

Research shows crowds do influence refs

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New data released today, reveals that almost every football fan believes referees' decisions are influenced by crowds, supporting scientific research by a leading academic, which will be discussed at the Science Museum's Dana Centre.

But former international referee, David Elleray, will discuss this research and attempt to give it the red card at a debate on the science and psychology of football at the Dana Centre in London - the Science Museum's adults-only bar and café for discussing contemporary science issues.

98% of fans questioned think that referees are influenced by crowds. The national survey of 2,517 football fans was conducted by The Football Fans Census on behalf of the Dana Centre for the event on the science of football on Thursday 25 May.

The survey tallies closely with research conducted by Professor Alan Nevill, University of Wolverhampton, whose studies of football crowds and referees show that home advantage is huge and that referees are affected by their environment.

This research could have massive implications for a possible Germany v England game in this year's World Cup.

Nevill's study showed that crowd noise influenced referees' decisions to favour the home team. It was suggested that whenever a home player commits a foul, the crowd's reaction is capable of activating the "potent

stressor” that might increase the level of uncertainty or indecision of the referees. The research indicated that the home team was penalised approximately 16% less than when compared with no noise condition.

However, the fans and Professor Nevill’s opinion is contested by David Elleray, former international football referee, who rejects the notion that crowds play a part in top referees’ decisions and that referees are able to ignore external influences on their decision-making.

Elleray will argue how perceptions often don’t meet reality, not least because those referees able to withstand external pressures are most able to reach the top in the debate at the Dana Centre.

The survey of football fans also reveals:

- 53% of fans believe that bias is not a problem
- 69% of fans believe the crowd at their club has some influence over referees’ decisions
- Newcastle fans believe they exert the most influence over referees, followed by Arsenal fans, then Leeds fans
- Fans believe that big clubs get the most favourable refereeing decisions because of their crowds – with Manchester United being perceived by the majority of fans to be the most favoured club.

Source: The Science Museum

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