupational roots. The young England captain Bobby Moore, on the other hand, was a different type of player and man, someone who clearly relished the new stylistic explorations of relative affluence and fame, and who often appeared alongside the charismatic, long-haired Northern Irishman George Best in fashion magazines and adverts. Holt (1992: 316) describes how sportsmen – especially footballers such as Best – found an important place in the new 'youth culture'. Attractive young male players were picked out by some respondents for their looks and associations with new youth styles after the austerity and reserve of the 1950s in which F41 (age 64, STH) suggested: 'the people in that same age group always look like that, with the partings and the flat hair'. Thus, these new football stars signified, for some women fans at least, a society which was deeply in social and cultural transition during a period of generational shift and rising individualism in which questions were generally being raised for women about issues of sexuality and potential liberation:

Bobby Moore was handsome, blond, curly haired, looked fit. Whereas they [the Charltons] looked like the older style players somehow...They'd come up from a working class background. They'd been miners or children of miners and then got into football...Bobby Moore...he was definitely a different sort of player. And George Best certainly was. But that was when the whole of society was changing really...When I grew up, you dressed in what your mother wore. But then I was in that first bit when rock and roll was there and Elvis and you just wanted to dress differently. Younger people started to become individuals, you know, rather than clones of their parents. And that happened definitely from the '60s onwards. (F40, age 64, STH)

Toffoletti and Mewett's (2012) findings show that female fans will stress their knowledge and commitment to sport over any voyeuristic pleasure they might experience, as women's role as active lookers can jeopardise the legitimacy of women's sports fandom. However, it has been argued that age can act as a buffer against accusations of being a 'groupie' (Obel, 2012; Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012), so perhaps many female fans in this

research study were comfortable in openly discussing a sexual interest in players in part because their age served to protect them from the 'groupie' label which could undermine their authenticity as a sports fan. But the tension between being a female football fan and the possibility of having a sexual interest in players did emerge in F49's account; she was keen to emphasise the importance of her identity as a football fan above voyeuristic looking (Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012):

I was watching the World Cup of course but at that time it was the football that was most important... Someone might think he's [Bobby Moore] a bit of alright, I think maybe yeah. I'm not quite sure on that one, being a fan of football; I mean all I saw at that time was football. But of course you'd say he's good looking, and of course he's pleasing on the eye, that was it yes. And you'd look. I mean you'd got your own favourites, now is he your favourite because he's good looking or because he plays well? (F49, age 70, STH)

The rise of these players as new national celebrities led to new kinds of relations developing between football players and female fans. Thus, we can speculate here that the greater sexualisation and glamorisation of players may have opened up the sport to some women, allowing more of them to break into this previously male-dominated arena. F39 (age 60, STH), for example, described how in the 1960s high profile players led to football becoming 'glamorous', which she suggests would have resulted in rising numbers of female fans at matches and the sport starting to change, 'from just being sort of working men's cold afternoon thing that boys did with their dads'.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought, uniquely, to reveal a female perspective on early sporting memories. Socio-historical approaches to the development of football as a cultural product have largely focused upon male experiences but this article makes one contribution towards addressing the dearth of research on female fans (Allon, 2012). Drawing on a 'grounded theory' approach, the article examined female experiences and interpretations of the 1958 Munich air disaster and 1966 World Cup finals, two events which are now considered iconic in English culture. I also explored the concomitant rise of football players as sexualised national celebrities.

The Munich air disaster represented a significant moment of change in how football was typically presented and consumed. This extraordinary event engaged women who were based in Leicester, some 100 miles from Manchester, demonstrating the national importance of this event. Respondents could recall and describe their memories of this tragic event and the media coverage around it. In a small number of cases respondents who had vivid memories of this event were not actively following football at this time, demonstrating that the impact of the Munich air disaster may have extended beyond sports fans.

Both Munich and the 1966 World Cup finals would have played a role in raising the profile of football more generally in England. I argue that the 1966 World Cup finals impacted upon women to varying degrees and so caution needs to be exercised around the extent to which this event has impacted upon women. A small number of respondents

discussed how traditional gendered roles and expectations meant that they were unable to follow the 1966 World Cup finals. Broadly speaking, respondents who were most actively involved in the 1966 World Cup were already active football fans at a club level and so 1966 served as an *extension* of their existing fandom rather than initiating an interest in football.

Both the Munich air disaster and the 1966 World Cup, along with wider transformations of the media industry at this time (Whannel, 2002), led to changes in the nature of sports stardom. The greater sexualisation and glamorisation of players – the development of footballers as ‘celebrities’ – also occurred in an era when women were arguably beginning to be sexually liberated and perhaps led to new kinds of relations between female fans and players. The shift towards intimacy (Kennedy and Hills, 2009) or the ‘personalisation’ of players (Whannel, 1992) that followed changes in the media industry may also have appealed to some female (and indeed male) fans. Clearly there is a need for further research to examine the intimate relations between players and fans, along with how women look at the male athletic body in sexually desiring ways (Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012).

Finally, I would argue that there is a need for further research to explore women’s experiences of football historically. Future research could examine female memories of iconic events such as those under study in this article along with other significant events in the development of football. There is also a need for further work to examine women’s experiences of attending football matches and their connections to the sport in earlier decades before such memories are lost to time.

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