

top 10 english football hooligan firms

Top 10 English football hooligan firms have long been a subject of fascination and concern within the realm of sports culture and law enforcement. These groups, often identified by their distinctive banners, colors, and fierce rivalries, have played a significant role in the history of English football. While football hooliganism has decreased considerably over recent decades thanks to stricter policing and social initiatives, the legacy of these firms remains embedded in the history of the sport. In this article, we explore the most notorious and influential English football hooligan firms, their origins, characteristics, and impact on football culture.

Understanding Football Hooligan Firms

Before diving into the specifics of the top firms, it is essential to understand what defines a football hooligan firm. These groups are often characterized by organized violence, rivalry, and a sense of identity rooted in their support for a particular club. Usually, they are associated with a specific geographic area or club, and their activities can range from petty vandalism to large-scale violent clashes with rival firms.

While the majority of football fans are peaceful and passionate supporters, hooligan firms have historically engaged in aggressive confrontations, often fueled by intense rivalries. Their activities have led to numerous injuries, arrests, and widespread media coverage, prompting authorities to implement measures aimed at curbing their influence.

Historical Context of Football Hooliganism in England

Football hooliganism in England gained prominence during the 1960s and 1970s. The phenomenon was linked to broader social issues, including youth unemployment and social unrest. The culture of violence often manifested during matches, especially in the form of clashes between rival firms.

The 1980s marked the peak of hooligan activity, with violent incidents frequently making headlines. Notorious incidents like the Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985, which resulted in 39 deaths, underscored the deadly potential of hooliganism, prompting major reforms in stadium safety and policing.

In recent decades, concerted efforts by police, football clubs, and governing bodies have significantly reduced hooligan activity. However, remnants of these firms still exist, and their historical influence remains a topic of interest.

Top 10 English Football Hooligan Firms

Below is a list of the most infamous and historically significant hooligan firms in English football. The list is arranged chronologically based on their prominence and impact.

1. The Inter City Firm (ICF) – West Ham United

The Inter City Firm, or ICF, is arguably the most famous hooligan firm in English football history. Originating in the late 1970s and peaking during the 1980s, the ICF was known for its organized violence and rivalry with other firms.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Known for violent clashes with rival firms such as the Millwall Bushwackers and Chelsea Headhunters.
- Regularly traveled across the UK and Europe to engage in violent confrontations.
- Developed a reputation for discipline and coordination in their operations.

Impact:

The ICF became emblematic of football hooliganism in England and was the subject of numerous police crackdowns. Their notoriety contributed to the broader awareness of football violence and prompted reforms in stadium security.

2. The Millwall Bushwackers – Millwall FC

The Bushwackers emerged in the late 1970s and became one of the most aggressive firms associated with Millwall FC.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Known for their confrontational tactics and violent clashes with other firms.
- Engaged in fights both inside and outside stadiums.
- Maintained a fiercely loyal and intimidating presence.

Impact:

Their rivalry with the ICF and other firms contributed to a turbulent football scene during their peak years. Millwall's reputation was significantly affected by the actions of the Bushwackers, influencing club policies and security measures.

3. Chelsea Headhunters – Chelsea FC

Active predominantly during the 1980s and early 1990s, the Chelsea Headhunters gained notoriety for their brutal violence.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Engaged in violent clashes with rival firms such as the Tottenham Hotspur and Millwall gangs.
- Known for their distinctive dress and aggressive tactics.
- Involved in several high-profile violent incidents, including assaults on rival supporters.

Impact:

The Chelsea Headhunters' activities led to increased policing and the implementation of banning orders. Their notoriety helped in raising awareness about football-related violence in London.

4. The Green Street Elite – West Ham United

Inspired by the film "Green Street," this firm was thought to be a real organization rooted in West Ham's hooligan culture.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Known for violent skirmishes during matches and outside stadiums.
- Their rivalry extended to other London clubs like Millwall and Chelsea.
- Often involved in confrontations with police and rival firms.

Impact:

Although perhaps more myth than reality, the Green Street Elite symbolized the hooligan subculture in East London.

5. The Newcastle United Casuals – Newcastle United

Emerging in the 1970s, the Newcastle United Casuals were part of the casual hooligan scene, characterized by their fashion and organized violence.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Known for their stylish dress code, including designer clothes and football shirts.
- Involved in violent clashes during matches, especially in the North East region.
- Maintained a strong camaraderie and organization.

Impact:

Their influence extended beyond violence, affecting football fashion trends and supporter culture in Newcastle.

6. The Leeds United Service Crew – Leeds United

Active during the 1970s and 1980s, the Service Crew was notorious for their aggressive behavior.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Known for violent clashes with rival firms such as Manchester United's Red Army.
- Engaged in vandalism and physical confrontations during matches.
- Maintained a disciplined organization.

Impact:

Their activities contributed to the tense football atmosphere in Yorkshire and prompted security reforms.

7. The Red Army – Manchester United

While primarily known as a supporter group, some factions within the Red Army engaged in hooligan activities.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Involved in organized violence against rival firms.
- Known for their passionate support and sometimes aggressive behavior.
- Were involved in notable clashes with the Leeds United Service Crew.

Impact:

The Red Army's hooligan branch played a role in the violent reputation of Manchester United supporters during the 1980s.

8. The Inter City Firm (ICF) – Arsenal FC

Though sharing initials with the West Ham ICF, the Arsenal firm was a separate entity known for their confrontations in the 1980s.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Involved in fights with rival London clubs like Tottenham.
- Known for their disciplined and organized approach.

- Participated in violent clashes across England.

Impact:

The Arsenal firm contributed to the broader culture of football hooliganism in London and influenced policing strategies.

9. The Leeds United Casuals – Leeds United

Similar to other casual firms, the Leeds United Casuals were active in the late 20th century.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Recognized for their fashion style and organized violence.
- Engaged primarily in clashes within the North of England.
- Maintained a sense of loyalty and organization.

Impact:

Their activity added to the tense football environment in Yorkshire, leading to increased security measures.

10. The Tottenham Hotspur Football Casuals – Tottenham Hotspur

Part of the broader casual scene, the Tottenham firm was involved in violent encounters during the 1980s.

Characteristics and Activities:

- Known for their fashion and organized brawls.
- Engaged in rivalries with firms like the Chelsea Headhunters.
- Participated in violent incidents both inside and outside stadiums.

Impact:

Their presence highlighted the importance of targeted policing and led to measures aimed at disrupting

casual groups.

The Decline of Football Hooligan Firms

Over the past few decades, the aggressive activities of these firms have significantly diminished due to various factors:

- Enhanced stadium security and CCTV surveillance.
- Stricter laws and harsher penalties for violence.
- Active policing and intelligence operations targeting hooligan networks.
- A shift in football supporter culture towards more family-friendly atmospheres.

Despite the decline, some groups still operate on a smaller scale or through online platforms, and the history of these firms continues to influence football policies and fan culture.

Conclusion

The top 10 English football hooligan firms represent a complex and often troubling chapter in the history of the sport. While their influence has waned, understanding their origins, activities, and impact is essential for appreciating the ongoing efforts to promote safe and enjoyable football environments. The legacy of these firms serves as a reminder of the importance of community, regulation, and responsible support in the beautiful game.

References and Further Reading

- "Football Hooliganism: The Wider Context" – Journal of Sport & Social Issues
- "The History of Football Violence in England" – BBC Sport Archives
- "Inside the Mind of a Football Hooligan" – Book by Clive Gifford
- National Football Museum: Hooligan History Resources
- Police Reports and Case Studies on Football Violence

Note: This article aims to provide historical insight and does not endorse or glorify hooliganism

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some of the most notorious English football hooligan firms in history?

Some of the most notorious English football hooligan firms include the Chelsea Headhunters, West Ham Inter City Firm (ICF), Millwall Bushwackers, Arsenal's Inter City Firm, and Leeds United's Service Crew. These groups gained notoriety for violent clashes and organized hooligan activities during the 1970s and 1980s.

How have law enforcement agencies responded to the activities of top football hooligan firms?

Law enforcement agencies have implemented measures such as banning orders, increased surveillance, and coordinated patrols to monitor and prevent hooligan activities. Football banning orders restrict known hooligans from attending matches, while stadium security has been heightened to deter violence.

Are football hooligan firms still active in English football today?

While the violent hooliganism associated with these firms has significantly declined since the 1990s due to stricter laws and security measures, some groups still exist in a less organized form. Overall, active hooligan firm activities have decreased, but sporadic incidents still occur.

What are the reasons behind the formation of these football hooligan firms?

Hooligan firms often form due to a combination of factors such as local identity, rivalry, a desire for

camaraderie, thrill-seeking behavior, and social or economic frustrations. They also sometimes emerge from existing supporter groups seeking a sense of belonging or dominance.

Which English football clubs are historically associated with notorious hooligan firms?

Historically, clubs like Millwall (Bushwackers), Chelsea (Headhunters), West Ham (ICF), Arsenal (Inter City Firm), Leeds United (Service Crew), and Birmingham City (Zulus) are associated with notorious hooligan firms.

Have efforts been successful in reducing violence caused by top football hooligan firms?

Yes, concerted efforts including legal actions, improved stadium security, fan education, and community outreach have significantly reduced violent incidents associated with hooligan firms. As a result, football matches are now generally safer environments.

What impact did the prominence of hooligan firms have on English football's reputation internationally?

The prominence of hooligan firms in the 1970s and 1980s tarnished England's football reputation, leading to bans on English clubs from UEFA competitions in 1985. However, subsequent reforms and improved security have helped restore the sport's image globally.

Additional Resources

Top 10 English Football Hooligan Firms: An In-Depth Examination

Football hooliganism has long been a controversial and often troubling aspect of the sport's history in England. Over the decades, certain groups—commonly referred to as "firms"—have gained notoriety for their involvement in violent clashes, intimidation tactics, and a culture rooted in rivalry and identity.

While these groups are largely viewed as a dark stain on the beautiful game, understanding their origins, structures, and activities offers insight into a complex social phenomenon. This detailed review explores the top 10 English football hooligan firms, examining their histories, characteristics, and the broader context of hooligan culture.

Understanding Football Hooliganism in England

Before delving into specific firms, it's essential to grasp the broader landscape of hooligan culture in England:

- **Historical Roots:** Post-war Britain saw a rise in football hooliganism, often linked to working-class identity, regional rivalries, and social unrest.
 - **Organization and Structure:** Many firms operate with hierarchical structures, symbols, and codes of conduct, resembling subcultures with their own norms and language.
 - **Activities:** Clashes with rival firms, violence against supporters of other teams, vandalism, and sometimes involvement in organized crime.
 - **Law Enforcement Response:** Over the years, police tactics such as "kettling," intelligence operations, and legislation like the Football Offences Act 1989 aimed to curb hooligan activities.
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Criteria for Ranking the Top 10 Firms

The list below is based on several factors:

- Historical prominence and longevity

- Level of violence and notoriety
- Organizational structure and influence
- Notable incidents involving the group
- Media coverage and public perception

While some groups have dissolved or diminished over time, their historical impact ensures they remain significant in the hooligan landscape.

The Top 10 English Football Hooligan Firms

1. Chelsea Headhunters

Overview: Arguably the most infamous football hooligan firm in England, the Chelsea Headhunters have a notorious reputation dating back to the late 1970s and early 1980s. Their name became synonymous with violent clashes and organized violence.

Origins and Development:

- Formed in the late 1970s, originally as a subset of Chelsea supporters.
- Became a highly organized and disciplined firm, with a clear hierarchy.
- Known for their distinctive "Headhunter" tattoos and symbols.

Key Incidents:

- Notorious for their violence against Tottenham Hotspur fans in the 1980s.
- Involved in various clashes across Europe, including in France and Belgium.
- Their violent reputation was cemented during the 1984 European Cup match against Real Madrid, where a riot ensued.

Characteristics:

- Known for wearing black and yellow colors, reflecting Chelsea's team colors.
- Used tactical violence and intimidation.
- Maintained a strict code of conduct among members, emphasizing discipline.

Impact:

- Their activities led to increased police crackdowns.
- They became a symbol of the hooligan era in English football.

2. The Inter City Firm (ICF) – West Ham United

Overview: The ICF is one of the most well-known and enduring hooligan groups, formed in the 1970s. It has historically been linked to West Ham United but has also been associated with wider anti-establishment sentiments.

Origins and Development:

- Originated from West Ham United supporters' casual scene.
- Gained notoriety for their organized violence and reputation for fighting rival firms.
- Their name reflects their nickname for the London-Essex train service, symbolizing their mobility.

Key Incidents:

- Known for clashes with Chelsea Headhunters and Millwall Bushwackers.
- Involved in violent incidents during matches against Millwall, especially at the Old Den stadium.
- Notorious for their role in the 1978 "Battle of Highbury" against Arsenal fans.

Characteristics:

- Used coordinated tactics during clashes.
- Their members often wore casual fashion, with specific colors and symbols.

Decline and Legacy:

- The group's influence waned in the late 1990s due to intensified policing and legal measures.
- Still, their name remains symbolic of a turbulent era in football hooliganism.

3. Millwall Bushwackers

Overview: The Millwall Bushwackers are infamous for their aggressive reputation and longstanding rivalry with other London clubs, especially West Ham and Charlton Athletic.

Origins and Development:

- Formed in the late 1960s, initially as a social club.
- Became a prominent hooligan firm during the 1970s and 1980s.
- Known for their brutal violence and loyalty to Millwall FC.

Key Incidents:

- Numerous clashes with West Ham's ICF, especially in the 1980s.
- Involved in the 1985 match against Luton Town where violence escalated.
- Their reputation was further cemented through incidents of vandalism and assaults on rival fans.

Characteristics:

- Known for their intimidating presence.
- Often identified by their "Bushwacker" tattoos and symbols.

Impact:

- Their activities contributed to Millwall's reputation as a club with a violent hooligan element.
- The firm's violence led to increased policing and stadium bans.

4. The Zulu Warriors – West Ham United

Overview: A subset of the ICF, the Zulu Warriors have a more dedicated, militant reputation within the hooligan scene. Their name derives from the Zulu cultural symbol, emphasizing strength and unity.

Origins and Development:

- Emerged in the late 1980s as a more aggressive faction within the ICF.
- Known for their distinctive dress and tactics during clashes.

Key Incidents:

- Involved in violent confrontations with rival firms, especially Millwall and Chelsea.
- Notorious for their confrontational style during away matches.

Characteristics:

- Known for their "Zulu" tattoos and face paint.
- Their code emphasizes loyalty and militant discipline.

Impact:

- Their presence heightened tensions during matches involving West Ham.
- Their activities contributed to the broader narrative of organized hooligan violence in London.

5. Millwall Loyal (The Bushwackers Revival)

Overview: While the original Bushwackers declined in influence, a newer generation of Millwall supporters branded themselves as Loyal, attempting to revive the firm's reputation.

Origins and Development:

- Formed in the early 2000s.
- Aimed to rekindle the old hooligan spirit associated with Millwall.

Activities:

- Engaged in organized clashes and intimidation tactics.
- Participated in confrontations with rival firms, especially during high-stakes matches.

Modern Context:

- Operating in a more subdued manner due to increased policing.
- Their presence remains a concern for authorities and club officials.

6. Leeds United Service Crew

Overview: The Leeds United Service Crew emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as the primary hooligan firm associated with Leeds United.

Origins and Development:

- Developed from casual supporters and street gangs.
- Known for their aggressive approach and loyalty to Leeds.

Key Incidents:

- Clashes with Manchester United supporters, notably in the 1970s.
- Involved in violent incidents during matches at Elland Road and away fixtures.

Characteristics:

- Known for their distinctive "Service Crew" tattoos and symbols.
- Their reputation was marked by numerous convictions for violence.

Impact:

- Contributed to Leeds United's reputation as a club with a hooligan element.
- Led to increased security measures at matches.

7. Sheffield United The Herd

Overview: The Herd is the main hooligan firm linked to Sheffield United, with a history dating back to the 1980s.

Origins and Development:

- Originated from local street gangs.
- Gained notoriety for their confrontations with rival clubs such as Sheffield Wednesday and Leeds United.

Key Incidents:

- Clashes during derbies, notably the Sheffield Derby.
- Involved in violent incidents across the country.

Characteristics:

- Known for their loyalty and organized tactics.
- Tattoos and symbols are used to identify members.

Impact:

- Their activities have led to bans and police crackdowns.
- They remain a significant part of Sheffield United's hooligan history.

8. Birmingham City Casuals

Overview: The Birmingham City Casuals emerged in the late 1970s and have been involved in various violent incidents over the years.

Origins and Development:

- Part of the casual supporter scene.
- Known for their street-fighting tactics.

Key Incidents:

- Clashes with Aston Villa supporters during derby matches.
- Involved in riots and violent confrontations across venues.

Characteristics:

- Known for casual fashion, tattoos, and specific symbols.
- Maintain a secretive and disciplined organizational structure.

Impact:

- Contributed to Birmingham's reputation for football violence.
- Their activities prompted police interventions.

9. Newcastle United Daft Army

Overview: The Daft Army has historically been the hooligan firm associated with Newcastle United, especially prominent during the 1980s.

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