

Disability and football fan experience: a comparative analysis of disabled attendees and sports venue staff

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Outline of the presentation

- Background and context (PV)
- Research objectives (PV)
- Method and sample (SN)
- Key findings (SN/PV)
- Implications for sports venues (SN)
- Future research (PV)
- Researcher's reflection (SN)
- Supervisor's reflection (PV)

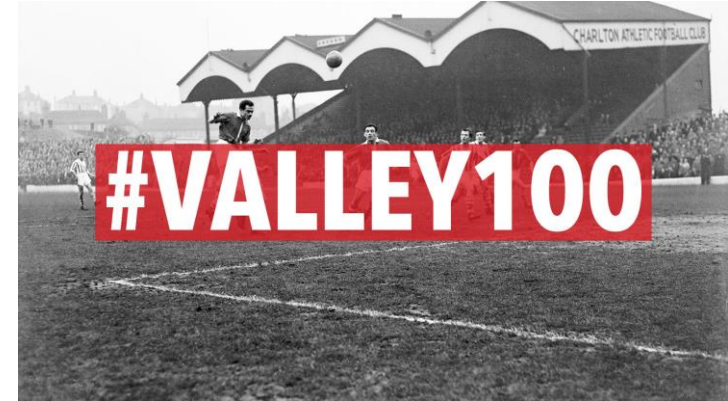
Background and context (PV)

- In recent years, a body of research has emerged focused on disabled athletes in competitive sport (Choi et al, 2019; Braye et al, 2017; Wareham et al, 2017).
- The general participation in sport by disabled people has also attracted research attention (Jaarsma et al, 2014; Nixon, 2007; Albrecht et al, 2019 ; Brown and Pappous, 2018)
- Yet little parallel attention has been paid to disabled fans as attendees and consumers of sport event experiences.
- One in five people in the UK report a disability (DWP, 2018).

Research context: CAFC (PV)

- Established 1905, in southeast London
- Moved to “The Valley” in 1919
- Capacity 27,111
- Premier league 1998-2007, subsequently demoted
- Recent financial challenges
- Loyal fan base

<https://www.cafc.co.uk/news/view/5caf45ff19c97/valley100-the-story-of-charltons-famous-home>



Legal framework of disability in the UK (PV)

- Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970
 - This was the first kind of British legislation that endeavoured to recognise the right for disabled people to access assistance, adaptations and equipment.
 - Local authority has a duty to make arrangements to ensure those needs are met.
- The Disabled Persons Act 1986
 - To improve services for people with disability by strengthening their voice through making provision for representation and placing additional duties on local authorities.
- Health and Safety Legislation including the Safety at Sports Ground Act 1975
 - Specifically addressed to local authorities; responsible for “safety at sports stadia and other sports grounds” (Legislation.gov.uk, 1975).
 - Recognises need for the safety of spectators at football stadiums but no specific mention to accommodate disabled spectators.

- **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**
 - Made it illegal for “service providers, including football clubs, to treat disabled people less favourably than other customers” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014).
- **Reasonable adjustments for buildings 2004**
 - Made “owners of some historic buildings to carry out alterations to make their buildings accessible to disabled people”. The law “requires service providers to take **reasonable steps** to remove, alter or provide a reasonable means of avoiding a physical feature of their premises, which makes it unreasonably difficult or impossible for disabled people to make use of their services” (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2000).
- **Disability Discrimination Act amended 2005**
 - Furthered the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, by “setting out to promote the rights of people with disabilities and to ensure they do not suffer discrimination because of their disability with particular attention to the rights of people with disabilities in relation to employment, education, access to goods and services, buying or renting property” (EalingHELP.org.uk, 2011).
- **Equality Act 2010**
 - The most comprehensive legislation supporting disabled people to be treated equally to other citizens. Resulted in the idea that ‘clubs **should** be making “**reasonable adjustments** for people with all sorts of disabilities...induction loops for people with hearing impairments, audio-description facilities for people with sight impairments and free tickets for people who support disabled people to come to a game” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014).

Social and Medical Models of Disability (PV)

- Medical model of disability (the subject is the ‘problem’)
 - Defines disabled people by their impairments or differences and infers that these “impairments should be “fixed” or “cured” by medicine and other treatments, even when the impairment does not cause pain or illness” (Sport, 2014).
 - Using this approach, the medical model would view the wheelchair user wanting to access the Charlton football grounds as a burden, and would see the adaptation of the stadium or addition of the ramp as burdensome and not regard the wheelchair user as being capable of living independently.
- Social model of disability (society is “the problem” i.e. attitudes/infrastructure)
 - Says that disability is caused by the way society is organized” (Nottinghamshire, 2018) and looks at society as needing to change to ensure that the barriers faced by disabled people are removed.
 - For example, if a wheelchair user wanted to access a Charlton match but the stadium was not wheelchair accessible, under the social model, a ramp would be added to the entrance so that the wheelchair user is free to go into the building immediately.

Disability and policy response (PV)

- Political/legal pluralist approach (equality/reasonable accommodation)
- Moral approach (philanthropy/charity roots)
- Consumerist approach (Nader; “pink pound”)

Research aims and objectives (PV)

- Research aims:
 - To capture the experiences and attitudes of disabled fans, venue staff, and general management
 - To reflect on the efficacy of current policy and legal frameworks
- Research objectives:
 - To identify and assess the behaviour and perception of disabled football fans.
 - To review the adaptable spaces offered by Charlton Athletic to their disabled fans and its relationship with their expectations.
 - To identify the issues faced by disabled fans with respect to Charlton Athletic.
 - To summarise and advise to the club with the review of recommending and/or challenging what can be done to increase the number of positive experiences by disabled fans within the club.

Method and Sample (SN)

- A case approach was used to examine policies, fan experiences, and staff perceptions of disability at Charlton Athletic Football Club (CAFC) in south-east London.
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups captured the experiences and attitudes of disabled fans, venue staff (i.e. ticketing, stewards, fan shop, catering etc) and general management.
- A total of forty (n=40) participants were interviewed, consisting of twenty disabled fans and twenty venue staff.
- Considered the whole attendee experience, including e.g. travel and local amenities, as well as on-site

Key findings (SN)

- Disparities exist between the experiences of disabled fans, and perceptions of non-disabled stadium staff.
- A fifth of disabled fans reported disability discrimination.
- Nearly two thirds felt that the venue required improved accessibility.
- Conversely, non-disabled stadium staff perceived no disability discrimination and few problems in responded to disabled attendees.

Disabled attendees - Satisfied comments (SN)

- *“My carer gets to go for free”*
- *“stewards are great. Only complaint sometimes no half time catering”*
- *“I receive commentary for majority of games.”*
- *“stewards make it easy to find my seat. Toilets are nearby”*
- *“after missing three seasons due to illness – returned to Valley to our three family season ticket seats”*
- *“I have always been given a headset to listen to the commentary for games and stewards have helped me to my seats when my carer couldn’t attend”*
- *“Charlton and the Disability liaison officer have been very helpful to me and my wife and have gone out of their way to help me when I need it”*
- *“they let me keep my same headset when I watch games and have always been helped by the stewards and reception”*
- *“they have been very helpful to me in allowing me to move my seats and come in to view where I could potentially sit”*
- *“we sit in the north west quadrant and we have a person from catering who always takes orders for us and brings them to us. It helps us a lot”*

Disabled attendees - Dissatisfied comments (SN)

- *“Noone can communicate with me”* (communication)
- *“we cannot sometimes get parking spaces in the disabled bays”* (choice)
- *“I was made to move my seat due to my arthritis and was told it was a safety issue. I had my previous seat for years before and now I have been moved away from the normal fans I used to sit with”* (choice/self-determination)
- *“I have visited a few times as an away supporter and the fans in front of us always stand and we cannot see when we tell the stewards little is done about it”* (service responsiveness)
- *“noticed that able bodied people can easily access all areas, whrrras not all areas for what I do arr radily accessible.”* (choice)
- *“had to fight to get covered seating for cup games and not just in front of west stand in the open...”* (choice)
- *“I miss out on many announcements and feel excluded”* (communication)

Comments from venue staff (PV)

- Providing assistance and support
 - *“helping disabled fans scan tickets in, taking them to their seats”,*
 - *“helping them get through the gates”*
 - *“access to toilets, access to lifts, ordering refreshments”.*
- However not always effectively
 - *“some requests for disabled supporters aren’t acted on such as the seating of spectators blocking the views of the disabled fans”*
- Recognise scope for improvements
 - *“enforcing the aspect of sitting down and not standing as it is not fair to the disabled supporters”*
 - *“ [need for] extra parking spaces for the disabled supporters”*

Managers defensive of their staff and facilities (PV)

- *“...people [staff] go out of their way to help disabled fans; whether by opening doors, or letting disabled guests use the lift first”*
- *“Ticketing staff will, if requested, put individuals in the easiest accessible seats. All facilities are accessible to disabled people”;*
- *“there are dedicated sections for disabled fans close to the pitch and in all stands, dedicated parking, sound support system to follow the game“*
- *“**Perceptions** around access - believed to be difficult for disabled supporters to access stadium when **in fact** it is rather easier”*

Intuitive rather than structured service (PV)

- *“If someone is blind **you just know** how to interact with them. I had an experience with a b[l]ind person and they were asking me for different tickets for different games so I ripped off certain tickets for him. **I would guide his hand** when helping him pay money like guiding his hand to where the counter is so he can put the money down...blind people get a carer for free”...* (ticket office operator)
- *“When selling to a disabled person, **I just try to cater to their needs.** For example, we have a deaf guy and he struggles to speak so when he comes I give him a piece of paper and we connect that way.”* (ticket office operator)

Discussion (PV)

- A substantial disparity between disabled fan reported experiences and staff perspectives.
- Emergent themes: choice, communication, self-determination
- Our results are especially surprising given the club's proactive inclusivity efforts in supporting the community, encouraging female fans, and recognising LGBT (Miller, 2018).
- Compared to the more widely reported issue of racism in sport, disability discrimination remains under-explored.

Implications for sports venues (SN)

- Equalities and human rights legislation impose only a minimum level of accessibility requirements.
- ‘Reasonable adjustments’ provisions reflect the burden on service providers rather than the needs and preferences of the disabled consumer.
- Larger clubs may be able to dedicate more financial resources on physical accommodation of disabled fans, but such improvements must be complemented by staff training.

Future research (PV)

- Extend research to more sports grounds
 - esp to test attitudes vs resources: does money “solve”
- Extend research to other live entertainment venues
- More detailed service gap analysis
 - How are the expectations of disabled fans constructed?
 - How are the service delivery levels of venues established?

Researcher reflection (SN)

- Images of Shahab carrying out research in the field
- Gaining access to carry out the data collection
- Carrying out objective (unbiased) action research



Supervisor reflections (PV)

- Finite university support services (“reasonable adjustments”)
- Adapting the research and supervision process to fit the student
- Learning through different perspectives: avoiding research bias

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Thank you – Questions?

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