

To open the afternoon session of the 'Cohesion Equality Diversity' conference, **Pat Younge**, Head of Programmes and Planning at BBC Sport and Runnymede trustee, introduced **Paul Elliott** – once a professional footballer and now actively engaged in the Kick It Out campaign and Football Against Racism in Europe.

Pat Younge. The issues of cohesion, diversity and equality have been very much to the forefront in sport recently and have actually helped move sport from the back pages to the front pages of our newspapers: what happened to the England team in Spain; Ron Atkinson's outburst; what the Spanish coach has been saying about various black Premiership players; this has all been front-page news. I'm delighted that our next speaker has experience, not just in the UK but across Europe in the whole area of football, which is the UK's key national game.

Paul Elliott, MBE, is a former professional footballer whose career started in the late 1970s. He played for Charlton Athletic, Aston Villa, Pisa Sporting Club in Italy, Glasgow Celtic and retired at Chelsea – prematurely in my opinion, but due to a very bad injury. He was an outstanding player and he now operates in the media as a summariser for Eurosport, Channel 4 and for radio and Italian television. Paul represents the Commission for Racial Equality, the Professional Footballers' Association, the Scottish Footballers' Association, the Charlton Charitable Trust, the Kick It Out campaign and Football Against Racism in Europe. So he has a wide range of experience in a number of countries.

Paul Elliott. I'd like to thank Pat, Runnymede and the Home Office for inviting me here today to say a few words about my experiences of race equality and the community cohesion agenda. I would like to express my support of the government's strategy and the positive outcomes it envisages in light of the current climate of inequality, intolerance and reduced life-chances for disadvantaged individuals within society.

The subject-matter of the strategy is very close to my heart, not only because of my identity in terms of colour and racial group, but because of my faith, age, class and gender. This combination often creates competing demands amongst the various communities I have associated myself with, and these are compounded by a lack of integration, of cohesion with the wider life of communities, and differences of economic and political affiliation.

For me, respect, opportunity, dignity and tolerance are key levers for me to begin addressing the complexity of my own identity and that of others. My professional career, as some of you may be aware, started in what is often termed 'the beautiful game' of football. That was my choice, my aspiration, my dream. The game, to some degree, reflects and mirrors the wider society in terms of its structures and lack of equality.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were certainly demanding, and I often found myself at the end of abuse directed at my colour or race, and feeling isolated from the game as a whole and the wider society which I thought I was part of.

My career started with Charlton Athletic. For me, that was a very, very difficult time generally. My parents were first-generation immigrants from Jamaica, and that was, I suppose, when I first learned about social exclusion. Life was very difficult for them. My mother worked extremely hard – as a nurse, as a traffic warden, as a street sweeper – just to try and gain a living, some self-respect. I soon realised, when I started to play football at a professional level, where the problem started. It wasn't so obvious in south-east London, but as we ventured further north we encountered the monkey chanting, booing, banana throwing. I

suppose my initial thoughts were: well, why is this happening? I soon realised it was because of the colour of my skin. Many people said to me, 'Oh well, we're just trying to intimidate you and put you off.' But you and I know that it is hard enough to play football without a group of people behaving in such a disrespectful way in order to upset your game.

I asked myself, 'How do I deal with it?' There were other, fellow black players that I knew but only one or two. There was really no legislation in place to punish people, because there wasn't the level of input there is now. The situation stayed the same for many years, and even when it was brought into the public domain, people would often say, 'Just get on with it. It's part of life.' But is it part of football? Clearly racism was then, and still is, a part of life and I believe that while racism stays on in society, racism will also be in football.

I moved next to Aston Villa: same type of problems. Luton Town: very similar again. What I was trying to do was to make a living, build a career, fulfil my dream of trying to play professional football to the best of my ability.

The most interesting move came when I went to Italy. I was barely 22 years old and I was thrust into this very, very difficult and hostile environment. I'll make further references to that, but the problems there were colossal. You've got a north-south divide: the north - very affluent, very prosperous; and the south with great social and economic problems. And I think that was reflected in the people. In the north, they were quite warm, quite welcoming, but there were still certain fundamental things intrinsically not right, not correct. And I thought that when I went into those areas trying to make a positive contribution, it would be better than what I'd left behind. But sadly, it wasn't.

I recall many games, and one in particular when I played against the great Diego Maradona, which for me was a wonderful personal achievement. I was designated to mark him and I have to honestly, impartially, say the nearest I got to him was when I shook his hand at the end of the game. He was exceptional and I was nothing short of woeful. I do also recall trying to kick him because I couldn't get near the ball, and as I went off the pitch at half time, there were about 10 policemen coming to give me some assistance. I have not seen a man who has been so influential in world football. And, in actual fact, I had won the ball from him fairly and squarely and I still needed a police escort. So that really tells you the magnitude of how that man was regarded.

But Italy was a wonderful move in terms of learning different cultures, speaking a new language, integrating, interacting with the local people. But there were issues there, and problems. I was the first black player to play for my team at the time, probably in 85 years. I suppose it comes with a price, but all I tried to do was just to focus on my football, focus on the job in hand and, as they say, let my feet do the talking.

In reality it wasn't a particularly good experience: the same monkey chanting, the same booing. Obviously, there are still issues in the game today. There's a colossal problem in Europe. That's a fact of life. That's reality. That will not change until certain things are instituted which I'll highlight a bit later.

But I served my time in Italy. From a professional point of view I felt I'd done a job, and then it was time to move on again and I moved to a place in Scotland. Scotland - there's a strange mix. 'Vodka and whisky' - we call it 'racism and sectarianism'. I couldn't understand how you could have such a wonderful, sincere, honest, hard-working community, and then how football brought out the worst in them. And I thought there were problems with racism but obviously they were superseded by other areas. This for me is extremely difficult: fellow players who were Catholic, with Protestant wives, and the families wouldn't talk. They wouldn't even visit each other's houses. They wouldn't socially interact. I found that very difficult to take in, but I'd inherited a hundred years' worth of history and issues.

There are certain games that bring out the best in some people and the worst in others. One is called the 'old firm' game: Celtic v. Rangers. I recall my debut for Celtic, which was against Rangers in front of 67,000 people. And I remember a little boy coming up to me and saying, 'I don't know your name but you look like Frank Bruno.' It's always stuck with me. I said, 'Well,

yeah? The only thing that we've got in common, young man, is that we're both black. But certainly not our name.' (To be honest I think my performance that afternoon was more Frank Bruno than football.)

I recall I didn't have the best of games. In fact, I started terribly by scoring an own-goal. Didn't help on my debut! The monkey chanting, the booing came out, far more vociferous than it's ever been, and then I made a back pass which contributed to the second goal. So after 45 minutes we were 2-0 down courtesy of Paul Elliott. I think you can imagine when the manager came in at half time – it's the biggest game of the season – he wasn't too complimentary in what he had to say to me. So I had to focus and apply myself and I must be honest with you and say the level of provocation certainly had an adverse effect on me because it was an experience like when I went to Italy: I went there as a boy and I came out of it a man. I think that was applicable to my time in Scotland too.

The second half of the game, things got better. The banana throwing wasn't as bad and I recall a particular incident where, when the ball went out of play, I went to get the ball and there were 3 or 4 bananas, and I actually picked up a banana, took a bite and threw it back at the offender. Now, in many respects, I think it was the right thing to do because there were roars of laughter from the opposing supporters and I thought, 'Well this is incredible.' I didn't want to eat too much and cause myself stomach issues for the rest of the game, but within 15 minutes I'd contributed to scoring, via an assist. Celtic were then losing just 2-1. And in about the 87th minute I scored the equaliser myself. So I felt redeemed.

Now I recall, after the game everybody was delighted, over the moon, and I remember this particular journalist came up to me and said, 'Paul, I know the game is about two halves, but this is ridiculous. How can you be so poor in the first half and then play reasonably well in the second half?' He said to me, 'Well, what was the most influential factor?' And I said: 'Well, don't you know the nutritional value of a banana?' That was said live on television, so all of a sudden, that's how I learned to turn negative into positive.

Now, I should not have to be subjected to that level of abuse. Nobody should. We all know it, but that was then and those were the times, and I've come across many fellow black sportsmen who probably wouldn't have behaved in the way that I did – everybody's got their own way of dealing with it. I've learned the struggle, I've seen how hard my mother and father have had to work in this world to try and make something for themselves and their children. And what they always taught me was about education. A lot of my work now is involved with education, working at various levels within the infrastructure of the game. And I feel that, while progress has been made – this includes progress towards racial diversity in the makeup of professional players, and removing racism from the terraces as well as from the pitch, things are improving, there's no doubt – we still have a long way to go.

The fact of the matter is within the game of professional football, there are three major issues for me. The black player base has developed in numbers, but there have been decreasing numbers on the terraces. Why aren't there people from the ethnic minorities on the terraces? There's only 1%, and yet 27% of the players are from the ethnic minorities. There's a virtual absence of Asian footballers at professional level. Why? There's talent there. Are they being suppressed? And, also, where are the ethnic minorities in the boardroom, in football administration. Managers? They're not there and if they are, they're on the minority forum. These are very serious issues that need to be addressed and it's because of them that I agreed to join Race Equality in Football at the CRE as Special Adviser with my friend Garth Crooks. The CRE, Garth and I are committed to working within the football industry to become a beacon of community, economic and political integration and cohesion for other industries.

In this country, I think a lot of football clubs need to recognise their responsibilities and their obligations to society. I am a director of Charlton Athletic Community Trust and they have an infrastructure there which I think is quite exceptional. It's devoted to working with children as young as 4 and 5. What Charlton has done that I have not seen in any other club is that they have successfully engaged with the community. They have a full-time staff, they do a lot of good work with Greenwich Borough Council, they have an infrastructure that goes into

schools, that works within the community, and the community actually feel part of the football club, regardless of race, colour, creed, gender, sexuality – everybody has a great affinity to the club. Their relationship with the community is first-class. And it's all about the people at the top.

Martin Simons is an excellent chairman and he's fully committed to tackling race, racism and inequality. I feel that footballers have a great role to play these days. Football used to be on the back pages but now it starts from page 1. At Charlton Athletic, all of the footballers there dedicate 4 hours a week to the community, that's written into their contracts. So you can imagine that when, within a 15 to 20-mile radius, you have Jason Euell, you've got Kevin Lisbie, you've got Mark Fish all taking 20–25 minutes popping in to schools, talking to kids, taking part in assemblies, giving out positive messages, positive vibes, children will listen. They can see these same people they've seen on the football pitch right there in their classrooms. They see them on TV on a Saturday night, talking about positive messages. I look at somebody, I look at you and I see a mass of people, I don't look at colour, I don't look at race. I judge you all by the content of your character, not the colour of your skin. And that's where the authorities in this country have a lot of work to do. But in Scotland, I'm trying to work with the Scottish Footballers' Association to ensure that the same principle is applied. Equally, with Gordon Taylor at the Professional Footballers' Association, I'm saying: 'Gordon, look at what Charlton do. It's a template. It's an infrastructure that's portable.' And that's from the top right the way to the bottom, way down to children as young as 6 years old.

Now, ultimately, most of us here, as parents, have a role to play within the home just as much as teachers have a role to play within the classroom.

Both Gordon and the authorities in Scotland, what we are trying to do collectively, cohesively, is develop that same structure where you've got players all over Britain – from Celtic and Rangers down to the north-east – Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Newcastle – down to the Midlands – Aston Villa, Birmingham City, Nottingham Forest, Leicester City, Derby County, West Bromwich Albion. Imagine that all the way down to the south, imagine the impact of that good practice, positivity, encouragement and support on the future.

We're working hard to try and get that in place because the reality is – and I say this honestly and impartially – in this country we are further ahead, 15 years ahead, of Europe, probably further ahead in the rest of the world. We are the leading lights in this country in challenging racism and inequality. There is no question about it. Because the reality is you look at what's happening in Spain, you've seen what happened with Aragones, the coach, we've seen what's happening when England played against Spain and what those black players were subjected to. It's totally unacceptable for FIFA and UEFA, the footballing authorities, to fine a nation £47,000. That's merely one week's wages for one of their top players. That does not send out a positive message that they're tackling racism seriously.

Look at Italy when England have played there, when Heskey, Ashley Cole, teams like Arsenal have played against Italian teams and the ongoing horrific abuse is still clearly there. They have not moved on. So part of my work for FARE – Football Against Racism in Europe – is to say to these authorities, 'Do you have the same vigour, do you have the same commitment and desire to want to challenge and confront it as we do here in this country? If you do, if you want to, we can help you.' But just like you have Martin Simons at Charlton – there are many other chairmen, not just Martin, I mention Martin because I know him well and I recognise the work that he's done – if the desire is there, if all those characteristics are clearly evident, then we have a chance. Which is why, in this country, things have certainly got better. But there can't be room for any complacency. Because racism doesn't stop. It keeps going, and all of us, as adults, have responsibilities to work against it with whatever capacity we can.

Now, before I finish, I would like to mention the impact the game and the wider sporting facilities provide to bring people together. Football, sport, brings people together from all walks of life, regardless of their own circumstances, class and racial group. The game provides opportunities to bring people together through the love of the game. They pool factors that develop personal aspirations to the game. People recognise the health benefits that football and sport bring. Equally, it provides an opportunity to socialise with friends and

colleagues and prove oneself on merit on the field regardless of race, age or heritage. And this point, in my view, is articulated elegantly by a great, great man, Nelson Mandela, who I would like to quote:

‘Sport, and football in particular, has an important role to play in the lives of people. Sport has the power to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can. It speaks to people in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where there was once only despair. It breaks down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all kinds of discrimination, spreading hope to the world.’

Thank you all for taking the time to come here today. By your attendance, you’ve shown, like me, your commitment and your desire. I can’t stress enough how important it is for all of us in this room cohesively, collectively and individually to work hard and to make our contribution in bringing to fruition this strategy for the very many vulnerable communities that rely upon us to do our job.

Pat Younge. Well, who said footballers are inarticulate? Paul has posed some real questions there about the obligations of major industries and that’s what sport is in the UK – it’s a major multi-billion-pound industry – in terms of their commitment to community and social cohesion and also about the role of leadership.