Racism in European Soccer

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Introduction

What is the first thing you notice about a player? Is it the way he plays his game, the talents he has, and the efforts he makes to make his team win? Or is it the color of his skin, the religion he follows, or the geographical background he belongs to?

Sports provide a platform for talented youngsters around the globe to showcase their skills and achieve their aims. Football is one of the most popular sports in the world, which involves the spirit, love, and passion of billions of people around the world who support their favorite teams and belong to diverse cultures, religions, nations, ethnic groups, and demographical backgrounds. Sports such as football bring nations together and unite people from every part of the planet to be involved in the activity of joy and pure passion.

However, racism has corrupted the game, which is a pure show of talent. European soccer has been a target of racism and the highlighting of cultural differences for several reasons, such as shaming a player for the color of their skin or their religious beliefs. Additionally, fan culture has led to soccer fans bringing each other down using racial slurs and disrespecting others for their support for a specific team.

Moreover, soccer is blamed for “white-washing” higher-level positions, such as coaches. European football has always chosen already well-known white men as coaches instead of looking for talent and experience in the general public or football leagues. White players have been appreciated and given illogical preference over colored men.

Considering the history of Europe and the culture of white supremacy since the ages of British Colonialism in different parts of the world, specifically oppressing people of color from different backgrounds, racism was born in Europe and was unavoidable in sports. The high immigration rates in Europe and increased diversity in the game of soccer led to people using race as a weakness of the opposition instead of judging talents and skills.

Discussion

The Roots of Racism:

Racism is a contemporary issue that has existed since the beginning of time. Racism refers to the superiority of one race over another, which is mostly related to white supremacy over non-whites. This culture was introduced by the British during the period of colonialism and the oppression of colored men belonging to different geographical and demographical backgrounds, such as Africans, Indians of the Sub-Continent, and Native Americans. They were not only oppressed and exploited in their own land but also hired as slaves and servants. This was when the British declared non-whites to be a weaker, lower-class, and subservient race [1].

After the revolution and the end of colonialism, diversity increased in Europe and areas of the United Kingdom. At the same time, immigration rates were on the rise, which led to diversity in sports and other professions. However, racism never went away. Not only white supremacists but other races also try to insult each other and look down on other groups when it comes to competition and general employment opportunities. Higher positions in every organization, including sports, were restricted to native Europeans.

Types of Racism in Soccer:

Generally, racism is associated with white supremacy over a black community in the form of violence and abuse. However, racism can be prominent and hidden in the shadows of discrimination in employment, racial slurs, and negative behaviors. Moreover, racism is not restricted to Africans but also affects brown people belonging to the Middle East and Asia.[2]

The beautiful game of football has been unsafe because of the evil of racism. Discrimination and abusive attitudes towards minority racial groups exist in football in different forms. Racism can be both intentional and unintentional. Media reporters in the history of football, and particularly in Britain, have referred to black players as “negro players.” This shows that racist remarks were commonly used and not considered to be offensive or inappropriate. [3].

Fan Culture:

The worst kinds of supporters of football include racist fans who direct racist chants at a non-white soccer player and at spectators who support the opposing teams. This leads to violence among fans and demotivation of soccer players who are against the culture of discrimination and racist slurs [4]. Racist soccer spectators can stoop to the extent of abusing a player for their ethnicity rather than judging their talents and skills. The behavior corrupts the purity of football and discourages players who make every effort to make their team win and keep the game clean of any form of political influence and personal grudges.

Political Parties and Xenophobia:

The xenophobic trend is very common in the stadium during soccer matches. Political parties employ members from a football stadium to ignite xenophobia among spectators and encourage violence and verbal abuse using racial slurs. This increases negativity among soccer fans and corrupts the game. It is one of the most prominent forms of racism existing in the game.

Discrimination in Soccer Recruiting:

The European Football Association is known for recruiting white and superior men for positions in governing bodies, such as coaches, referees, and managers. There is a major lack of representation of minority groups among soccer players that is noticeable on the field. Footballers are not entirely recruited on the basis of their talents and skills. The atmosphere is influenced by such inequality among the players on the basis of race and cultural backgrounds [5].

The Growing Disease of Racism in Soccer throughout History:

Christos Kassimeris, in her book about racism in soccer, refers to racism as a modern disease and sheds light on the contemporary issue that has existed since the beginning of the game [6]. When different nations participated in soccer, the game gained the interest of xenophobic spectators who introduced aggressive behavior toward supporters and players of opposing countries. The game was meant to unite nations and bring them together to celebrate the beautiful form of sport, where young players were given a chance to showcase their skills and talents.

Sports have always played a crucial part in the lives of citizens of various countries. They encourage a spirit of competition on the field, develop personality, bring unity, and increase nationalism among citizens. The rapid expansion of the European Union has aided the involvement of multiple cultures, religions, and other diversifying elements among the European crowd. However, European multiculturalism didn’t unite the diverse groups of people but increased negativity and racism among the people. Football has played a vital part in European sports culture and provided a platform for racism. [7].

Even though sports do not involve social structures but an equal opportunity for everyone based on their talents, the activity has somehow always attracted racism and racist supporters. The racial slurs and abuse of other groups are excused as football enthusiasm and love for the game, which is entirely inappropriate.

In 1991, Fritz Korbach used offensive names for the black Dutch football player Bryan Roy and the famous footballer Romario, calling them “nigger” and “coffee bean from PSV.” These remarks were denied by Korbach, who said that they were merely expressions of football language. This shows that racism exists but is ignored for illogical reasons. The worst thing about racism in soccer is that it is

often ignored, forgiven, and considered normal among the players, the governing bodies, and passionate fans.

During a match between Liverpool and Everton in 1987, some Everton FC supporters threw a banana at football player John Barnes, who was playing for Liverpool. They shouted and chanted at him, claiming, “Everton is white.” They brought him down for his race and showed the supremacy of white Europeans. The fans of England’s club are as passionate and dedicated to the game as any other league, but such racist attitudes discourage the players and ruin the environment. Barnes responded to the racism silently and ignored the attitude [8].

Moreover, racism and stereotyping have targeted all football players, including South Asian players, who are considered to be static and homogenous. On the other hand, black football players are referred to as difficult, bad-tempered, and ill-mannered by the soccer clubs of the Netherlands. Minority groups are asked to forgo their cultural identities and be involved in the game with pure intentions of playing football, which forces them to follow the rules and guidelines set by white supremacists, who believe their culture and beliefs are above all [9].

Such events can be dated back to racism in soccer in England. Dixie Dean, a dark-skinned Everton player, claims that he had been a target of racist comments during a match in London in the 1930s. Dean was angered by the racist remarks and forced to punch the offender. Similarly, Steve Mokone resigned from Coventry City due to the racist behavior of the manager, who blamed his race for the dissatisfaction of the player with the team. On another occasion, a soccer player from England with an Indian background changed his name to a more European-sounding name in order to avoid racism.

Moreover, banana-throwing and monkey chants had been there for a while. In the 1960s, West Ham United players, who were black, were attacked by fans with racist remarks while they threw bananas at them. Football players, specifically dark-skinned and non-white players, had been targets of racism throughout the history of soccer.

Furthermore, racism traveled to Scotland and its soccer games. Mark Walters reports that on 2nd January 1988, when his team lost at Celtic Park, he was targeted by racist slurs from the fans of the opposing team. The Scottish Football Association is reported to have not taken any action against the racist activity happening during their matches. This shows that racism was never taken seriously.

Conclusion

Sports hold a significant place in our lives, and the importance of soccer around the world, particularly in Europe, is underestimated. The game is meant to encourage unity among nations, bring diversity, show love and passion, provide a platform for talented players, and motivate a spirit of competition and a common goal. However, football has attracted billions of fans, which include racist and xenophobic supporters who bring racism to the game and highlight the weaknesses of the minority race. The nationalism of football supporters has led them to adopt aggressive and abusive behaviors

towards other groups.

Nevertheless, the issue has always been catered to by different organizations and recognized by various players who have come to the extent of refusing to play in order to avoid such negative activity. At the same time, many campaigns have been carried out in the past to eliminate such behavior.

End Note

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