



# YOU'RE NOT WELCOME ANYMORE

**WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO HELP PARENTS  
CONTINUE TO ACCESS FOOTBALL WITH  
YOUNG CHILDREN**

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This report is dedicated to all of the mums that love football - be that playing, in the stands or watching at home.  
We dedicate it specially to the memory of Ann Rawlinson, lifelong Fulham fan and original Fulham Lillie.

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# INTRODUCTION

## ANNA B. - FULHAM FAN

I went to my first Fulham match as a baby in 1985. My sister and I went with our dad while our mum worked. It was a proud moment when I took my son (born in 2019) to his first match when he was a couple of months old— I had no choice as I was breastfeeding.

However, with the obligation now to pay for seats even for babes-in-arms (I have a second baby now) and inflating their prices to match those for 17-year-olds, I cannot fully use my season ticket. When I came, the other supporters' faces lit up when they saw a baby. We are a family club, after all.

(Fulham supporter since 1985 and season-ticket holder since you needed to have one)

This report stems from personal and learned experiences, such as Anna, whose story is told above, and the other women's stories that will follow, of attending and not attending Premier League football matches. However, we hope our recommendations will ripple across the entire Football League structure.

## INTRODUCING THE FULHAM LILLIES AND THE FULHAM SUPPORTERS' TRUST

The Fulham Lillies are an independent group of female Fulham fans that aim to amplify the presence of women within the club, fostering a more diverse fan base; and motivating and empowering upcoming generations of female fans. Additionally, we advocate for women's football and encourage supporter participation at Fulham FC Women's matches.

The Fulham Supporters' Trust is a community benefit society comprising an independent group of Fulham fans. We are there to safeguard the best interests of all Fulham supporters. We aim to protect Fulham's unique identity at Craven Cottage, keep football at Fulham accessible and maintain a strong connection between the club and supporters. Above all, our mission is to always look after the best interests of Fulham supporters.

## AIMS

We hope this report puts together a fresh perspective on bringing young children to stadiums and opens the debate on making matchdays family-friendly. Parents - be they doing that job now or in the future, make up a significant fraction of match-going football fans. Let's see how positive the impact would be if we opened the game to enable them not to get left behind.

This report will **empower and inform parents** to advocate for the ability to easily attend Premier League matches, not only solely in the ability to enter stadiums but also with club policies from ticket pricing to family-friendly spaces. We aim to **influence clubs** to first permit parents to attend matches with young children if not currently doing so and then to examine further policies to make matches truly family-friendly, considering aspects such as ticketing and bag policies. Finally, we hope to **inspire supporter groups** to encourage their clubs to become truly family-friendly.

## EVIDENCE

Any match-going fan that becomes a parent finds themselves in unknown territory once their baby arrives. Their freedom to attend matches is significantly impacted and felt keenly when football is a parent's community, friendship circle, and identity.

We know that the change is particularly impactful to mothers, despite the sterling work that many of today's dads provide in society. Breastfeeding is an important part of this imbalance but is not the only reason behind the gender divide.

We have found significant variety within the Premier League clubs on their rules for under 5s to attend matches, many of whom ban it for home or away fans or do not allow some children into stadiums. It is unacceptable, and this report addresses the need for uniformity.

## IDEOLOGY

The football world has yet to entirely remove the assumption that it is for men. The remaining impediments to infants being brought to matches stem from beliefs rather than factual risks.

In society, there is still a whirlwind of expectations for new mums to become new people overnight and an assumption that their old life will fit around the edges, if at all. It informs the rules on match attendance by those under five. This report explains why shifting the culture around attending matches with babies is crucial and outlines how clubs can do more to support this.

## RISKS

We understand that there is risk involved in the attendance of young children in stadiums with large crowds, and we evaluate this in our report. We also investigate ways that clubs can mitigate risk and show that with constructive work, they can support the bringing of young children to games.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**This report focuses on three key reasons why Premier League football clubs and every club in the EFL pyramid need to review their policy to bring young children into stadiums on matchdays.**

When referring to young children, we mean a child under five years old. We understand that someone under five is not old enough to be interested in watching a football game for any meaningful amount of time. Moreover, an under-2 should not require a seat and would only be in attendance due to the parent's needs.

## THE REASONS FOR REVIEWING POLICY AROUND YOUNG CHILDREN ARE:

- The parent, child and football bond is essential to nurture
- There is risk involved, but it can be mitigated to reasonable levels
- Clubs have a responsibility to be inclusive to this group of fans

At the end of this report, we have outlined some recommendations and request that anyone interested in reviewing their policies get in touch as we have more detailed specifics to our recommendations available in separate information. You can find our contact details on the last page.

Our report starts with a table that shows current Premier League policies on bringing children under 5 to a football match and our findings.



# POLICY AND INFORMATION AT PREMIER LEAGUE CLUBS FOR BRINGING YOUNG CHILDREN

To gather data for this chart, we scoured each club’s website for information. Some clubs were easy to understand, with clearly stated child policies. Still, it was difficult to discern for most clubs, even after extensive searches through the website home page, FAQ section, ticketing pages, and deep into the club’s website. After that, we emailed each club about their policies but received no response. We then called each club to inquire about their under-5s policies, which often required being transferred from person to person and long hold times. Rarely will any parent with a baby have much time to sort through a website or sit on hold for 15 minutes to figure out if they can bring their baby to a match, much less how much it costs. Parents accustomed to bringing their small children to home grounds might not realise that babies are not

permitted at other grounds and not be granted entry; or, removed partway through a match. Likewise, parents whose children are not permitted at their home grounds might not realise that they can bring their children to other stadiums and could choose not to attend even though it is possible.

The following league table rates accessibility to Premier League football grounds for the 23/24 season and combines several factors to rate clubs according to their child-friendliness. Incredibly, many clubs make it very hard even to access simple information about bringing under-5s to their stadiums, and one or two don’t even allow young children in, so they sink towards the bottom of the league.

## HERE ARE THE CRITERIA IN ORDER:

- Under-5’s allowed into the stadium, yes or no?
- Free entry for “babes in arms” (not taking a seat)?
- Age limit for babes in arms
- Child concessions prices available in all stands?
- Concession price (lowest category price)

Rank	Club	Division	Under-5s allowed into stadium?	Free entry without a seat (babes in arms)?	Child seat concession category	Concession price range	Concessions in all stands?	Away fan policy	Any other restrictions?
1	Manchester City	PL	✓	✓ (under-5)	Under-5	£0	✓	Away discretion*	-
2	Bournemouth	PL	✓	✓ (under-3)	Under-8	£0	✓	Away discretion*	Junior Cherries membership required (3-8). Family Stand is recommended.
3	Sheffield United	PL	✓	✓ (under-2)	Under-18	£12 - £22	✓	Away discretion*	All under 5s need tickets
4	Brighton	PL	✓	✓ (under-2)	Under-18	£15 - £37	✓	Away discretion*	
5	Liverpool	PL	✓	✗	Under-17	£9	✓	Same as home fans	Membership required
6	Brentford	PL	✓	✗	Under-18	£10 - £15	✓	Same as home fans	-
7	Everton	PL	✓	✗	Under-18	£15 - £25	✓	Same as home fans	-
8	Wolves	PL	✓	✗	Under-14	£11 - £17*	✓	Away discretion*	*Not all price categories announced.

Rank	Club	Division	Under-5s allowed into stadium?	Free entry without a seat (babes in arms)?	Seat concession category for under-5s	Concession price range	Concessions in all stands?	Away fan policy	Any other restrictions?
9	Fulham	PL	✓	✗	Under-18	£24 - £83	✓	Same as home fans	
10	Arsenal	PL	✓	✗	Under-17	£11 - £25	✗	Same as home fans	Not all seats allowed for under-3s. Friends & family sales window only.
11	Aston Villa	PL	✓	✗	Under-14	£13 - £15	✗	?	Prices for under-5s in family stand only. Limited availability.
12	Chelsea	PL	✓	✗	Under-20	£18 - £28	✗	Same as home fans	
13	West Ham	PL	✓	✗	Under-18	£18 - £55	✗	Away discretion*	
14	Tottenham	PL	✓	✗	Under-18	£19 - £42	✗	Away discretion*	Not all areas.
15	Luton Town	PL	✓	✗	Under-10	£12*	?	Same as home fans	*Not all price categories announced.
16	Burnley	PL	✓	✗	Under-18	?	?	Same as home fans	Difficult to find prices.
17	Manchester Utd	PL	✓	✗	Under-16	?	?	Same as home fans	Difficult to find prices.
18	Newcastle	PL	✓	✗	Under-17	?	?	Same as home fans	Difficult to find prices.
19	Crystal Palace	PL	2+ only	✗	Under-18	?	?	Same as home fans	Difficult to find prices. Written permission required for under-2s.
20	Nottingham Forest	PL	4+ only	✗	?	£10	?	Same as home fans	Difficult to find prices.

\*Away discretion - it is the choice of the visiting club to allow young persons into the away area

As the above table has shown, policies around away supporters travelling to matches are varied and complex. It is also the hardest issue to solve as away ends have limited capacity and a lack of family-friendly facilities and they can be more boisterous and rowdy. However, away fans matter; they are absolutely crucial to the atmosphere in the ground and it is vitally important that supporters can continue to watch their team both home and away.

The responsibility for away fans is shared between the two clubs. It is right that they work together, along with fan groups, stewards and policing, to ensure all supporters who wish to attend away fixtures can do so. We will discuss how to mitigate these risks later in the report.

# “WHY WOULD YOU EVER WANT TO BRING A YOUNG CHILD TO A MATCH?”

When we began this project, we were met with incredulous expressions, such as, “Why would you ever want to bring a young child to a match?” Several of us are mothers ourselves, and we wanted to articulate some of the levels of meaning that are entangled in attending matches and support our claims with facts, data, and studies that explain why new parents might want to bring children to matches. We realise this list of reasons is not exhaustive and suggest that there could be many reasons parents want to share in a football match with their child(ren). Not every parent will decide to take their child to a match, but we believe parents should be informed, but ultimately, that the choice to take a child to a football match should be theirs.

This is not requesting access so parents can compete for a social media post for “baby’s first match” at the earliest age. However, this indeed may happen – we intend to acknowledge a lifeline for longtime season ticket holders who wish to continue their pre-baby lives and access the activity (attending football matches), social support networks and community that they have been part of for decades. **Parent wellbeing matters.** We believe most clubs can do more to accommodate parents of young children. Attending matches with small children is work; it is not something parents will take lightly - it requires planning, balancing, shuffling and prioritising on the part of parents. They will put in significant effort to attend matches, and clubs should work to honour the relationship and make it easy for the supporter to do so. This section outlines why parents want to bring their child(ren) to football matches.

## “IT’S WHO I AM!” - MAINTAINING IDENTITY

To some parents, maintaining participation as a supporter feels like a way to continue a healthy sense of self, enabling the person to be a better parent. Continuing fandom as a new parent can help provide stability, at least in identity, during a season of changes.

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Football fandom is more than an individual activity – it flourishes due to the community, friendships, and relationships formed in supporting a team. The bonds cemented over decades at football form an essential support system for new parents, particularly during a lonely and isolating time.
- Face-to-face interactions are the key to fandom and increased well-being and cannot be replicated by simply watching a match at home.

## MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

- Multiple studies show that closely identifying with a team is connected to positive emotions, improved social well-being, higher self-esteem, and reduced loneliness, negative emotions and depression (Reysen et al., 2018).
- Belonging to and identifying with groups is also tied to increased quality of life, and the stronger one identifies as a fan, the likelihood of increased well-being increases.
- A recent study shows people who attend sporting events in person report higher levels of saying their life has value and lower loneliness, linking to overall higher satisfaction with life, often leading to multiple positive health outcomes such as reducing mortality hazards (Keyes et al., 2023).
- Supporting new parents in attending matches in person should be one of a club’s strategies for promoting mental health.

## “FOLLOWING IN MY FOOTSTEPS”

- Parents often use sporting events to connect to their children, with mothers and fathers bringing their children to matches because it holds great importance in their lives.
- Football helps structure family interactions – different generations of family meet at matches, and season tickets are passed from generation to generation. Clubs should want to help families continue this legacy.
- Some fans see bringing children to matches as a way to socialise and impart family values such as teamwork, group connection, and club loyalty.
- Parental influence is still the largest predictor of which team a child supports. Clubs should enable this to provide continuity for another generation.
- A psychological bond is formed between a fan and their team, often becoming strong enough to impact how the fan understands and processes much of the world. Clubs look to the future benefits of solidifying a family’s loyalty.

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## BREASTFEEDING

- Breastfeeding during the first year particularly requires parent and baby to be together for on-demand feeding. Particularly during the first few months, it is rarely possible to be away for more than a couple of hours from their baby, and no one should be required to make this decision to attend a football match.
- Breastfeeding and fandom are not incompatible, and mothers should never be forced to give up their fandom to ensure their children are fed.
- Mothers need structures, policies, and support to ensure they can attend football matches however they decide to feed their babies.
- Clubs should look for ways to support them by providing spaces where the mother can care for her baby while actively participating as a fan.

## CHILDCARE

- Safe, affordable, reliable, and regular childcare can be difficult to arrange.
- Some teams had offered a crèche for children, but these are rarely in use anymore. Nor does it solve the problem of breastfeeding.
- Bringing a child to a match can let a parent continue their fandom and ensure their child is cared for appropriately.

## KEY POINTS

Altogether, a new parent's continued fandom can help them maintain their self-identity and the social structures they had before having children and provide mental health support. Attending with children allows connections with that child, eases breastfeeding, and eliminates the need for childcare on matchday. Clubs need to be conscious that not assisting these new parents could cause long-term schisms, with generations of fans being lost, perhaps to other clubs or football entirely.

**“When my little girl was a baby, she would have been perfectly fine in a sling during the match, but it was not accepted behaviour so we couldn't do it.”**

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### ROSE M. - ASTON VILLA FAN

Going to Villa before kids was everything – my husband and I went home and away every week with friends, and it would completely dominate our weekends. It was not just the football; it was the early morning breakfast sandwich runs, the train journeys, random budget hotels after the game, the pre-drinks, half-time beer and pie. The stories flowed from being part of something. Whilst pregnant, I could still go to the games, and we would leave earlier or later from the stadium. We always had the top priority, so my husband could always book seats in the corners of the group / back rows which meant we kept out of the way of crowds. Thank goodness Villa were promoted two months before my little one was born because it would have been awful not to be part of that!

But now everything has changed – I barely go to any games. It's not just the football you miss out on, but the whole experience. I find myself resenting the football and, to a certain extent, my husband. He still attends all matches, but for me to be able to, the emphasis is on me to arrange a babysitter, and we just don't have that family support available. With travel, parking, and crowds, it's usually a

7-hour trip. Now my eldest is four, and she is asking to come to games, but it will still be a couple of years before we can go to games again because of the baby.

I appreciate that football stadiums are not designed for children, and people attending may not want children there. When my little girl was a baby, she would have been perfectly fine in a sling during the match, but it was not accepted behaviour, so we couldn't do it. I remember taking her to the cricket at Edgbaston, and the comments there were bad enough! Perhaps a creche or a family area that allowed under-4s to attend would mean we could still be part of it. Or, at the very least, acknowledge my supporter history regarding my previous attendance. We still buy my season ticket every year so that I can retain my seat for the few games a season I can attend and to be able to return someday in the future. Otherwise, when the children are older and I can attend again, my husband and I will be in different priority categories. This would mean I still couldn't go to all the games or get a seat near him. So again, you feel like you are pushed to the outskirts, not part of the whole experience. You feel that you are not welcome.

# HOW MUCH OF AN ISSUE IS SAFETY?

**As mentioned previously, when we approached various organisations to discuss young children and babies attending matches, we were often met with the response, “Why would you ever want to bring a young child to a match”. The belief was that it was too dangerous and not a suitable environment. We wanted to break this safety aspect down and explain the risks that young children will be exposed to.**

## CROWDS AND CROWD BEHAVIOUR

Football matches can be intense and emotional events, often leading to passionate reactions from supporters. Young children and babies could be exposed to overcrowding, accidental physical contact or objects thrown by unruly spectators. However, spectator safety is of paramount importance today in football stadiums and risk assessment and mitigation are being implemented to ensure the well-being of all attendees. Whilst taking young children brings unique and specific issues, given that crowd control and mitigating other risks are the duties of all clubs, there should be no barriers and accommodating babes in arms and young children is possible without compromising safety standards.

## PYROTECHNICS

Over the 2022/23 football season, around 45 million people attended men’s domestic and international matches in England and Wales. There were a total of 3,024 regulated football matches involving men’s English and Welsh clubs and the national teams played in England and Wales. Of these, incidents were reported at 1,516 matches (statistics taken from the Home Office report published on the 28th September, 2023 Football-related arrests and banning orders England and Wales: 2022 to 2023 season). No incidents were reported at women’s regulated football matches. When referring to incidents, this covers anything from anti-social football-related behaviour to violence and disorder, which can happen before, during and after the game.

Out of the 1,516 incidents reported, 620 were related to pyrotechnics. As a percentage, this means the chance of an individual coming into contact with a pyrotechnic during a football match is 0.00001378%. It is also worth remembering that the reporting of pyrotechnic incidents includes people trying to enter the ground with them on their person, being found with them in the ground and then after they have left the stadium. It does not necessarily refer to them being dispatched and causing injury to others.

Section 2A of the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985 states it is a criminal offence to attempt to bring a pyrotechnic device into a designated football ground or to have a pyrotechnic device in the spectator viewing accommodation at a designated football ground. The use of pyrotechnics at football grounds puts the safety of everyone at risk. Staff and players have the right to work without the risk of injury from the crowd, and fans have the right to enjoy football in a safe environment, which is why this law is in place.

Rather than punish babies and young children by not allowing them to attend football matches, the onus needs to be put back on clubs to take all reasonable steps to prevent the use of pyrotechnics in stadiums. Examples of how they can do this are:

- Before a match, websites, social media and tickets can clearly convey that possessing pyrotechnics in grounds is prohibited in all circumstances. It needs to be clear that anyone found guilty of such use will be banned from the ground and may also be prosecuted.
- Clubs should be discouraged from using pyrotechnics and consider light shows as an alternative.
- Gather information on visiting supporters, for example, via the Football Safety Officers Association (FSOA)/police intelligence from previous fixtures or information from the visiting club’s safety team.
- Use intelligence from sources, including social media and others, to build a risk assessment on the potential nature and scale of risk of the use of pyrotechnics at an event. Use this as part of the stewards’ safety briefing.
- Use signage around the ground to reinforce the message that possessing and using pyrotechnics is illegal and prohibited.
- Use CCTV to identify those using pyrotechnics in the crowd.
- Gather evidence in close liaison with local police representatives.
- Where there is robust evidence of an individual(s) using pyrotechnics in the stadium, take steps to ban them from the ground and a wider exclusion from other football grounds.
- Publicise such ground banning orders and/or arrests

(the above information is taken from the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA) Pyrotechnics Education Campaign Toolkit)

# IDENTIFY THE ACTIVITY AND PERSONS AT RISK

Describe the work activity: Football matchdays involving 1st team	Who might be harmed? Potential for vulnerable groups such as children and babes in arms to be affected	Frequency of activity: Weekly from August to May – mainly Saturday afternoons or midweek evenings
Hazard Identification	Risk Assessment	Controls to reduce the risk
Noise	Sound within stadiums can reach a higher level that which is deemed safe for a child.	Sit in an area within the stadium with lower noise levels Child to wear ear protectors
Bad/extreme weather	Dehydration, sunstroke, sunburn, hypothermia, pneumonia	Access to drinking water Sunscreen Appropriate clothing and footwear against prevailing conditions First Aid assistance available
Football into crowd	A player kicks the ball and it ends up hitting a child/babe in arms.	Recommend sitting at least 20 rows back from the pitch to prevent any injuries from the ball coming into the crowd Sit in a designated family area away from the pitch
Pyrotechnics	Pyrotechnics being thrown within the ground area including onto the pitch.	Ground regulations around pyrotechnics visible within the stadium Inform supporters when tickets are sold that no pyrotechnics are allowed Inform supporters via the Club website and programmes that no pyrotechnics are allowed Ensure procedures are in place to ensure supporters do not enter the ground with pyrotechnics Eject anyone with pyrotechnics within the ground

## DESIGNATED AREAS

Some parents of young children might want to continue to sit with friends and family in the same stands as they have for decades. As passionate, season-ticket-supporting fans, we strongly believe this is something that they should continue to have the right to do. Clubs should do their best to accommodate expanding families to keep them in the section they desire; otherwise, they could lose the important social ties that drew them to football initially.

However, in some stadiums, there are designated family areas which clubs should prioritise for parents with a history of club support. They can encourage families to choose seats within a set space. These designated family areas provide a more relaxed environment for individuals with young children. These sections often feature facilities such as changing areas, breastfeeding facilities and reduced noise levels, thus allowing families to enjoy the match fully. We acknowledge that not all stadiums have the infrastructure or resources to implement these dedicated family areas. In such cases, clubs can implement other policies to keep families safe and supporters in their long-term seats.

## FOOTBALL INTO CROWD

The 2021/22 SGSA Football Spectator Injuries at Football grounds report states that 1,841 spectators were treated for eligible injuries at football matches. The average number of injuries caused by spectators being hit by balls, across the 5 leagues, is 4.8% or 88 injuries. However, if we just look at the Premier League and International matches that figure is just 2%. Whilst we acknowledge these numbers are not insignificant it is worth noting that the majority of incidents across all leagues occurred among adults (64%) with most of those occurring among adults aged 25-59. Therefore the risk to babies and young children is minimal and can be mitigated against by taking the actions recommended in the above table.

## POLICY CAN BE INCLUSIVE & SAFE

By striking a balance between safety and inclusivity, clubs can create an environment that welcomes families while ensuring the well-being of all attendees. Continual assessment and refinement of stadium policies, empathy and staff training are essential in addressing the complexities of spectator safety concerning infants in football stadiums.

# THIS IS AN INCLUSIVITY ISSUE. THE MEN'S GAME NEEDS TO ACT NOW.

Our community will continue to flourish as long as we maintain broad dialogue and democratic values. We rely on our diversity to make European football inclusive and welcoming to all.

- Together for the Future of Football – UEFA Strategy 2019-24, The Fundamentals, p.8

## SARAH T. - BRENTFORD FAN

Brentford's brand new Gtech Stadium was opened without baby changing tables in the toilets. This case comes from a report of the difficulties a mother experienced from taking babies at 14 months and four months. There are also no alternatives except one emergency gate for children under-5 with difficulty using the turnstiles.

Accepting parents with young children is an inclusivity issue. The message across all football governing bodies is loud and clear - football is for everyone. From playing the sport, watching it or working within the industry, all major governing bodies agree on this point and are creating strategies, frameworks, and policies to ensure that more is being done. Within the context of the Premier League, for which our work is focused, the aims of the Premier League Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Standard explain that:

Clubs are asked to use data and insight to identify key EDI priority groups where under-representation needs to be addressed or special emphasis needs to be placed, e.g. mental health and wellbeing (MH&W). Priority groups should be drawn from the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010, which ensures that individuals are not discriminated against on the grounds of:

- AGE • DISABILITY • GENDER REASSIGNMENT • MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP •
- PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY • RACE • RELIGION OR BELIEF • SEX • SEXUAL ORIENTATION •

Clubs may also have other priorities, for example, socio-economic status, poverty, areas of deprivation, Welsh language, young people not in employment, education or training (NEETS) and young offenders.

The Equality Act 2010 makes specific reference to the area of pregnancy and maternity as likely to need support and focus to ensure equality. So far, within football, these concerns are being addressed in policies for female staff members. Creating equality for supporter attendance has not been at the forefront. Socioeconomic status, including the issue of poverty, is another priority that clubs may focus on improving. Affordable ticketing and support for parent supporters would immediately increase the standing of a club's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity policy.

Currently, stadiums are not welcoming of young children, which increases the stigma associated with someone who does wish to bring a young child, having a policy at odds with this inclusivity work that the Premier League is driving.

## AN ODD DIFFERENCE

Interestingly, this separation of parent and child attending only occurs in the men's version of the sport. Family attendance and 'safety' have never been questioned within the women's game. Women's Super League club policies welcome children of all ages, and the spectator's view of the sport is that it is normal for people to attend with children.



## CHANGE MUST COME

This difference between the women's game and the men's makes it clear that the historical association of men's football and the specific male culture surrounding the sport is driving policy around attendance, not safety issues.

We believe clubs can work harder to include parents with young children in their ED&I policies and help them attend matches. The culture will not change unless clubs lead the process. As with all other initiatives that have been implemented to change the game, they come from a desire for better accessibility, from normalising that which historically hasn't been, and they come from support for those people who previously might not have considered attending a match, but now feel confident in their ability to do so.

**“It just wasn't practical and would make a potentially joyous occasion full of stress and anxiety.”**

### HELEN F. - NOTTS COUNTY FAN

I have been a football fan – and a Notts County fan – since infant school. I used to go to every home match with Dad and my three younger brothers, and 30-plus years later, it is fair to say that Notts is the glue that sticks our family together. If we didn't talk about football, what would we talk about?! We have seen our team play in every league and get promoted and relegated more times than we would have liked.

Mainly for practical reasons, such as the cold and the difficulty of accessing breastfeeding through many layers of clothing, I have not taken my autumn-born children to live matches as small babies. But with a playoff campaign and warmer weather coinciding, I took my 7-month-old son to watch Notts vs Boreham Wood at Meadow Lane. There was no issue with his entry so long as I had a free-of-charge ticket for him. He wore ear defenders and mostly slept in my arms or the baby carrier. There were no problems at all.

When we won the match in extra time. Watching Notts return to the Football League at the new Wembley was so exciting. I had watched Notts at Wembley five times before, but not since the mid-90s! I was incredulous when I read that no under-2s are allowed entry into Wembley. As breastfeeding

was still my son's primary source of food, I couldn't make a full day away from him work without much difficulty: it just wasn't practical and would make a potentially joyous occasion full of stress and anxiety.

I would never intentionally endanger my children, but football is a family game. It was a National League play-off final, not a full-blooded international, and Wembley is a brand-new accessible stadium – what could be so risky?

Wembley's rules may have been set with the best intentions, but they robbed me of the chance to take my eight-year-old son to watch our team at Wembley – his first trip there. I instead had to wave off my dad, brothers, nieces and son as they enjoyed the occasion together, leaving me to watch it on TV.

I find these rules discriminatory and insulting to people who choose to breastfeed their children. There are enough obstacles in life for new mums and it makes me sad that Wembley would rather ban young children and, therefore, their parents than work with us to make events open to all.

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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A robust and family-friendly policy for under-5s requires consideration from different areas of any football club, from safety teams to ticketing policy. We want to work with the Premier League, EFL, FA and SGSA to understand how best to create an environment that works with parents and helps them as much as is legally possible within the safety parameters of a football stadium.

## IN SUMMARY, WE BELIEVE THAT CHANGE MUST COME FROM THESE KEY AREAS:

- Review **safety**: Clubs need to be confident in allowing young children into stadiums, which they can work together in partnership with the Premier League and the Sport's Ground Safety Association (SGSA) to achieve. By aligning these rules, the risks can be mitigated as much as is humanly possible, ensuring safety for clubs that offer this open policy and safety for the parents who choose to take their children to matches.
- Review **ticketing policy**: We believe that parents shouldn't pay for a child under the age of five in attendance. Parents won't risk purchasing an expensive ticket if there is a chance they will not be able to make use of it on the day. A ticket can be allocated at no charge and could include specific support and information.
- Use **inclusive language**: What may seem 'ludicrous' for some to want to bring a young child to a match is, to another person, their lifeline and something they would struggle without. Clubs can share inclusive and accessible information for parents on family-friendly facilities and initiatives at stadiums. Not only will this provide much-needed practical information, but it will also make parents feel included and seen.
- Align **marketing and values**: 'Family club' is a term often used by clubs that pride themselves on the generations of fans that attend together. Baby bibs and clothing emphasise this intention to get families to continue their support together. This marketing drive must align with the matchday experience, and these teams can work together to achieve this. Branded ear defenders, perhaps?
- Consider matchday **facilities**: This goes beyond changing tables, but they are the vital starting point. Pre-match locations for buggy storage and set entrance points that are easier to access need to be available and made clear to those attending.
- Get **supporter feedback**: Some current policies have been set from a safety perspective alone, without considering what life can look like for a fan. The easiest way to rectify this is to understand what would help a supporter. Ask to speak to young families or work with supporter networks to learn more about how best to help.

# GETTING THIS RIGHT MATTERS

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## There are currently two significant-sized groups of regular, match-going fans.

Those who are yet to have children are often the most dedicated fans of their clubs. During child-free years, they regularly attend games at home and away, and it is often a weekend right of passage. Friendships form through these events, and they often create memories of famed games that will live with them for life.

Then there are fans whose children are old enough to decide whether to attend with their parents. Either they have caught the football bug, or they haven't. Football is either a special event between parent and child or some free time for an adult to rekindle the pastime that had brought them happiness and cherished memories before childrearing.

There is a significant drop in the match-going attendees between these two groups, especially those fans with young children. Many change the support of their team whilst children take precedence. Some become keen armchair supporters, and some return to stadiums hardly - if at all.

This is of particular significance for female football fans. Not only are they directly impacted if they choose to breastfeed their child, but they are statistically still more likely to be the parents who will lose out on attending matches during these labour-intensive years of parenting (Pope, 2023).

We strongly believe that this gap can be bridged, and it will benefit the fans who currently miss watching live games, the football clubs that count them as an important part of their fan base, and the wider football community that misses anyone who falls out of love with a sport that is so enduring.

## CONCLUSION

Having reviewed the evidence, the idea of banning any child under the age of 5 from a football match seems as ill-founded as the female football ban in 1921, based on the assertion that "kicking is too jerky a movement for women" (Eustace Miles, FA doctor). On the contrary, all clubs should facilitate bringing infants if their parents wish to. It promotes well-being for parents and is more likely to ensure that a new generation of fans will provide continuity for the future.

There's a historic image of football that makes some people 'nervous' about the thought of younger people in stadiums. Instead of inflating an image that belongs in the past, we should work on creating a new image of support that is passionate, exciting, and open to all.

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**The Fulham Lillies will happily speak with any club or organisation keen to understand this issue better and to update their policy for parents and young children. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the options that could help and to work with anyone keen on improving this aspect of diversity.**

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## REPORTS ALSO FEATURED IN THIS DOCUMENT:

Premier League Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Standard  
<https://resources.premierleague.com/premierleague/document/2021/07/27/b86eed08-7549-4749-9b91-e462a2a6d88c/PLEDIS-APRIL-2021-v2.pdf>

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# CONTACT DETAILS

For more information on this work and to discuss any thoughts and outcomes from reading it, please contact the Fulham Lillies via email:

**[fulhamlillies@gmail.com](mailto:fulhamlillies@gmail.com)**

You can follow the work of the Fulham Lillies and the Fulham Supporters' Trust via our social channels:

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The authors of this article, are:

Hayley Davinson | JulieAnn Thomas | Sarah Keig | Dr Tamara Dragadze

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