

## **World Cup 2010: England fans lose their reputation for violence**

British police in South Africa report no football-related arrests, save for the fan that entered the England dressing room. The players made the country sweat on the pitch. But off it the 2010 World Cup has succeeded in rehabilitating the reputation of England's travelling support, according to British police in South Africa. In the wake of England's qualification for the second round, they said today that there had been no football-related arrests in South Africa at all – save for the fan who confronted David Beckham in the dressing room following the draw in Cape Town, who will appear in court again tomorrow.

"It's absolutely unheard of. There has been nothing untoward at all. The English fans have been ambassadors for their country. We're delighted," said Andy Holt, the assistant chief constable in charge of a group of 12 British police officers liaising with South African colleagues. He said the stereotype of the travelling England fan as a beer-swilling, tattooed oaf with a penchant for hurling plastic furniture had been consigned to history, with measures taken in the last 10 years to ban known hooligans and a shift in demographics boosting the number of families, women and children following the team.

"This hasn't happened by accident. There has been a cultural shift around England support," said Holt.

"What we're seeing is that those that pose a risk of disorder are kept at home through the imposition of football banning orders," he added, referring to the 3,143 people banned from travelling for the duration of the tournament.

"That has allowed people to travel here that perhaps wouldn't have considered it if they thought there were risks of disorder. I have spoken to dozens and dozens of fans and there are loads of husbands and wives, fathers and sons, couples who have come away with friends for a holiday combined with the football."

Police were prepared for "tension" between fans in advance of England's second round match with Germany on Sunday, Holt said, but he hoped that game would also be trouble-free.

Sean Nevitt from Luton, on holiday with his wife and three sons, said they had combined their summer holiday with the World Cup. "It's a beautiful country and it's a great experience for the boys. The welcome has been phenomenal. There has been no trouble at all, but there never is," he said. They had been to Table Mountain and Robben Island and were heading off on safari before going to the Germany game. Although groups of fans drank and sang all day in Cape Town before the Algeria match last week, Holt said there had been no issues as they mingled with opposing supporters. The same was true on Wednesday in Port Elizabeth, where travelling England fans gathered in the bars and restaurants of the city's beachfront chanted "we're not going home" and looked forward to their clash with Germany. Another factor has been the warmth of the welcome from their South African hosts, many of them following England in replica tops and tracksuits.

Kevin Miles, the director of international affairs at the Football Supporters Federation, said that alongside diehard England fans that had been to every qualifier, the easier availability of tickets and the attraction of a holiday in South Africa had attracted a different sort of first time fan. Some have been to South Africa before to follow the British Lions or the England cricket team and are here as much to experience the wildlife, the scenery, the wine and the steaks as the football.

This World Cup, at which an estimated 20,000 travelling England fans are expected to be bolstered by others arriving from the UK to replace those going home, has highlighted a shift in support that has been going on for the past decade. "The whole atmosphere here in South Africa has been conducive to a friendly and well-run tournament. We haven't seen the opportunity for those confrontational bouts of drinking that have marred football previously," said Holt.

It has not been entirely peaceful on the home front however, with some violence involving England fans at an open-air screening in Bristol and four arrests at a screening in Manchester. Alcohol was banned and the capacity reduced at the fan park in Bristol following "yobbish" behaviour during the opening match against the USA. Extra police officers and stewards were brought in to make sure there was no repeat of the scenes. There were four arrests at the fan zone in Manchester on the day of England's first game and complaints there that yobbish behaviour had spoiled the screening for some. But since then there have been few problems at either fan park.

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