



NEWSLETTER

A little bit of history...

The creation of the FSOA came about during the flurry of activity that followed Lord Justice Taylor's report into the Hillsborough Stadium disaster. The police seriously examined their role at sports grounds and football authorities were forced to face up to their responsibilities for ensuring the care, safety and wellbeing of spectators. In particular, they were forced to look at how their grounds were managed with one of the main concerns being the variance in safety management performances at football grounds in England and Wales. Safety systems and practices had been evolved locally but in a piece-meal fashion and with very little consistency.

Before Hillsborough, the role of Safety Officer was not an established post at the majority of clubs. Some felt that ageing club secretaries, with little or no knowledge or experience of safety management could carry out the role. Others deemed it to be a match day-only position. This was unacceptable and created the climate which helped to bring about the FSOA.

The Football Safety Officers Association (FSOA) of England and Wales was therefore formed in 1992 by a small group of Football Safety Officers to help develop and improve all aspects of stadium safety. It is open to Safety Officers, their deputies and other people with particular safety management roles within football, such as facilities and stadium managers, who work to deliver a safe experience for all spectators who attend football matches. The FSOA has more than 300 members and over 50 corporate partners who work together to share expertise and best practice to benefit the football industry as a whole.

For more information about the FSOA, visit www.fsoa.org.uk

Details unveiled for FSOA 2017 Spring Conference & Exhibition

The FSOA will host its Spring AGM Conference & Exhibition on March 28th and 29th 2017, giving organisations in the events industry the chance to showcase their products and services whilst networking with experts.

The event will take place at The Stratford Manor Hotel, in Stratford-upon-Avon. A packed programme of talks and activities has been lined up, focusing on a range of issues such as national terrorism threats, Hillsborough inquest verdicts, real-life insights into football stadium safety and Q&As with high-profile speakers.

An evening dinner will take place following the conference, featuring football legend Dean Saunders as the special guest speaker, reliving tales about his achievements as a footballer. The evening celebrations will be compered by Andy Ashworth and will also feature comedian Ian Irving.

John Newsham, FSOA Business Development Manager, said: "The event will provide a wonderful platform for organisations to network with industry experts to share knowledge and best practice, whilst showcasing their own services and products.

"We have already had great interest in our spring event and have a number of organisations signed up. Exhibition spaces are going fast so we would suggest that organisations interested in exhibiting book early to avoid disappointment."



For more information or to book a place at the event, visit www.fsoa.org.uk, call 01254 841771 or email info@fsoa.co.uk



To stand or not to stand?

Reintroducing standing at matches has become the focus of the football world. Fans want it, Celtic already has it and other clubs are now asking if there really is such a thing as safe standing. John Newsham, FSOA Business Development Manager, looks at the issue that's got everyone talking.

Football fans of a certain vintage will probably tell you that standing is the only way to watch a match. Tens of thousands of Borussia Dortmund fans would agree. As would the few hundred loyal supporters of Hereford United FC.

Whilst British football is famed for passion, both on and off the pitch, some would say that the high-octane atmosphere created in those bouncing British terraces from years ago cannot be replicated whilst fans feel like they are shackled to their seats. Standing terraces remain an important feature of football in other countries across the world, especially in Germany, and a glimpse of the Dortmund Yellow Wall is the perfect example of how breathtakingly impressive a football crowd can look when standing in unison.

But the debate about whether standing should be reintroduced to the UK's top two flights is a well-rehearsed one that cannot simply be drawn back to nostalgia.

When seating in stadia became compulsory in England and Wales back in the 90s, few in the football world argued. Appalled by the horrors of Hillsborough, there was little fight when the government responded to the tragedy by ordering major clubs to develop all-seater stadiums.

People were so shocked by the poor quality of some grounds that the opinion formed that standing could just not be done safely. A wave of hooliganism in the 1980s highlighted by incidents of fans storming terraces had also played a part in national calls for football crowds to be more tightly controlled.

Keeping fans in their seats was safer and easier to police, it was agreed. And even when the ban was reduced to just the top two divisions in England and Wales, higher league clubs were happy to leave the lower leagues to it and keep memories of those passion-filled standing terraces in the past - whatever the desire of fans - content with the ability to fill their grounds as a matter of course. Despite the passing years, memories of football tragedies, such as the devastating events at Hillsborough, have remained all too fresh in the minds of clubs whose number one priority is to keep all fans safe and comfortable. And a sitting crowd is easier to control and keep safe, after all.

But the argument for all-seater stadia is not as simple as that. Any football fan attending an emotionally-charged match will testify that when the ball hits the back of the net, the temptation to stand proves too much. It is the same story for fans at every club up and down the country.

It is widely recognised that spectators stand persistently at grounds for a number of reasons, perhaps to get a better view, because they see others standing or just because that's what they prefer - whatever the rules say. Ironically, then, it is the status quo that is potentially more dangerous as thousands of fans choose to stand - or spend the game

being told not to - at Premier League and Championship grounds every weekend.

Fans standing in seated areas causes a number of headaches for a Safety Officer. Seated areas do not contain any of the design and safety features required to accommodate a standing crowd, leading to a number of potential hazards. Fans who choose to stand are not protected by any crush barriers or railings preventing them from falling forward onto the people in front, creating the potential for a cascading effect along with the gradient of the seating deck. There have been incidents of physical injuries, such as cuts and bruises, and while at some grounds there has been a natural evolution whereby standing is tolerated in some areas, recent issues at West Ham's new ground show how heated exchanges can occur if exact rules are not made perfectly clear.

Survey after survey has found that the majority of fans would like to be given the option to stand and the mood amongst clubs has now started to shift. So, is there a way of giving fans what they want whilst at the same time ensuring their safety?

Arguments made by a small group of campaigners over the years that the most logical way to keep fans safe - whilst giving in to their desires to stand at matches - by introducing safe standing terraces have slowly become mainstream. Following years of outright dismissal to entertain the idea of any reintroduction of standing in any form, the issue of safe standing is now one that is getting serious consideration at every Premier League club.

The tide is turning thanks to Celtic FC, which has blazed the trail for other clubs by introducing rail seating for 2,975 fans. The rail seating is impressive in the simplicity and inescapable logic of its design - effectively replacing each existing seat with a standing spot and flip-up seat, with 900mm railings in front and behind each row.

The result has been years in the making and, quite rightly, Celtic has been challenged on the policies, procedures and structure at every turn before being given the go ahead. It's been a costly and exhausting process and the introduction of rail seating has done nothing to increase the stadium's capacity. But the fact that season ticket sales this year have exceeded the level of previous years by around 10,000 due to the buzz about what the development will do for match day atmosphere speaks volumes about what fans want. Even those top-flight English clubs previously content to follow the naturally conservative instincts of the Premier League have had their interests piqued and are now seriously looking into whether the system could become a reality for them too. The horrors of Hillsborough will haunt the football world forever. But maybe Celtic has found the solution to keep fans safe and clubs - as well as Safety Officers - happy?

Dealing with adverse weather at football stadiums

- Not all clubs have the luxury of under-soil heating to assist them in keeping the pitch playable in cold weather conditions. Some clubs still use ground sheets to help keep the pitch from freezing. Whatever method you use it is important to keep up to-date with current weather conditions for your area ahead of match day
- Ground staff are usually responsible for the pitch area but liaison with the stadium manager regarding the pitch is vital at this time of the year. They can assist by ensuring under-soil heating systems are serviced at least once per year, in particular before the winter season sets in. Tests on the system should be undertaken as a matter of course and a log kept
- Those that use ground sheets should always make sure that the sheets are in position and ready to be rolled/pulled out as and when they are needed
- Ground staff should ensure the grass coverage is at its best before the winter season sets in as bare patches will freeze up much more quickly than those with grass cover
- If the game is to be policed, early discussions with all emergency services should take place
- Consideration must be given early to supporters travelling any distance if a game could be cancelled as well as press/photographers
- Referees and the football authorities/ leagues also need to be given advance warning if the game is in doubt so make sure they are kept informed throughout the decision-making process
- Not all games are called off because of the pitch. During heavy snow, the pitch may well be playable but the conditions in the terraces and around the ground, including car parks and footpaths, may mean it is unsafe for spectators to approach or get into the ground. This alone may be reason to call off a match - regardless of the condition of the pitch
- Road conditions must be considered. Communication with local councils and Highways agencies are paramount to determine if it is safe for fans to travel to the match
- Think about all of the staff working the fixture if it goes ahead. They may also have difficulty getting to the ground in adverse weather. Ask yourself if you would have enough staff to manage the fixture if it went ahead
- Consider whether the visiting team is staying in a hotel local to the ground or are they travelling on the day? Is it safe for them to do so?
- Make the most of local radio or club radio to keep supporters informed throughout the day about the decision and the reasons why the decision is being made



Details of regional meetings

The latest North West regional meeting was held at Tranmere Rovers on November 28th. FSOA corporate members, Northwood, gave a presentation before the meeting about their hygiene products which was well received by all members in attendance.

The South East region met on December 13th at The Emirates Stadium whilst the West Midlands region met on October 7th at Stoke City's bet365 Stadium. The meeting was sponsored by radio communications specialist, OS Comms, whose representatives gave a very positive presentation to members.

Mark Miles stood down this year as the West Midlands Chair but remains the Vice Chair of the national association. Phil Mayer, of Port Vale FC, took the role as Chair of the WM region and Ravi Sharma, of Stoke City FC, took over as Secretary for the WM region.

The North East region met on November 17th. John Rutherford, a long-standing Chairman of the region and former national Chairman, stood down from his regional role at the meeting. He has been replaced by Richard Stanford, of Sheffield Wednesday, as the NE regional Chairman. Chris Patzelt, NE regional secretary, has been replaced by Paul Davies, of Rotherham United.

The FSOA thanks John Rutherford for his outstanding dedication to the role and his contribution as regional Chairman and member of the FSOA Management Board over the years.

Upcoming regional meetings:

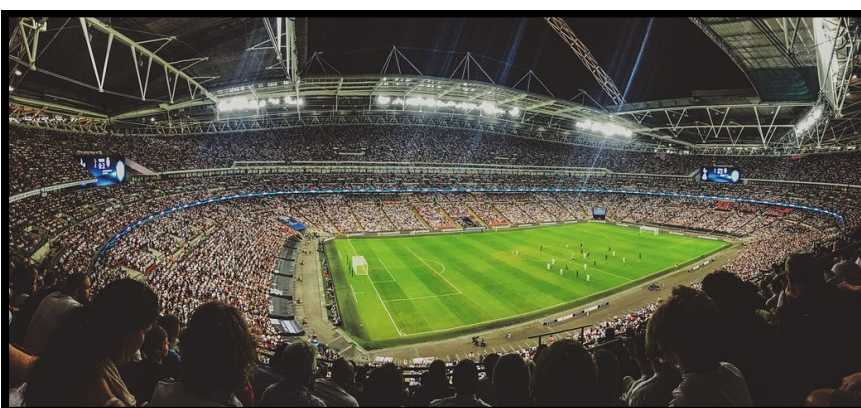
North East Region: Newcastle United, February 23rd 2017

All other regional meetings to be confirmed. They will all take place at least 28 days before the AGM in March to give members chance to submit their nominations for national Chair/Vice Chair positions.

FSOA Aims & Objectives

The FSOA is a not-for-profit organisation that works to improve all aspects of safety at football grounds. We do this by promoting best safety management practices, enhancing the role of stewards and continually developing the expertise of safety officers.

As stadium design and facilities for spectators have been improved over the years, so too has the expectations of the fans who visit grounds. In order to keep pace with these heightened expectations the FSOA continues to play a significant part in evolving safety practices, mainly through the stewards employed by football clubs, to improve levels of customer care and quality of service delivery. Attending football matches should be an enjoyable experience irrespective of the match result. Safety officers, through their match day staff, play a significant part in achieving this objective.



For more information about the FSOA, to learn more about the benefits of being a member or to book your place at our Spring conference, visit www.fsoa.org.uk, email info@fsoa.org.uk or call 01254 841771.

