Hooliganism – Defining a superhooligan

Your task:

Prepare a presentation in which you define a superhooligan. You should use the article below. A good presentation includes concrete materials that can help you define the term. This could include images, statistics, interviews and video clips.

You also have to prepare one or two exercises that help your audience remember your definition.

Length of presentation: 20-25 minutes – excluding exercises.

**British Soccer Superhooligans:  
Emergence and Establishment:  
1982-2000**

By: A. J. Haley  
Professor  
Arizona State University - Main

Superhooligans officially arrived on the British professional soccer scene during the last four years of the most intense and continuous stretch (1961-1986) of soccer hooliganism in British history. The sobriquet superhooligan was originally created and utilized by the British media in the early 1980's when it was reporting on the largely informal structure and process of football hooligans, as duly noted by Murphy et al.

This process culminated in the emergence in the early 1980s of named ‘superhooligan' gangs such as the ‘Inter City Firm' (ICF) of West Ham United, the ‘Service Crew' of Leeds, and ‘Gooners' of Arsenal, the ‘Bushwhackers' of Millwall, the ‘Baby Squad' of Leicester and the ‘Headhunters' of Chelsea. The ICF can serve as an example. They were one of the first ‘superhooligan' gangs to emerge and they chose their name in order to signify the fact that they pioneered the tactic of eschewing travel on ‘football special' trains wearing club favours, choosing, instead, the regular ‘Inter City' service and what they regarded as ‘smart' but ‘casual' clothing with no club colours in order not to advertise themselves as football fans to the police. These successful tactics spread during the early 1980s until most major crews were practicing similar techniques. (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 91)

Various writers employed a variety of names in describing this new class of soccer hooligan. Robins (1984) talked about ‘hardmen' and Williams et al., (1984) about ‘hardcases.' Popplewell (1986), in a government report, further described and acknowledged the emergence of the new hooligan, and Buford (1991) referred to them as ‘superthugs.'

What specifically set these soccer hooligans apart from other hooligans? The popular image of the soccer hooligan in the 1960's and 1970's was still of "tough, badly-dressed yobbos or skinheads, covered in tatoos, usually drunk, from the working classes and unemployed" (Canter, 1989, p. 120). Acts of hooliganism by this old type of soccer hooligan were usually sporadic and random in nature. However, the new superhooligan could be profiled as follows (Keating 1985):

1. These hooligans are usually in their mid to late twenties, sometimes even more than thirty years old.
2. Their involvement in soccer hooliganism has usually endured since their teenage years.
3. They are not necessarily unemployed and some may even have professional jobs or be university students.
4. They may well be married and be family men with mortgages.
5. They often have previous convictions for violence.
6. They may well exhibit good, often innovative, skills in the organization and planning of hooligan activities.
7. They seldom drink alcohol before the game, needing to be alert when fighting.
8. Some keep a record in the form of a diary or scrapbook.

This profile contradicts the old image of soccer hooligans as mainly teenagers, unemployed, or in unskilled jobs, and from the "rough, working class" (Taylor and Ingham, 1978, p. 77).

Emerging during the early 1980's, superhooligan groups were organized into hooligan gangs with their own distinctive names. Some of the more notorious superhooligan groups became well-known in the British press and other media.  
Buford (1991) provides a partial list of some of the well-known superhooligan groups operating in England at this time. The original superhooligan groups emerged in London. Two of the most famous of these groups were Chelsea's Headhunters and West Hams' ‘Inter-City Firm' (ICF), so named because of their practice of traveling first class on the Inter-City trains of British Rail, avoiding the obvious soccer special trains. The Chelsea Headhunters were known for dressing ‘smart' in Armani pullovers and other designer clothes. The Headhunters were the first to develop the use of the calling card. After beating a victim senseless the Headhunters would leave a card on the victim which said "Congratulations, you've just been serviced by the Chelsea Headhunters" (Walvin, 1994, p. 169). Both of these groups were blamed for a number of murders of rival fans.

Superhooligan groups appeared throughout England. Liverpool's ‘Nutty Crew' were blamed for the hooligan activities which led up to the disaster at Heysell. The ‘South Midland Hit Squad' linked with the Oxford United Soccer Club was another non-London superhooligan group responsible for particularly vicious attacks on rival fans. One of the more infamous superhooligan groups was the ‘Cambridge Casuals' who rose to hooligan prominence during the mid-1980's. Several of the ringleaders of this group were jailed for up to five years for assault, use of a deadly weapon, and causing an affray, (Kerr, 1994). The list of these emergent superhooligan groups is both long and ever-expanding.

Most of these superhooligan groups were led by forceful individuals who took responsibility for and directed the actions of the rest of the fellow hooligans. For example, the Chelsea Headhunters were led by Terry Last who was ultimately convicted and sent to prison for the 1984 knife attack on a Newcastle United fan (Keel, 1987). Most of these initial superhooligan leaders were extremely violent, and would be the first to initiate attacks on rival fans - leading the way for others to follow.

The size of these superhooligan groups can only be estimated from statements made by the hooligans and police intelligence reports. However, the size of some of the larger hooligan groups such at the Chelsea Headhunters was thought to be as high as five hundred. The majority of the larger superhooligan groups number in the one hundred and fifty to two hundred range, (Murphy et al., 1990). Some of the most notorious hooligan groups such as ‘Combat 18' are small in size, but make up for this lack of stature by their level of violence which included the killing of a West Ham fan by throwing him from a moving train.

A disturbing trend in the development of the superhooligan was the type of person becoming involved with soccer violence. The Keating (1985) profile highlighted some of these changes. Past studies of the occupations of convicted soccer hooligans tended to support the prevailing view that most were either in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs or unemployed.

Harrington's (1968) report based on collected relevant data on 497 convicted soccer hooligans supported this view, except for the numbers involved in skilled occupations. Specifically, it found that 206 or 41.4 per cent were employed as labourers or in unskilled manual occupations. A further 112, or 22.5 per cent, were employed in a semi-skilled capacity. Some 64 per cent of Harrington's sample, in other words, belonged to the Registrar General's Social Classes 4 and 5. However, even as early as 1968, some football hooligans came from higher up the social scale. Thus, fifty, or just over 10 per cent of Harrington's sample, were skilled manual workers and a further nineteen, just under 4 per cent, of Harrington's sample belonged to the Registrar General's Social Class 3. Two were even employed in a professional or managerial capacity and thus qualify for membership of the Registrar General's Social Classes 1 or 2. (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 88)

A later study by Trivizas in 1980 that examined 520 convicted soccer hooligans in the London area corroborated Harrington's findings. The majority of the hooligans came from "towards the bottom of the social scale" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 89). The popular view that soccer hooliganism emerged because of the rise in unemployment has never been a convincing argument. According to Dunning et al., (1988), "Football hooliganism emerged as a recognized social problem in a period when unemployment amongst young males was very low compared to the levels found in the 1980's and present." In the Trivizas study "Only 8 football-related offenses were committed by people in intermediate occupations, 6 by students, 3 by individuals in professional occupations and 3 by members of the armed forces" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 88).

These findings contradict the hooligan profile by Keating (1985) that held that some of the hooligans had professional jobs or were university students. However, the findings by Trivizas did not distinguish between hooligan and superhooligan group members. Although some of the superhooligans have prior soccer hooligan convictions many of them do not, and one of the characteristics of the new breed of soccer hooligans is their ability to escape police attention and capture.  
There are no complete occupational profiles of superhooligan groups available, but it is known that the leaders of these groups are not traditionally working class. An illustrative example is provided by Buford (1992) who describes a hooligan known as DJ in the following way.

In the figure of DJ I had the fundamental contradiction at its most concentrated. He had so many things going for him - education, intelligence, an awareness of the world, money, initiative, a strong and supportive family...Implicit in my thinking was the liberal commonplace that those who ‘turn against society' - I felt that destroying its property and inflicting injury on its members could be described as ‘turning against society' - have been denied access to it. This wasn't true of DJ.  
(Buford 1992: 220)

The profile of DJ does not fit that of a typical hooligan, and there are other contradictions. Terry Last, the convicted leader of the Chelsea Headhunters, was by no means the typical hooligan type. He was a clerk for a leading firm of London solicitors, training to take the English bar exam. He was described as a hard worker and friendly to staff. He was frail in build and a non-drinker (Keel, 1987). Nevertheless, Last was the leader and mastermind behind one of the largest superhooligan groups in the country, the Headhunters. He was eventually jailed when convicted of a razor attack on a rival fan.

Stephen Hickmott, another example of one not fitting the typical soccer hooligan profile, was the leader of the superhooligan group, the Cambridge Casuals; a group of about eighty members. The Casuals were known for their expensive clothes and yuppy life-styles along with a reputation for violence. Hickmott was a sales director for an engineering firm in Cambridge. He was sentenced in February 1985, for five years, because of his role in planning and organizing a surprise attack on a group of Chelsea supporters in a local pub (Kerr, 1994).

These profiles were not restricted to the leaders of the superhooligan groups, but applied to some of their ‘rank-and-file' members. Most of the superhooligan groups would spend large sums of money on their hooligan activity. The I.C.F. funded many of their hooligan activities by organizing, pay-at-the-door, warehouse ‘rave' parties, using the proceeds to travel in style to away games in England and abroad. According to Williams et al., (1984)

"Big money was involved here, much of it untraceable. With typical panache, a number of members of the ICF turned up in style in Italy for the World Cup Finals in 1990, staying at the five-star Carlton Hotel in Bologna..." (p. 173).

There are critics of this popular image of the superhooligan groups as high-spending, professional people, in good jobs. Dunning (1994) notes that the class origins of the majority of these superhooligans are "strikingly traditional" in terms of their working class roots. They believe the media has distorted the real picture by "massively hyping these hooligan generals," and by describing them as individuals "running their own businesses and managing banks" when in fact they were self-employed window cleaners, couriers, and irregularly employed clerks. Overall, however, there is agreement among the critics that this new breed of hooligan is willing to spend more money and dress with more style than their predecessors, while being the direct result of the "emergence of a rampant competitive individualism among a post-war skilled labor aristocracy" (Taylor, 1988, p. 188).

The superhooligan has been viewed strictly as an English problem, but superhooligan groups became prominent in Europe during the late 1980's. Williams and Wagg, (1991) provide some insight into the emergence of the superhooligan groups in Europe when they say:

"The ‘new style' of football violence, and the ‘organization' which went with it, became more important when, and the attractiveness and news value of football visits to Newcastle, Manchester, and other English locations began to pale, the lure of continental Europe with its never-closing bars, reluctance to convict foreign offenders and ill-defended stadiums, began to beckon (p. 169).

The police in England have persistently made life more difficult for the soccer hooligans, both in terms of preventing hooligan activity and dealing with it once it occurred. European police found it difficult to distinguish English soccer hooligans from normal fans, while in England police were able to identify convicted soccer hooligans, keep them under close surveillance, and prevent them from entering stadiums.

Often rival superhooligan groups in England joined forces to form what could be described as a soccer hooligan ‘coalition force' to face their European counterparts. At first, the English hooligans went unchallenged, but the incidents they were involved in helped to shape hooliganism and hooligan fighting ‘crews' on the continent Williams and Wagg, (1991). The superhooligan groups from European countries used the English as a measuring stick for their own performances. In soccer hooligan circles around Europe the English were "a tough, sometimes outrageous group of people having an exciting time and cocking a snook at everyone" (Ward, 1996, p. 108).

Before any European competition involving an English team, the leaders of the major superhooligan groups in England would join forces to plan strategies on how best to commit violence against foreign fans and rival hooligans. The superhooligans arrived at destinations unnoticed, without advertising the fact they were English soccer fans, by not wearing English soccer memorabilia or clothing. They stayed in upscale hotels avoiding the ‘rank-and-file' English soccer mobs. The superhooligans would wear paraphernalia from other countries so that they could blend in with their foreign rivals.  
During this period, cross-national contacts were growing between hooligan ringleaders from different European nations (Van Limbergen and Walgrave, 1988). Newspaper reports just before the European championships in 1988, described English hooligan ‘generals' "holding ‘summit' meetings with their Dutch equivalents on trains en route to West Germany" (‘Yobs Plot War,' Daily Star, 11 June, 1988).

The press began to devote more coverage to the superhooligan activities than they did to the actual play of the teams involved. The soccer hooligans enjoyed the press coverage and subsequently produced notoriety. The 1988 championships, for example, were billed in the English press as "a ‘showdown' between Europe's most notorious football hooligans" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 168). Even the quality English press described the upcoming championship as "the Hooligan Championship of Europe" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 168).

Incidents involving English soccer superhooligans in Europe continued. There were serious superhooligan incidents in Amsterdam when England was eliminated from the World Cup by Holland in the summer of 1994; English superhooligans ran pitched battles with Irish fans in Dublin, and rioting occurred in London when England played West Germany. Superhooligans had warned of the violence in advance, and leaked information to the press about events to come. Williams et al., (1984).

The media has continued to play a vital role in and throughout the historical development of soccer hooliganism. In particular television, which focused on activity in the terraces and on the "forms of crowd activity which began to draw some of its strength from the presence of television cameras" (Pearson, 1983, p. 108), has been a most ready and willing vehicle for portrayal and expansion of the hooliganism movement. Walvin (1986) makes the following reference to the role of the media in the development of soccer hooliganism stating; "certain groups of fans were happy to oblige, and to indulge in the very behavior TV had a natural penchant to project" (p. 67). The increasing amount of coverage soccer hooliganism received in the media implied a morbid curiosity with this phenomenon.

The media's "appalled fascination" (Williams and Wagg, 1991, p. 167) with the superhooligan gangs and their leaders "only served to heighten the mythologies around them and increase their attractiveness to a growing number of young men whose primary interest seemed to be male comradeship and the possibilities for trouble as much as the football" (p. 167). Men who would normally live life in obscurity could command a certain amount of national fame via appearances in front of news' cameras and on the front pages of newspapers.

The press regularly featured stories about the leaders of the superhooligan groups or ‘top men.' The publicity devoted to the individuals who ran the superhooligan groups made the identities of superhooligan leaders common knowledge to anyone reading newspapers. Members of superhooligan groups were "looking seriously only for the ‘top boys' at rival clubs, and the names and faces of key hooligans became common currency around the country" (Williams and Wagg, 1991, p. 168).

Individuals in West Ham's Inter City Firm were used as consultants in BBC's ‘The Firm' (1989) and "delighted in representations of the lads stockbroker belt life-styles and the trashing of the Golf convertibles and BMWs of rival hooligan gang leaders" (Williams and Wagg, 1991, p. 175). Younger hooligans, featured in the program, looked up to these individuals as role models.

The press also contributed, indirectly, to the escalation of superhooligan activities by "predictive reporting" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 122). Predictive reporting refers to the British press' practice of sensationalizing upcoming matches, and giving warnings that trouble would occur. A Chelsea fan, for example, convicted of carrying a concealed weapon stated that he had read in the press that the "West Ham lot were going to cause trouble and would be ‘gunning' for members of the Headhunters. (The Times, 31st October, 1988). Murphy et al., (1990) defines the role of the press in the following way

By defining match days and football grounds as times and places in which fighting could be engaged in and aggressive forms of masculinity displayed, the media, especially the national tabloid press, played a part of some moment in stimulating and shaping the development of soccer hooliganism (p. 122).

Murphy et al., (1990), believe that the amount of publicity given to the superhooligan groups and their leaders increased the membership ranks with "hardcases and other socio-pathic nutters" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 168), who were not previously involved with soccer hooliganism.

The media was not only engaged in reporting and predicting soccer superhooliganism, but it also led the call for remedial action against the soccer thugs. However, the media-advocated policy measures introduced to combat soccer superhooliganism "tended to displace the disorder on to the streets outside football grounds, sometimes at considerable distances from them, rather than to eradicate it" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 122).

Involvement by the media in soccer hooliganism included publishing their own ‘league tables of hooligan notoriety.' The Daily Mail September, 1986, ran a headline, "Chelsea tops thugs league" Murphy (1990), or, the Evening Standard had a center spread page on July 29, 1985, which read, "London league of violence" Murphy et al., (1990). The impact these articles have had on the reader depends on individual motivations. Superhooligans view the publicity as validating their activity. When an article is published, identifying the Chelsea Headhunters as the top superhooligan group, other superhooligans view this as a challenge to knock Chelsea off of the top spot.

The root causes of present-day soccer superhooliganism are deep and complex. Newspapers, in particular the tabloid press, "have made a contribution of some significance to the rise of present-day hooliganism and to giving it its distinctively contemporary form" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 124). Articles featuring stories on superhooligan group leaders, although not necessarily condoning them, rarely condemned their activities either. The press undoubtedly contributed to the "intensification of the status competition between rival hooligan groups" (Murphy et al., 1990, p. 124), and the tabloid press has been responsible for feature stories portraying superhooligan leaders as prosperous and from middle class backgrounds. Exaggeration on the part of the press, according to Canter (1989), further sensationalized the leaders concerned, which consequently attracted to superhooliganism some ‘non-typical' hooligan types. That the popular press is responsible for aiding and abetting the soccer superhooliganism phenomenon by its extensive and sensationalized coverage is patently obvious. The press could have played a key role in diffusing the soccer hooligan movement during its early stages - but it chose instead to use hooliganism to sell papers and, consequently, led in the emergence and establishment of Britian's soccer super-hooligans.