

# OPERATION FIXTURE

**Submission for the 2003 Tilley Award**

*from*

Lancashire Constabulary partnered by  
Burnley Football Club

**Category: Crime and Disorder Reduction**

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# Operation Fixture

## Summary

A minority of racist thugs affiliating themselves to Burnley FC were posing a threat to disorder which reached far beyond the arena of football. The so called 'Burnley Youth' were engaging in organized and spontaneous violence on match days in and around town centre pubs where the negative impact on public reassurance was often dramatic.

The wider threat included their potential involvement in the ever present risk of large scale disorder between Asian heritage and white offenders in the Burnley area. During the riots of summer 2001 a significant proportion of the white offenders were known football hooligans.

Analysis showed that the key to breaking the mechanics of the problem lay with changing offender behaviour of the 50-60 individuals that were at the heart of the problem.

The overarching aim of the initiative was to make the environment safer for those in the town centre and around the ground on match days by reducing the risk. The objectives were:

- **Prosecute, Ban & Disrupt** - Ensure all offences were systematically investigated and rigorously prosecuted. Seek super banning orders. Conduct disruption tactics before each game.
- **Media** - actively generate media exposure to reassure the public and impact on the hooligans.
- **Intelligence** - extend the intelligence footprint to secure better control and improve prosecution rates.

Or in the words used in the media launch we wanted to *'hurt them, let everybody know were hurting them and gather intelligence so that we can carry on hurting them'*.

A firm but fair approach was adopted, CCTV / EGT footage was systematically reviewed for any public order offences, prosecutions and bans followed with summons delivered to the doorstep of known offenders by Fixture officers. Disruption tactics, led by improved intelligence, were implemented prior to each game.

The media campaign was launched to intimidate and shame the thugs, posters of banned, convicted offenders were displayed by pubs and BFC. Licensees were provided with plastic glasses via the safer streets fund and in return they agreed to improve door security and amend opening hours during problematic games. Pivotal partnerships with the town Pub Watch Scheme, BFC and the council were all enhanced by the media campaign.

The results? 130 arrests this season compared to 40 last season and 40 banning orders compared to 17 last season, resulting in a significant reduction in the tangible threat of disorder during match day operations.

## OPERATION FIXTURE

### SCANNING

The introduction of Lord Clarke's Burnley Task Force Report conducted after the riots of 2001 provides an accurate description of some of the towns difficulties that contribute to problem of football violence and the ever present potential for more widespread disorder.

Burnley is an East Lancashire town set in the hill country of the Pennines with a population of 89,500. It's growth the nineteenth century is attributed to textile and heavy engineering industries. However it is a town in slow transition. Increasing unemployment, derelict and outdated buildings and infrastructure, significant in-work poverty due to low wage levels and an under-skilled workforce combined with under-attainment at school, remain key features of the local economy.

6 out of 8 Secondary schools fail to meet the national average for attaining 5 GCSE a to C grades with 3 significantly below.

Around 30% of all East Lancashire Income Support claimants live in inner Burnley. Burnley also suffers worse than national average incidents of premature death from coronary disease, cancers and respiratory diseases. Burnley has very high levels of teenage pregnancy, mental illness, drug and alcohol misuse.

High crime rates are evident, 44% of all crime within the division covering Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale, occurs in Burnley whilst the population accounts for just 33% of the same area.

Around 7% of the population are of Asian heritage concentrated in the Daneshouse ward, the most deprived ward in the Borough and amongst the worst 1% in England (only 7 out of 8414 are more deprived). Four of Burnley's 16 wards are within the worst 20% in England.

A recent Lancaster University Research project on "Racism among under 25's in Pennine Division", found alarming levels of racism were "part of the wallpaper" among young people in the town and that metaphorical glass walls divided insular and polarised communities.

In June 2001 widespread disorder occurred in the town instigated by criminal acts perpetrated by both white and Asian offenders. The white offenders were bigoted, racist thugs intent on creating more widespread disorder, many of whom were Burnley football hooligans who have right wing racist tendencies.

Turf Moor, the home of Burnley Football Club (BFC) enjoyed success during the 1960's and 70's but has failed to reach the premier division in recent years. The towns loyal fan base has ensured the Club enjoyed regular attendances of around 14,000 at each home game, a larger support base than other clubs in a similar position in the league.

The town has an active football hooligan element that regularly engages in disorder on match days but also presents a real and present threat of racist disorder. This problem manifests itself in the following predictable behaviour patterns. Racist chanting at the match including verbal and even physical attacks on Asian stewards. Heavy drinking following the matches led to attacks on Asian taxi drivers, and disturbances and assaults in public houses.

Local businesses have been attacked and damaged following games. Licencees and traders suffer the threat of longer-term losses if people fearing violence stayed away

It is a sad indictment but we had become accustomed to levels of football disorder, and its fair to say that there was a sense of inevitability about football violence.

During the latter half of last season a new, more menacing group began to emerge. This group, considerably younger, named themselves the Burnley Youth. They would associate with the older Hooligan group known as the Suicide Squad, but refused to abide by the rules of the game. This group was more determined and less affected by the Police tactics, than their older colleagues. The Police began to receive intelligence reports from members of the Suicide Squad who were genuinely concerned that their younger brethren were "out of control" and were travelling to away matches with weapons. The level of violence and the circumstances surrounding these incidents strongly supported these concerns (Wolves 2002, P.N.E. 2002)

Operations costing thousands of pounds were now the norm. (The subsequent Nathan Shaw murder enquiry cost £24,000 in overtime alone)

## ANALYSIS - Defining the problem

The problem analysis triangle was used to provide some structure and helped define the problem.

### Victims

#### *Offenders themselves*

Those subject of injury following assault, this group often includes the offenders who tended to be male, white, aged between 15 and 25 coming from both home and away supporters, numbers are likely to be under reported for that reason.

These assaults have the potential to be serious and have led to resource intensive enquiries to bring those responsible to trial.

#### *Innocent victims*

The groups of football thugs refer to non-combatants as "scarfers" and the evidence from intelligence sources; thug websites and interviews with offenders would appear to confirm it is rare for "scarfers" to be targeted. This however often conflicts with public's perception of the threat, which is greater than reality.

A recent and tragic case involved the murder of Nathan Shaw a visiting supporter who died from his injuries following an attack by Burnley hooligans. This tragic death shocked the community and galvanised public opinion against the hooligans

#### *Victims of race attacks*

Evidenced under Offender

#### *BFC*

The stigma and reputation of violence associated with the club reduces both decent local and visiting support with a significant loss in gate receipts. The cost to the community is arguably higher with decent folk afraid to support there local club adding to the towns problems and lack of cohesion.

### *Taxpayers*

The taxpayers of Lancashire and Burnley lose police resource diverted from other areas on match days to prevent disorder. There are obvious and realistic opportunities to reduce these costs if the level of threat posed by the thugs can be minimised.

### **Location**

Experience and post operation de-briefs indicated that the stadium was not the main area of concern, environs of the ground and the town centre proved more problematic by far. There were distinct problem areas that were strongly linked to time relative to the match, policing operations defined these periods as Pre, During and Post Match phases.

### *Pre Match*

Analysis showed that the two hours prior to kick off were high risk in terms of opportunity for conflict. We know from intelligence gathered and from the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) that mobile phones are used to co-ordinate activity as each group often co-operates in trying to avoid police and engage in violence. There is a strong link with licensed premises in the centre of town, which hosts both groups before after engagements that takes place. The objectives of the police operations were to identify both groups early and ensure they were monitored to prevent disorder. This involved escorting visiting prominents from the train station, or pub, to the ground and maintaining close control of home prominents in licensed premises. In order to increase the levels of control both groups were often searched under Section 60 and individually videotaped by Evidence Gathering Teams (EGT) to secure a record of their clothing to enhance detection should they later became involved in disorder.

As the match approaches the concentration of potential combatants near the ground increases the opportunity for conflict.

### *During Match*

During the game tensions often increased as events on the pitch develop. Though recent years have seen dramatic improvements to the structure and organization within stadiums there are still areas for concern. Burnley hooligans demonstrated territorial leanings towards the lower north stand. This location is close enough to exchange abusive and threatening behaviour with the away fans and presented a real hot spot for trouble that was unacceptable and would need to be addressed in the response.

### *Post Match*

Post match is the most problematic phase, the 14,000 people leave the ground within 8 minutes and fill the main roads surrounding the ground affording the best opportunity of the day for disorder, police resources are stretched at this time and there will always be opportunity for sporadic outbursts of violence. The main objective at this stage is to identify both groups and isolate the away hooligans to escort them to the rail station. Both groups, given the chance will head for the town centre pubs and attempt to meet for a fight. During this phase innocent supporters from both sides can be vulnerable to mistaken identity and attack.

The licensed premises in the town played a significant role as muster points for hooligans and would clearly form part of any solution.

### Offender

Burnley FC have the dubious and unfortunate honour of being unwilling host to a group of hooligans that are larger in number and more vociferous in their behaviour than clubs of a similar position in the league.

The hooligan element at Burnley proudly refers to themselves as the Burnley Suicide Squad. The self imposed title is derived from previous behaviour at away games where the single minded involvement in violence against overwhelming odds could be described as suicidal. The name became synonymous with the group during the early 1980's and many of the original members are now in their late thirties and early forties, many are well known to the police and have a string of convictions for violence.

This group was being replaced by a new generation of Hooligans called the "Burnley Youth", who were evolving into a forceful group, less influenced by Police tactics

There is a of mutual respect between rival groups and if rival groups converged to fight but were prevented by police presence both would leave with a degree of pride. Such circumstances were relatively common and the hooligans would return to there home town describing the failure to engage as having been "policed out". Internet comments, remarks to Police spotters and confidential sources confirmed this. The Burnley youth seem to have missed this subtle but important rule of combat and refused to accept that police presence was a bar to violence, indeed there was evidence at the PNE game in 2003 that the Police were the substitute targets of the group when an incident in the concourse within the ground at half time saw a sustained attack on two serials of police officers who were lured to the assistance of bar staff by the groups actions.

#### *Burnley Offender profile*

Analysis of those known to engage in violence led us to some common factors. Burnley hooligans are predominantly racist, male, white, aged between 16 - 35yrs, in gainful employment, few had any criminal convictions other than football related disorder, many had no convictions at all and were unknown to the police prior to the initiative.

#### *The racist threat*

The hooligan element at Burnley is overtly racist and holds extreme right wing views that presents and ongoing threat to disorder in the town. Evidence to support this statement include:

The key involvement of known hooligans during the riots of 2001

Intelligence that Chelsea and Burnley hooligans agreed and planned a joint attack on Asians in Burnley in September 2001 during a friendly fixture. A major policing operation involving more than 400 officers were required to prevent disorder.

Intelligence that Stoke and Burnley hooligans agreed and planned a joint attack on Asians in Burnley in 2002.

A viscous, alcohol fuelled attack on Asian taxi drivers in Burnley following the Sweden game during the 2002 World Cup.

Racist and inflammatory entries on the Burnley hooligan website "burnleylads.com"

Numerous arrests for racist chanting and a notable arrest of a prominent member of the Burnley Youth for nazi saluting at Tottenham fans. On arrest the offender's bedroom was found to be a shrine to the National Front and BNP.

The analysis helped define the extent of the problem which for some of us was more revealing than we expected.

The Analysis focussed our minds on the cyclical nature of the problem and helped forge our resolve that there must be a better way of impacting on the huge costs and negative impact of football violence.

These idiots, numbering less than a hundred, were generating a disproportionate amount of effort to keep the peace, we knew who they were, when, where and how they offended, it simply cried out for a medium term problem solving approach.

## RESPONSE

The use of the problem analysis triangle led us to a fairly predictable conclusion; the very best opportunity to break the mechanics of the problem lay in amending offender behaviour. We recognised that as with prolific recidivist volume criminals, if the personal risk of their actions were increased then the opportunities to offend would be reduced.

The offender profile analysis indicated areas of vulnerability:

They had few criminal convictions and were not yet insensitised to the judicial process.  
They enjoyed a cloak of anonymity behind which they led relatively normal lives beyond match days that could be disrupted.

Our response was designed to exploit these areas of opportunity.

PS Graham Lister and PC Steve Charnley were seconded to the operation from the Support Unit; they had a reasonable working knowledge of the problem and an enthusiasm for the solution. They were to work as a team with DC Mark Webster, the division's Football Intelligence Officer FIO.

### *The overarching aim*

Reduce the threat of disorder presented by the activity of football hooligans.

### *Objectives*

Simple and designed to capture the imagination and support of the public and partners:

1. **Prosecute and ban** offenders of football violence. Amended on review to include **disruption** of both home and away hooligan.
2. **Media** coverage to increase public confidence, encourage support from partners and intimidate the thugs.
3. **Intelligence** Improve intelligence to facilitate continuing activity.

### *Partnerships*

Were identified and the team began to build on relationships with regular meetings involving:

Burnley against Nighttime Disorder (BAND) This scheme bans known Football hooligans from all Burnley town centre pubs. Particularly those favoured by the Hooligans before and after matches. It publicly displays photographs of them, and disrupts their activities.

Burnley Borough Council (BBC), including the Crime and Disorder Partnership (CDP), Who were instrumental in introducing "CRYSTAL CLEAR" which is an on street drinking ban backed up with powers of arrest should anyone breach the ban.

Burnley Football Club (BFC)

Local Media

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS)

## Home Office

### Prosecute

Bringing those to book for their actions and therefore increasing the risk to their behaviour was vital. Clear performance indicators were set to increase the number of offenders arrested, prosecuted and banned.

A meeting was held with the Divisional Commander, the head of the local CPS and Magistrates to set the context of the problem in Burnley, seek advice about the new legislation allowing Antisocial Behaviour Orders to be imposed on sentence and to seek support for the objective.

During the meeting both agencies were offered the opportunity of an escorted visit to a match day operation to experience the difficulties faced with offender behaviour in these circumstances.

To increase prosecution capacity we developed a number of processes.

All tapes from CCTV within the ground and the town centre, Evidence Gathering Teams and helicopter were collected at the end of each operation, home and away. The tapes were systematically reviewed for evidence of offences involving the hooligans. This post incident methodical approach created prosecutions from incidents that could not have been dealt with on the day.

The local press published pictures of unidentified offenders with dramatic results, some offenders were identified several times over.

Summonses were hand delivered by members of the Fixture team at home addresses. Both the press involvement and the personal delivery had the additional psychological impact of revealing offender's behaviour to family, friends and work colleagues. During one such occasion an offender was visited at his place of work, within weeks he was wanted again but this time he contacted the Fixture office pleading to be allowed to attend the police station to avoid embarrassment.

### **Banning orders**

It was essential for long term impact to ensure that we had powers to control their movements on match days. The analysis proved that the majority of violent confrontation took place in the town centre before and after games so we set out to impose conditions preventing entry to the town centre by securing ASBO's on conviction. Following liaison and advice from the Home Office however it was decided to use existing football legislation. Traditionally forces and courts have only sought conditions preventing entry to football matches and have failed to recognise the full potential of this legislation which in fact allows any condition to be imposed if it can be shown that it would reduce the likelihood of football related violence.

The new "Super"Banning Orders were then developed, a package was put together containing a summary of the problem, generic conditions with accompanying map of the centre and distributed to custody offices. The conditions included a ban on entering the designated area of Burnley town centre for three hours before and after each home game and a ban on entering the borough hosting away matches. The orders last for three years and carry a power of arrest and potential custodial sentence if breached.

These banning orders are seen as the best opportunity to reduce organised football violence in Burnley. Therefore every effort is made to increase the success rate of applications both home and away. One of the main reasons for failure is the relatively minor nature of offences presented to courts and the lack of quality supporting evidence for ban applications. Advice was sought from CPS resulting in the creation of a chronological portfolio of video evidence of each offender's behaviour at fixtures throughout the season

presenting a clear pattern to the Court of the individuals contribution to the wider problem. This is supported with detailed written records of intelligence entries and offences involving the offender.

It has not always been possible to secure a favourable result at Magistrate's Court. For a few of the main ringleaders there is a second option currently being pursued. We have retained the services of a Barrister and are currently preparing cases for six banning orders on complaint during the close season. This is the first occasion that this tactic has been used in the country and early indications are that it will be successful.

### **Disruption**

The operation was reviewed regularly, on the first review it became clear that there was a gap in our approach, that of prevention. Disruption was added to the objectives and a menu of pro-active tactical options developed.

#### *Home visits*

Visiting home and away hooligans at their addresses prior to matches and serving warning letters threatening arrest if they appeared.

#### *Intelligence visits*

#### *Bans from town centre pubs*

BAND agreed to exclude twelve of the most prominent hooligans, in order to enforce the ban we took a risk and issued the photo and name of each on posters that were then displayed in every licensed premises in town. At the time this breached force protocol but was considered proportionate following the murder of Nathan Shaw.

#### *Posters BFC Bans*

Following the success of the pub scheme, BFC had over 100 life bans on their books; the difficulty of enforcement in a 14,000 crowd was overcome by the publication of similar posters displaying those that were banned. These were displayed at each turnstile to increase the risk of entry.

#### *Stadium announcements*

Where those subject of a BFC ban are identified in the crowd agreement has been reached that a stadium announcement will name the individual, identifying his position and requesting they leave immediately. It is strongly believed this will have the added benefit of embarrassing others to leave.

#### *The Lower North Stand*

Had been identified, as an area of concern, the solution has been to exclude the hooligans by reserving the area for accompanied children only.

#### *Plastic Glasses/Opening Times*

BAND were supplied with plastic glasses by the Police and agreed to use them exclusively when intelligence indicated the need. They also agreed to amend opening hours and employ additional door staff when asked by the Police for problematic games.

## **Media coverage**

### *Thug intimidation*

We intended to change behaviour by intimidating the thugs and putting them on the back foot, we wanted them to believe that the sky was falling down and the world was against them. By maintaining media pressure with requests for identification following incidents and reporting successful convictions we exploited the vulnerability identified and strip them of their cloak of anonymity. It was accepted that this strategy would involve a bold and risky approach to which also ensured media interest with continued radio and press interviews keeping the operation at the front of public awareness.

### *Reassuring the public*

We encouraged a new sense of purpose within the police, town centre licensees and BFC to kick hooliganism out the town, joint press interviews were arranged with BAND, BFC and Supporters Associations. Each new development with our partners was eagerly announced, the impact was tremendous. Exposure encouraged partnership involvement, developed a real sense of a common community goal. It was the hot topic of conversation on "burnleylads.com" proving the effectiveness of the strategy and elevating media as possibly the most effective partnerships.

## **Intelligence**

The divisions FIO, is a key member of the team and has developed a range IT solutions to improve the levels of intelligence received by officers on match day deployments. The high profile, briefings on match days and increased prosecutions all contributed to better intelligence flow.

Support unit teams were deployed to familiarise themselves with the thugs and conduct intelligence interviews, this received a mixed response from their families and neighbours and at least one hooligan was arrested for public order due to his behaviour.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### *Prosecute*

During the 2001-2002 season there was a total of 40 arrests of Burnley thugs.

During the 2002-2003 season there was a total of 130 prosecutions.

Op Fixture began in November 2002. This figure includes arrests at fixtures, arrests following investigations and arrests following breaches of banning orders.

These figures do not represent an increase in trouble associated with match days, analysis shows 55 of the additional arrests stemmed from greater scrutiny of C.C.T.V. and Police evidence gatherers tapes, proactively seeking to detect offences disclosed.

As awareness of Operation Fixture grew, ground stewards and supporters club members, were less tolerant of unacceptable behaviour, and began to report more offences to the Police. This increased information led to further arrests (Reading fixture, information provided identity of several pitch encroachers and people who threw missiles at the goalkeeper)

### *Ban*

Banning orders for three years at the beginning of this season there were 17 Banning orders in force. There are currently 40 banning orders with a planned private application for a further 6 in the close season.

In April a prosecution at Burnley Magistrates Court, brought about by Op Fixture officers, received the first custodial sentence for the offence in the country.

The systems and processes developed by the team are considered by the Home Office and NCIS as best practice directly resulting in an award of £170,000 from a Home Office fund that has the sole objective of increasing banning orders prior to the 2004 European Championships.

### *Disrupt*

The disruption tactics have been directly responsible for reduced the risk by limiting the numbers of both sets of hooligans attending matchdays at Burnley.

During derby between Preston and Burnley earlier this season there were numerous incidents of disorder and 25 arrests. Following home visits and serving warning letters, the corresponding fixture at Burnley in April was very poorly attended by both sets of jobs, had no instances of disorder and had only one arrest following a pitch encroachment by a single male.

Website quotes following this game included the following from a PNE thug to Burnley thugs, "*Had letters from the old bill just like you, probably stay away for this one...*"

### *Media*

There have been enumerating articles and quotes to local media since the launch of Fixture, some of which are contained in the appendices. Radio interviews include BBC Radio Lancashire and 2BR, There have been three arranged press conferences and interest continues to grow. The operation has been proclaimed an ongoing success, has become the topic of many conversations and is receiving widespread support among the public of Burnley.

### *Intelligence*

Both the internal and external profile of the problem has been dramatically raised increasing the intelligence flow from officers on match day deployments and public alike.

The intelligence files on those known to be involved has risen from about 25 to over 60 as a consequence of the operation.

Additional informants have been recruited and at least one has resumed activity because, as he puts it: "*I can now see that something's going to be done*"

This increased intelligence has directly contributed to real time management of the problem and increased the levels of success of match day operations both at home and away.

### *Costs*

Cost savings are realistically anticipated next season as appropriate resource reductions reflect the decrease in threat

### *Perception*

Difficult to establish, but the media coverage, letters of commendation from the public and stakeholders feedback all suggest a tangible reduction in the effects of the fear of match day violence. De-brief sessions with club stewards and officers working match days report a friendlier atmosphere at the club. Although attendances at fixtures have decreased slightly, (which is partly attributable to poor performance of the team on the pitch) closer inspection of ticket sales shows an increase in the Family enclosure, and juvenile ticket sales and a decrease in the area frequented by the Hooligans