



Opinion Category

The Three Lions Vs England

by Aran Buma, Rice College, Co. Clare

The stadium is loud, a constant roar in your ears. Your heart is pounding as you step forward, the ball still on the penalty spot. The noise, the pressure, the weight of a nation watching. You try block it out, you can't think. You take the kick. A split second later, it's over. Donnarumma saves the penalty.

Silence. Then heartbreak.

In the dressing rooms everyone's phone is going off. Kane and Pickford's are getting encouragement, "Unlucky mate, head up." "We still have the world cup lads, next time." But for Saka, Rashford and Sancho there was never encouragement, just hate.

For Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho, the pain of missing penalties in the Euro 2020 final was already too much for them. But what followed was far worse. Instead of support, they were met with a massive wave of racist abuse online. Horrible emojis. Slurs. Hate. Not because they missed penalties, but because of the colour of their skin.

This was more than football now.

These players were targeted because racism still exists within sport and society. Football, which is normally praised for bringing people together, can also expose the ugliest sides of people. When England lost the final, some people looked for someone to blame and chose three young black players who tried to make their country proud. So many other experienced players could have stood up to take that penalty but Sancho, Rashford and Saka stood proud and took their penalties and even if they missed, they should have been proud of themselves for being so brave to take that penalty.

Racism in sport does not just happen to the biggest stages like the Euros. It happens at local level too in school matches, local league clubs, and amateur leagues. Players face abuse from opponents, spectators, and even online group chats and is not getting any better, there needs to be more reinforcements, from hearing “fans” with their own children shouting racial comments at their own players. In the league of Ireland there is several cases of racial abuse towards football players especially 16 year old Victor Ozhianvuna, with the individual still not punished at the dawn of the new year. It’s hard enough to hear that a 16 year old was racially abused but to find out that the individual has not been found or punished is appalling. All the FAI have done nothing but fining the club and put out an investigation trying to find the horrid supporter which they have not succeeded at so far. There needs to be proper measures in the League of Ireland to make the league a safer and more supportive environment for people that are vulnerable to racial comments.

The impact on mental health can be devastating (especially players like Saka and Ozhianvuna being the youngest players on their teams) leading to anxiety, loss of confidence, and in some cases, players quitting the sport altogether.

There are measures in place to prevent racism: campaigns like Kick It Out, players taking the knee, and social media platforms banning abusive accounts. But Euro 2020 showed that these measures are not enough on their own. Racism does not disappear with slogans; it requires real consequences, education, and accountability.

Stronger punishments, better moderation online, and more education from an early age are needed. Clubs, associations, and fans all have a responsibility. Silence lets racism survive.

The future of football should be one where talent matters more than skin colour, where young players can miss a penalty without fearing hate. Saka, Rashford and Sancho showed courage by stepping up. What football needs is the courage to truly change.