

ARE YOU A FOOTIE FAN? DO YOU KNOW THERE ARE SPECIAL LAWS RELATING TO YOU?

Attending a football match should be fun...just keep these few laws in mind.... it is not a defence to say that you didn't know about these football laws. The magistrates have heard this argument all too often and take the attitude that 'Ignorance of the law is no defence'.

Northamptonshire Police Football Intelligence Officer is working in conjunction with Northampton Town Football Club, Coventry City Football Club to run a trial of pyro amnesty bins at some Sixfields Stadium matches in April and May. The aim of this trial is to highlight the issues of possession of pyro at football and the consequences. This is not an invitation to bring pyro to Sixfields, but if you find yourself in the position where you have made the stupid decision to buy pyro or have been encouraged to take pyro into the Stadium, these bins will give the opportunity to get rid of it on a 'no questions asked' basis. But remember, if you are caught trying to get into the stadium with Pyro or alcohol...'ignorance of the law is no defence'. You will be arrested and chances are it will be the last time you get to see a match at Sixfields for at least the next three years, or possibly for ever.

Prepared by Alison Gurden, a Barrister, based at 1 Gray's Inn Square Chambers & specialising in Football Supporter Law. For Further information go to www.alisongurden.wordpress.com

For more information please see www.facepyrofacts.co.uk or contact PC 1025 Nick Price - Northamptonshire Police on 03000 111 222 or email nick.price@northants.police.uk



Smoke and flames...and police cells

Thinking of taking a smoke bomb or flare into a football match to let off when your team scores? The excitement of coloured smoke will last less than three minutes, but your arrest and conviction for possession of pyro will last much longer... up to 3 months in a youth offender institution or prison!

Just having pyro in your pocket in a public place is an offence if you are under 18

The police have the power to stop search a fan if they suspect that the fan is carrying pyro, the fact that one of your mates is carrying pyro may also lead to the police searching you as well..

If your mates carry pyro, you could also get a club ban

Don't forget, it's not just the fan that is in possession of the pyro who may end up in trouble, the clubs are getting much tougher on fans that associate with fans that are caught with pyro. Being in a group of fans who have pyro may end up in a club ban, and club removal of membership or your season ticket. That split second when you are offered pyro or encouraged to buy it, could change your life.... it sounds dramatic, but that is because it is.

Anything, other than the ball, thrown in the stadium is classed as a missile

If you are caught throwing coins or pyro you will definitely be arrested. Even if the police do not see the incident itself, they will trawl through the CCTV footage inside the stadium and will be assisted by the club safety officers to identify the seat number and trace you. There are hardly any areas which are not covered by video footage of some kind, either the club CCTV, the police hand held cameras, or, at some matches, the stewards body cams. The fine for missile throwing is up to £1000, and inevitably the club will ban a fan that has been caught throwing a missile. Recently clubs have been handing out lifetime bans, and that's in addition to any Football Banning Order imposed by the court.

Pitch invasion is a serious offence and will definitely result in a club ban, even jumping over the barriers and dancing on the sidelines to celebrate a goal, or a team win is classed as pitch invasion. The same penalties apply a fine, club ban and Football Banning Order.



Image MaxyM/Shutterstock

A drunken fan will probably become an arrested fan

Trying to enter a ground drunk will probably lead to you being arrested, and will most definitely mean that you miss the match. The afternoon you intend to spend at football with your mates could instead turn into a spell in a police station cell and end with a reprimand which will stay on your record, or worse still, a trip to court and a fine of up to £500.

The same applies for attempting to take alcohol into a stadium, only this time the stakes are much higher. If you end up in court the sentence can be a fine of up to £1000 or up to 3 months in custody.

If you appear to have had a few drinks but don't reach the drunken level, the Police can still search you at the turnstiles and in the stadium to make sure that you don't have any alcohol on you, and that search will not just be of your bag or pockets. Any alcohol hidden under your clothes, down your trousers or in your boots will also be found. Don't forget, most of these police officers have been searching people for years, they know where to look!

Add to this the fact you could end up with a football banning order and or club ban. You have to question...what do you value more, the football or a few drinks?

A Football Banning Order bans a fan from more than just a football match

A football Banning Order is a very strict order, it not only limits a fan's attendance at International, Premiership, Championship and League matches, but applies also to Conference games, and potentially to Under 21 matches. It can also prevent a fan going into town or from public transport on any day when their team is playing.

A banned fan has to report to the police station and may have to hand in their passport when their team, or England or Wales, are playing overseas. That means anyone who is currently under a Football Banning Order is not going to be able to travel overseas during the World Cup period, and probably will probably be banned from going into town to watch the World Cup games on a big screen or in a pub.

Anyone who has a Football Banning Order is classed as a 'yob' or 'hooligan' by the media, and that rubs off on others who will find out about a fan's ban. The Football Banning Order appears on a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, which will be carried out by potential employers. Even part time staff in supermarkets are subject to a CRB check. Anyone applying to referee or coach at any level will have to be CRB checked, and a Football Banning Order on the CRB check will probably put an end to any refereeing chances. Colleges and Universities are also able to request CRB checks, and a Football Banning Order can restrict entrance to a lot of courses.

Club issued bans are even harder to challenge than a football banning order

A football Banning Order can only be imposed by the court and so it is possible to argue against the ban being imposed, and while not always successful, it is sometimes the court decides not to impose the Football Banning Order. There is no such challenge with a football club, each club is a private company, and can do what it likes with a fan's membership. If the club decides to issue a ban, it is virtually impossible to challenge it. Whereas a Football Banning Order can be imposed for a maximum of 10 years, the club can issue a lifetime ban.