

WHITE RIOT

When Millwall fans started punching anyone in sight at an FA Cup game being shown live on TV, it reignited memories of the hooligan blighted days of yesteryear. **Max Daly** on how the rise of cocaine is fuelling a new breed of football thug.

The outbreak of crowd violence that marred the televised FA Cup semi-final game between Millwall and Wigan at Wembley in April surprised many observers. It was the worst bout of hooliganism seen at the national stadium since it reopened six years ago. Millwall fans fought police and Wigan fans. But strangely, most of the fighting involved Millwall supporters attacking each other, rather than rival supporters.

Over the next few days, police started to examine reports that many of the Millwall fans had been seen snorting cocaine before the trouble broke out. One angry Millwall supporter told *The Daily Mirror*: "There was no attempt to cover up what they were doing. They were openly snorting cocaine like other lads were downing lager."

Of the 14 fans arrested at the game, three were found in possession of a Class A drug, believed to be cocaine. The next week, *The Sun* found that half the cubicles tested at the Millwall's home ground, the New Den, tested positive for cocaine.

On the same weekend as the Wembley match, there were 29 arrests after vicious fighting broke out at the Tyne-Wear derby game between Newcastle and Sunderland, during which one fan punched a police horse. Also that day a group of 11 Watford supporters were arrested at Kings Cross station for public order offences, with one being found in possession of cocaine.

In February, ten Charlton Athletic hooligans were arrested after they smashed up cars and garden walls in south London following their team's loss at local rivals Crystal Palace. Two of them were caught in possession of cocaine.

Football violence is far less common today than it was 20 or 30 years

ago, when hooliganism was highly organized and widespread. Banning orders and more sophisticated policing have severely curtailed fighting on the terraces and outside grounds.

But more common use of cocaine among the general population, has seen it become the illegal drug of choice for the modern day hooligan. And it is a drug that combines with the traditional intoxicant, alcohol, to act as a performance enhancing drug for thugs.

To fans intent on getting involved in some match day violence, cocaine can also provide feelings of alertness, exhilaration and physical strength thugs feel are important before going into 'battle'.

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Tony, a Nottingham Forest FC hooligan and English Defence League (EDL) supporter interviewed for my 2012 book, *Narcomania*, told me that taking cocaine was a regular part of getting ready for a match.

"You've got to have a swagger, and a few lines of coke will help you along. Coke enhances the feeling, the arrogance and the bravado. You feel you can take anyone on. On the coach, you will see lads snorting off the tables, bags or wraps of coke will be passed around with everyone taking a dab.

"Cocaine keeps your thought processes alive; too much alcohol deadens them. The last thing you want

is not to be able to function properly. You need your wits about you. With the natural adrenaline of meeting your rivals, it's a powerful thing."

Cocaine, says Tony, is also a drug used by the football thugs who make up a large proportion of those attending EDL marches in Britain. "We always have a bit of coke before a rally. It sets you up nicely and gets you in the mood for a fight," he said.

Andy Holt, the Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo) lead on football policing, told the BBC that cocaine use among fans presented the police with a new challenge: "There is certainly a link between substance misuse and violence in today's game, particularly when you start mixing cocaine and alcohol," he said. "People become very volatile, very hard to control and sometimes they are not rational.

"There are a whole range of initiatives to combat this, such as sniffer dogs to police the queues as they go into the ground. But it is not impossible for people to smuggle drugs into grounds, or to take them in public house toilets before they go in. These things happen and we've got to do all we can with both the licensees and the clubs to make it as difficult as possible to watch football under the influence of alcohol or drugs."

To some extent, fan's behavior has been influenced by the changing drug scene. During the rave era in the 1990s and 2000s football fans were more likely to take ecstasy. Research carried out by Mark Gilman, at the time a drug worker in the north west of England, found that for a period in the early 1990s, football hooligans were "more interested in raving than rowing".

Instead of engaging in the regular beer-soaked brawling at the derby



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games, rival Manchester United and City teams were starting to mingle on the terraces, having taken ecstasy and dancing together in the same clubs the night before. Talk of organising the next fight had turned to talk of where the next outdoor rave was.

But, as Gilman pointed out at the time, youth culture, and drug culture, are highly changeable beasts. When in the 2000s cocaine began to filter down to blue collar workers to become an increasingly acceptable part of modern working class culture, the days of loved-up football rivals passing round the pills ended.

But while football hooligans may use cocaine for social reasons and to prepare themselves mentally for a confrontation, does the drug actually breed violence?

Statistics gathered by the Greater Manchester Police of people arrested for violent assaults over seven months between 2007 and 2008 (see Druglink March-April 2009) found that half tested positive for drugs. Of these, almost two thirds (62%) tested positive for cocaine only. Is this just because lots of people just happen to use cocaine? Probably not.

The range of emotions that cocaine and alcohol can each produce in people – for example over-confidence, irritability, loss of inhibition, confusion and paranoia – lend themselves to an increase in violent encounters. Much depends on the individual, for some these drugs, particularly cocaine, can engender more of a ‘flight’ than ‘fight’

reaction to danger. However, cocaine’s ability to keep people awake undeniably enables them to drink more alcohol.

According to *Bars, drugs and football thugs: alcohol, cocaine use and violence in the night time economy among English football firms*, a research paper by Tammy Ayers and James Treadwell at the University of Leicester, both cocaine and alcohol can be linked to violent behavior.

‘Independently, both substances are disproportionately connected to violence. However, when used together the violence tends to be exacerbated and becomes more volatile: the heavier the use the more severe the violence is likely to be.

The two drugs create a third, cocaethylene, which triggers a further high but also is highly liver toxic. Studies have shown that cocaethylene also increases the propensity for violence. While there is concern about the potential for violence within heavy users of cocaine and alcohol, some drug services are also warning about the health affects on these people’s own bodies.

Drug charity Chillout Sound Support carried out research into the links between football hooliganism and cocaine after noticing a rising number of service users being treated for cocaine and alcohol were members of local football firms. The charity prepared a report for Nottinghamshire City Primary Care Trust in 2009. It found that cocaine use, especially alongside alcohol, had

become “normalized” among football fans. It said: “Relevant health messages needed to reach these clients in a way that is credible to them, otherwise serious health issues already identified will get worse.”

The supply side of the cocaine trade has close links with football’s more violent elements. While many football thugs are otherwise perfectly law-abiding family men and professionals, others are involved at various levels in organized crime.

Former Barclays bank project manager Malcolm Carle, 57, was jailed for six years in March for laundering drugs money for one of Britain’s biggest cocaine gangs. As chairman of the North West Chelsea Supporters Club, Carle was regularly quoted in in the press, but he also hid a conviction for football violence.

PC Pete Dearden, Arsenal’s football intelligence officer told *The Observer* in 2010: “Cocaine... gives them that strength of character to go into situations where otherwise they might have been frightened. It makes them braver. “The best way for me to curtail the activities of my risk group [in Islington, Arsenal’s borough] is to cut off their supply of cocaine – with good intelligence, arresting the person supplying them.”

■ **Max Daly** is author of *Narcomania: A Journey Through Britain’s Drug World* published by Random House