

# SPORT 3

## The faces of a football hooligan

PETER said he would be looking out for the Sunday Times this morning; he said he'd be buying copies for all his friends too. In fact he had to be persuaded that the publication of his own name would not be advisable.

Peter, 17 years old, lives on a housing estate in the heart of London's East End. It would be very easy to call him a nice lad: clear-eyed, quick-spoken, a manly, deferential and obliging. The Cockney vernacular blurred his speech at times, but no swear word passed his lips.

Hospitably, he prepared a pot of tea, and discussed his "weapons". He had only two with him at this time, the spanner and wooden mallet. The others—including the razor and meat-hook—were in the special jacket which he had lent to a mate who was off to Arsenal's match.

The jacket is especially padded, with six weapon-holding pockets which were sewmnto the inside lining by his mother (the mother died). His boots are steel-toed, with the metal exposed. Classed as an offensive weapon, they got him turned away from a recent match.

He's been picked up just once, arrested with the spanner in his hand. He had to pay the £25 fine himself. Since then his father has tried to discourage him from going, but usually relents when the mates come around to pick him up.

What is what they call a "skin-head" or an "Agro boy". His hair is cropped, he wears braces, Levi jeans and a leather jacket. And the boots. The Tottenham supporters are called "The Park Lane". But we're on our own, about 12 of us, the others are from Botherhithe. We haven't really got a name, we just go to school together.

How do you actually use the weapons?

Hitting the other lot with them. Hitting them over the head, in the legs, in the back. The supporters of Tottenham never fight on the ground, but when they come off, they walk across the road and then when across, say, comes out, all

the Tottenham just get behind them, and just run into them and start hitting them with whatever they've got. They go to all the stations, when the Northern clubs play, when the Boro play, Boro Day they're all down. West Ham and Tottenham usually join up then."

You would use the razor?

"Yes, I would. I have really. In the arm. This was against Manchester City. They'd cut my mate's head open with a bottle."

Have you used the meat-hook?

"Another boy has. Pulled a geezer's leg, ripped all his leg out. That was Manchester United at Old Trafford."

Couldn't it happen that you could kill someone?

"I haven't thought of that really. . . We put some Everton supporters in hospital, two of them. This train was just pulling out from the platform and the door was open. We kicked them and they went out the door."

You could get a prison sentence couldn't you?

"Yes, well, if there was only one copper I'd have a go at him. This is what they do. You've got your mates with you and they jump on the copper. Up at Charlton on the railway platform a policeman grabbed hold of me and said: 'You're coming with me.' I said, 'No I ain't.' He was fighting, he took his helmet off and hit me across the back with his truncheon, and I fell down, caught him in the chin. My mate said, 'Come on, help him.' They got the copper off and I got away."

As we were getting on the train this policeman comes up and says to me: 'You were lucky, if you'd been on your own I would have caught you.' And he walked away and this kid threw a bottle at him and he came back to me again and kicked me in the shins. I jumped up and hit him, and this kid offed and went on its back. Three old boys was there, 50-odd, and they told



everybody to break it up. We left it at that. I got on another train, and then we wrecked another train. Smashed all the lights. One of my mates split his head."

You do quite a bit of train smashing?

"Yes. Coming home from these Northern clubs—if we lose they smash the train, if we win they do the same. Some supporters say that when Tottenham win they don't fight, but you're still going to smash."

Don't you get a bit worried when you keep going like this you're going to end up in prison?"

"You mean—frighten me? Not really, 'cos—well I've had

a few beatings from other supporters. When I used to go down to Tottenham first of all, I used to know I start no trouble. Just go to watch the match. But after the third game, when I got jumped on, after that I realised it's either you're them or then I wasn't gathered really, as long as I don't get pinched."

But you could always just go along to football...

"Yes well there's nothing to do Saturday afternoons except go swimming. And my mates and I go swimming, just swimming around, for me. . . An afternoon's entertainment, really."

You've got a good build, do you do a lot of swimming?

"Yes I like swimming. I'm

always down at the baths. I used to belong to a club. But I don't go much."

How would you like to have a season ticket and a seat of football?

"I wouldn't like it, not really. If someone offered me a season ticket I'd say no, keep it. When I went to see Liverpool I went with my Dad and he said come up in the seats. He'd got me a seat in the middle, and you could feel the atmosphere, all singing and all enjoying themselves, Liverpool singing their song and then Tottenham. They have a right to see who lasts the longer. Liverpool, Tottenham, Liverpool—Tottenham, and all that. . . And sometimes when you're down there with our lot you feel just like jumping over and getting in with this, and getting in there. But I'd rather be with all my mates."

He tells a story of a return train journey in which he and his mate were invited into a players' compartment by Jimmy Greaves and offered a pair of shorts. "I said, 'I don't like the Soccer hooligans, and they said they didn't either."

"We went all the rest of the way. We got all their autographs. I've got the programme upstairs with the autographs in it. . . When my mate said, 'I don't like them,' they wouldn't let him in because his boots had the steel showing. Alan Mullery lent him a pair of plimsolls. He's still got them. Mullery's quite a nice fellow, and good fellas really. They're all good fellas really."

What if someone like Mullery said to you he wanted a good club and good supporters and asked you as a personal favour to help wipe out hooliganism?

"Well, if he asked me that I'd leave all the weapons at home. But I'd go and fight because—well, in the papers it says Tottenham starts fights. But it isn't really. Because Liverpool come down and start singing 'I hear the声 of Distant Drums'. And they're all with pennies and bricks in their hands, and they start flinging them over. And they beat up the hot-dog stall man. . . But if Alan Mullery said that to me, I'd say, 'Sorry, I've got all your weapons and that, cut out all the hooliganism.' I would for two weeks. The next two home games. If it controlled down after that I'd only take one weapon with me."

And if it all started simmering down, would be pleased or disappointed?

"It'd be disappointing, really. Because you miss your knuckle or an afternoon."

The interview over, we walked together down to the corner of the road. Peter chatting amiably. He was meeting his friends at the pub, going off swimming again. He said he worked as a window cleaner, but that he wasn't working at the moment. To tell the truth, he said, he'd be glad to get back.

Norman Harris

This article is based on an actual interview but the subject's name and certain locations have been changed.