

Football fan culture in the Czech Republic **Development, problems, causes**

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The beginnings of football and football fandom

Football appeared in Bohemia in the 1890s, but like other branches of sport (rowing, cycling, and later skating, fencing, shooting, and athletics), which spread here primarily from England, it faced conservative opposition from the Sokol management (the physical training organization founded on February 16, 1862), which refused to recognise it as a sports movement and insisted on their own conception of physical training activities. Football was cultivated in Bohemia primarily by Germans, and the most powerful team was Regatta Prag, which ranked among the best in the Czech lands from 1885-95. Czech athletes became intensively engaged in football by the second half of the 1880s, but they played it for the most part to diversify training for rowing and cycling.

This was done, for example, in Klub velocipedistů Praha, Klub velocipedistů Smíchov, ČAF Roudnice, and the International Rosiny Club. Of the members of these clubs, students and the youth played football and became avid enthusiasts and boosters of the new ball game, despite the fact that they were admonished and subject to disciplinary action from most professors for their desire for physical activity and love of the ball game. In Prague, Czech students and young people played football around 1889 on Císařská (Královská) louka (Imperial (Royal) Meadow), in Stromovec, in Letná, and in Invalidovna (Vaněk et al. 1984).

At the beginning of the 1890s, football was also played at the chateau in Lučen u Nymburka, under the patronage of Count Alexandr Thurn-Taxis, who had a football ball and uniform brought from England for his son Erich. Erich studied in England and brought back three young Englishmen and also found several football devotees from the surrounding area. Football rapidly spread to Nymburk, Chrudim, Mladá Boleslav and other cities. The introduction of the rules of this sport to the public had a major impact on further development of football. The rules of football were published in 1897 as an standalone book. Another highly significant event for football was the founding of the Prague football clubs SK Slavia and AC Praha. In the mid-1890s, the new ball game even penetrated into the Czech

hinterlands (Plzeň, Brno etc.). The first traditional derby among the Prague clubs took place in March 1896, as AC Sparta defeated SK Slavia 1:0. In 1901, the Český svaz fotbalový (ČSF)(Czech Football Association) was established. In the early years of the 20th century, premier English teams came to Bohemia to play matches. Around 1910, football spread throughout all of Bohemia and Moravia. In October 1918, after the declaration of an independent Czechoslovakia, the fate of Czech and Slovak football was became one and football became a mass sport (cf. Vaněk et al. 1984).

Throughout this entire period, no violent events occurred in football stadiums despite the fact that football games were attended by several thousand fans.

After 1948 and the victory of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, traditional football clubs were frequently renamed (e.g. Slavia Praha assumed the new name Dynamo, AFK Bohemians was renamed Spartak Stalingrad). Even in the period from 1948-1989 (the communist era), football remained the most popular sport, watched by tens of thousands of fans. The most popular and most successful clubs were Dukla Praha, Bohemians Praha, Sparta Praha, Slavia Praha, Baník Ostrava, Slovan Bratislava (cf. Vaněk et al. 1984).

Football hooliganism in the Czech Republic

In Czechoslovakia, displays of football hooliganism appeared entirely spontaneously in the eighties, but since the nineties, the Czech Republic ranks among many countries in which there has been an activation of hooligan groups. It is also possible to refer to a hooligan sub-culture in connection with football hooliganism (Smolík 2001, 2004, 2005; Mareš, Smolík, Suchánek 2004).

There are two stages to football hooliganism. The first may be called the “pre-hooligan stage of unorganised football violence, brawls and vandalism.” This involved random incidents perpetrated by individuals or uncoordinated groups. In essence, this stage lasted from the beginning of football in the Czech lands to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, but the examined phenomenon grew in relevance from the beginning of the 1890s through the middle of the 20th century. In its second half, “after the English model,” consolidated gangs with specific names were formed and attached to specific clubs. The second stage of “modern football hooliganism by organised gangs” began, characterised by targeted activities by stable

groups, the rank and file of which in itself was understood to be supporters of specific (hooligan) entities (Mareš, Smolík, Suchánek 2004; Harsányi 2005).

From the original informal groups, in the second half of the nineties in the Czech Republic (but also in Slovakia), the first hooligan gangs and ultra groups began to form and issue their own fanzines.

Over the time, violence linked to football as well as to negative phenomena (including racism) has also become a social problem in Czech territory. If we overlook the frequently ridiculous incidents involving individuals at football matches in the period of the first half of the twentieth century (described for example by K. Poláček or V. Burian), then the first of the more significant incidents displaying attributes of football hooliganism occurred in 1985 with the demolition of a train for the Sparta Praha colour-guard, who were travelling to a football match in Banské Bystrice (cf. Centrum strategických studií 2003; Francková 2004).

The film *Proč?* (Why?), shot by the director Karel Smyczek about the incident in 1987, paradoxically popularised hooliganism among the youth (to this day, it is considered a cult film, and furthermore the role of the skinhead in it was played by Daniel Landa, the singer of the skinhead group Orlík, which has since split up). After 1989, still more pronounced development of this phenomenon occurred (Mareš 2003; Smolík 2001, 2005; Francková 2004; Harsányi 2005).

Since the mid-nineties, more stable gangs have formed (frequently with their own zines or internet pages) attached to several (not only) first league but also second league football clubs (cf. Mareš 2003).

Currently, approximately 30 such organised gangs are operating in the Czech Republic, of whom the most active support the football clubs Sparta Praha, Baník Ostrava, Slavia Praha or 1. FC Brno (see Table 1, cf. Mareš, Smolík, Suchánek 2004). Some of these hooligan gangs have also been profiled as political (e.g. JKG is generally viewed as a far right wing gang, while hooligans of Bohemians Praha are seen as in the far left camp). The problem of football hooliganism in the Czech Republic is resolved in the context of politics through internal security and by the activities of the anti-extremist unit of the Police of the CR (Smolík 2004, 2005).

Tab. 1: Hooligans and Ultras in Czech Republic

Football Club:	Hooligan/Ultras Gang/Gangs:
1. FC Brno	Johny Kentus Gang (JKG), Othodox Fans Brno, Torcida, Ultras, Division S
AC Sparta Praha	Brigade Drápek z Lasičky, Ultras Sparta, Red Pirates Sparta, Frakce Rudý Úder
Baník Ostrava	Apple Commando, BARABI, Marienbad Ultras
SK Slavia Praha	Slavia Hooligans, Brigade 97, Slavia Youngsters, Tlupa Toma Sojera, RWS
Slovan Liberec	Kategorie S, Ultras Liberec, D.B.S.
SK Sigma Olomouc	Hovada Zubr, Ultras Nové Sady, Zubr Gang Prerov
SFC Opava	Bulldog Corps
FK Jablonec	Corps Juniors
CU Bohemians Praha	Berserk Bohemians, Tornado Boys
FC MUS Most	Brüx Vandals, Radical Boys
FK Viktoria Žižkov	Ultras Viktoria
FC Viktoria Plzeň	Blue-Red Wolves Plzeň, Pilsen Bo!s, Radikálové Plzeň, Pilsen Fans
FK Teplice	Division Nord, North Warriors
České Budějovice	Brigade Gauners

In similar manner to the other countries, football hooliganism in the Czech Republic takes the following forms: intrusion onto the playing surface, throwing objects at players on the pitch (candles, coins, etc.), throwing objects at persons involved in the game (referees, players), brawling (frays with the police, service organisations, etc.), vandalism (tearing up and burning seats, destroying facilities at the football stadium, etc.), conflicts involving use of violence (against hooligans, fans, and spectators of rival teams, against players of their own/opposing teams, referees, service organisations, police, representatives of the football club, management, etc.). As noted by Bureš (2004), matches of the national team have been played for the most part without any incidents. The last European Championship in Portugal, which took place without incidents by Czech fans or football hooligans, confirms this fact.

As in other countries, a markedly homogeneous sub-culture of football hooligans has also emerged in the Czech Republic, characterised by an adherence to markedly specific social norms (manifested among others in stability, structure, integrity, cohesion, permanence, the closeness of groups, a specific value system, a system of control over value orientation, direction of hooligan gangs, group aims, etc.).

Even this relatively new sub-culture (or its parts) is considered by many experts as a possible base for right-wing and left-wing extremist figures, regarding the fact that some participants in football hooliganism respond to historical forms or methods of ultra-right/ultra-left or appeal directly to some ideological currents, at least superficially. Like abroad, also in the Czech Republic mutual interaction has occurred between the sub-cultures of skinheads and football hooligans (primarily at the beginning of the nineties).

Skinhead sub-culture (ultra-right and in some cases also the s.h.a.r.p. section) was an important part of the contemporary hooligan scene in the nineties, which as a result also caused the gradual politicisation of hooliganism. During the nineties, hooligan themes also attracted some skinhead musical groups (e.g. Orlík with its song *Viktorka Žižkov, S.A.D.*, *Operace Artaban*, *Protest, 3:2 pro MH*, *Pilsner Oiquell*, *Hlas krve*, *Reichenberg*, etc.) (cf. Smolík 2005).

The politicisation of football hooliganism in the Czech Republic

Involvement of the skinhead sub-culture has also stimulated interest in the problem of football hooliganism, which in some cases has manifested itself in the politicisation of individual football gangs (which are also defined by political affiliations). The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic has even responded to this fact, as it has begun to incorporate spectator violence (the so-called football “hooliganism”) into its annual report on extremism with reference to the fact that adherents to the skinhead sub-culture move among football hooligans, often committing criminal acts with an extremist sub-text.

During the Prague derby on May 17, 2003 between Bohemians and Sparta, in the 77th minute a group of drunken fans assaulted the linesman Talpa. Although this incident was not even the first or the most serious, the match was stopped and the debate on football hooliganism began in the Czech Republic. The guilty parties of this incident were detained by the service organisation, but the Police of the Czech Republic inexplicably released them. The police and the match organisers acknowledged that an error had occurred in mutual communication.

Several politicians entered into the subsequent debates with various opinions and ideas. According to the shadow Minister of the Interior, Ivan Langer, from the *Občanská*

demokratická strana (ODS)(Civic Democratic Party), “something went wrong” at the very least at the level of the police and the organisers. Ivan Langer also mentioned that this raised the question of how effective the money allocated for these events had been spent.

The following were finally compiled as factors enabling these incidents:

1. Problems in the laws of the Czech Republic. There is no special legislation against football hooliganism.¹
2. Shortcomings of the contract between the Českomoravský fotbalový svaz (Czech-Moravian Football Association) (ČMFS) and the Police of the Czech Republic.
3. The police failed to abide by the Police Act and the service oath of the police. Their abeyance may be assessed as “danger by default.”

Ivan Langer noted in regard to this issue “the case casts the police in a poor light rather than the organisers.” A representative from the Unie svobody-Demokratická unie (US-DEU)(Union of Freedom-Democratic Union), Vlastimil Ostrý, responded to the incident by adding that the most appropriate action would be to enact special legislation adapted from the English model (Centrum strategických studií 2003; Smolík 2005).

The incident ultimately resulted in meetings between the then Minister of the Interior, Stanislav Gross, and a delegation from the ČMFS, led by the then chairman Jan Obst. Both parties agreed on the preparation of a new contract between the Police of the Czech Republic and the ČMFS. At this meeting, a work group was also established with the following composition: Vice President of the Police Vladislav Husák and association representatives Alexander Károlyi and Ivo Lubas.

A critique was mounted against the police and the ČMFS for alleged inactivity and that they had allowed this phenomenon to develop.

Further political discussions on the theme of football hooliganism were evoked by the events of Spring 2004 and the rise (and greater seriousness) of incidents with apparent elements of hooligan behaviour. For example, on March 27, 2004 during a match between Baník Ostrava-FC Brno, 13 Brno fans were arrested, the damage exceeded 600 thousand crowns (two buses were destroyed, fans stole eighty tickets, destroyed 70 seats and looted a refreshment stand).

Another incident took place on May 15, 2004 during a derby match between SFC Opava and Baník Ostrava, when 8 policemen were hurt, 9 fans injured, and damage was assessed to at least 250,000 crowns (two destroyed railroad cars, torn up seats).

According to estimates, police reinforcement on the streets before every match just for the spring part of the 2003/2004 league season cost at least fourteen million crowns. Damage to stadiums equalled another two and one half million.

After the most serious incident at an Opava-Ostrava match on May 15, 2004, the then Minister of the Interior, S. Gross, criticised the approach by the football clubs and organisers of league matches. The minister noted that the police always join the fray in the second round, when the law has been violated and the situation has gotten out of hand.

Currently, a group of members of parliament under the leadership of Vlastimil Ostrý (US-DEU) have submitted an amendment to the criminal code (no. 140/1961 Coll. as amended by later regulations), which should enable a more effective approach toward violent sports fans.² Immediately after the incident in Opava on May 27, 2004, Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla met with police in Ostrava, state representatives and representatives of the football club Baník Ostrava, and declared “that it is necessary to use the criminal statute to its full extent,” by which he opposed those submitting the amendment to the criminal code (Smolík 2005).

It is apparent that even in the political arena there are two contrasting opinions, both attempting to suppress the manifestation of football hooliganism. The first group is trying to institute tougher legislation to the current norm and the enforcement of an expansion of one amendment to the criminal code, while the second group is requesting primarily the adherence to and use of current legislation.

It is apparent that football hooliganism has already become a political topic in the Czech Republic.

Fans of the national team of the Czech Republic

Fans of the Czech national football team attend football matches in great numbers at football tournaments such as the European Championships or the World Cup. After 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, a great many Czech fans participated at the World Cup in Italy in 1990, as well as at the European Championship in England in 1996 and the European Championship in Portugal in 2004. There have never been any problems with fans of the Czech national team and no significant conflicts have been recorded during international matches in the Czech Republic or abroad. It is possible to assume that Czech fans will behave accordingly also during the World Cup in Germany this year. Fans of the national team have just a few minor chants and songs, of which the most famous is: „Kdo neskáče, není Čech“ (He who doesn't jump up, isn't Czech).

Corruption in Czech football

In Czechoslovakia, or in Czech football, corruption also has its place, primarily corruption by the functionaries of some clubs. Corruption scandals were investigated in the 1980s, when some clubs set up so-called black financial funds, from which bribes were paid for results and through which the trades of individual players between clubs were carried out.

The last corruption scandal in Czech football emerged in 2004 and involved the bribing of referees. After several daily newspapers reported police monitoring, it was clear that the credibility of the Czech league was in decline and fans were turning away. The entire corruption scandal is still under investigation. The results appear to show that this involves organised activities damaging to football in a significant way and it also has drawn in football referees, delegates for individual matches (who have the task of judging individual matches and the performance of referees) and football functionaries. Czech football has not been otherwise stigmatised in any other way by the entire corruption scandal. Most Czech football fans traditionally place priority on the matches of the national team over attending games of the Czech football leagues. Attendance at Czech football league games is down with the average attendance fluctuating around 4 000 spectators per game. An interesting fact, however, is that corrupt behaviour (taking bribes) has been demonstrated in that the certain referees are constantly selected for competitive matches of the Czech football league.

Conclusion

Czech fan culture has a very great and long tradition. The first football clubs were already established as early as the in 19th century. Society-wide events have had an impact on Czechoslovak football, primarily the occupation in the years 1939-1945 and the communist era from 1948-1989. Football in the Czech Republic is a well-known phenomenon, although this fact is not significantly supported by the number of spectators at individual football matches of the Czech football league. Czech football fans are modest in behaviour and displays of hooliganism appear to be entirely an exception. Just like for other football matches, the Czech Republic has been touched by a corruption scandal that has yet to be definitively cleared up. It is possible to assume that for the World Cup in 2006 which will be held in Germany, there will be unprecedented interest on the part of Czech football fans, especially keeping in mind that the Czech national team has qualified for the World Cup for the first time in 16 long years.

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¹ The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, however, is not preparing any such statute. The question is whether it is more beneficial to adhere to and use existing legislation.. For example, § 16 of the Police Act no. 265/2001 Coll. about authorisation to restrain the movement of aggressive persons, according to which 1) persons who physically attack other persons or the police or damage property or who attempt to flee, may be restrained from possible free movement using suitable objects of restraint. 2) Restraining free movement may last as long only until such time as the person has ceased acting in this manner or placed in police custody, at most, however, for 2 hours.

² The amendment requires the expansion of § 26 par. 4 letter g), where it requires a ban on visits to sports matches. (In particular, this concerns the expansion of provisions for conditional release from prosecution with such control that the court may directly determine the mode of punishment related to the perpetrator for concrete criminal acts committed in relation to sports matches.)

The proposal would be inserted into § 202, with a new paragraph 2, which enables a move against brawls committed during sports matches or in connection with sports matches. The current paragraph 2 would be remarked as paragraph 3. Stiffer sentences have also been proposed for repeat offenders in the criminal act of brawling.

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