

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK

English for Life in the UK

Season 2 - Episode 22 - Football in the UK

May 2021

Mark Hello, and welcome to the podcast **English for Life in the UK**. This podcast is for those people who want to improve their English and at the same time to learn more about life in this country; and, we choose subjects which we hope will be of interest to people, and some of them are linked to the *Citizenship Test* that the government has, for those people who want to become British citizens, eventually¹.

Sheena - what would you say about the style of the podcast that we use?

Sheena Well - I would say that we try to be natural and have a more natural conversation rather than anything that is rehearsed or scripted and sometimes that means we might interrupt each other - or it might mean - and I think I do this a lot - that I don't finish my sentences off properly, and I would say we all have our own individual local accents as well.

Mark That's great. I didn't say hello to you, Sheena - anyway - hello - how are you today?

Sheena I'm alright, thank you, Mark - hello.

Mark And I'm also joined today, by John - how are you, John?

John I'm very well - apart from the weather - typical bank holiday² weather - it's raining and blowing a gale, I'm afraid, today. But yes, I'm good. Hello, Sheena.

Sheena Hello, John - same here - terrible rain.

Mark Maybe we could remind people about the transcript, John?

John Yes - as Mark and Sheena were saying - we try to engage in kind of an ordinary, normal conversation and sometimes some of us - perhaps - might have stronger regional accents than the others. We might also be using words and phrases that are new to some English learners, so what we do, we issue a transcript, which is basically

¹ *Life in the UK: Official Study Guide* - published by the UK Government, to help people prepare for the Citizenship Test, available through The Stationery Office (TSO) and in most public libraries,

² bank holidays - national holidays on which banks are closed, and shops used to but this is less usual now.

a typed up document of all the conversation in the podcast and that transcript is available on the website - alongside - on the **St Augustine's website**.

Mark That's great - and there's information about all that at the end of the podcast, about how you can access it.

So, today we're going to talk about football - **Football in the UK**. And - we decided to choose this topic because it's been in the news quite a lot recently and also football is a very popular sport, in this country and, indeed, around the world. But two weeks ago - it's about two weeks ago, now - there were twelve clubs - football clubs across Europe - six of them in the UK - England, specifically - three in Italy and three in Spain - that announced they were going to be forming a new break-away league - the European Super-League. And it caused a huge outcry and a lot of opposition from football fans of the clubs involved and of all other clubs, as well.

The Government got involved - they weren't happy with it and, in the end - or, where we are now - at the moment, it looks like the idea has collapsed, because gradually clubs pulled out and said "no - we've got this wrong - we realise the fans don't like it - we'll pull out". But I think it's important to say that this is all down to the ownership of the clubs and the money-making. This is a huge multi-national business football now and these clubs involved are big businesses.

And I'm just going to take you through the six English clubs that were involved. So there were three clubs from London - that's Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspurs and Arsenal; there were two Manchester clubs: Manchester United and Manchester City; and there was Liverpool. And the other clubs, elsewhere: there was Inter Milan and A C Milan and Juventus, from Italy; and there was Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid and Barcelona, from Spain.

(4 minutes:49 seconds)

Now the English clubs - it's really interesting - all but one of those, are ... have foreign owners - so actually, Chelsea are owned by a Russian billionaire; Manchester City are owned by a Sheikh, from Abu Dhabi; Liverpool, Manchester United and Arsenal are all owned by Americans. And it's only Tottenham Hotspur's that actually has a British owner, and this is not unusual now, in football, in this country. There are a number of big clubs that are either owned fully or partially by overseas, big rich businessmen and they were wanting to make more money out of it and the fans were really unhappy about it, because they felt that they were being ignored and that it was all just about the money.

And, as we record this today - just yesterday - there was meant to be a match between Manchester United and Liverpool: two of these teams - and the match had to be cancelled, because the supporters invaded the stadium and demonstrated outside the hotel where the players were, just to show how unhappy they were, with this proposal.

So that's - that's the topical stuff - that's what's in the news at the moment, but I think now, we're going to go right back to the beginning of the game in this country and we'll ... at the end we'll come back and link back to what's going on still, today. John - you're going to tell us a little bit about the history of some of these clubs.

John Yes - as Mark points out, there - the "Super-League" has been very controversial - so we are topical, again with our podcast, this week. Eleven of Europe's most successful clubs and Tottenham Hotspur³, decided to form this break-away Super-League and as you can imagine, it's caused great consternation, especially in England.

For numbers of reasons ... There's a number of reasons, really: I think for a long time, as Mark points out, football has become increasingly commercialised. There are these billionaire foreign owners, and the idea that they could take these historic English clubs, effectively out of the established UEFA⁴ competition, potentially, even out of the English league, caused a lot of anger. One of the things that we're going to look at, in terms of - as Mark says, we're going right back into the history of Association Football in this country and to some degree, how it's influenced football in the rest of the world, but one of the things that's cropped up a lot in the conversations has been supporters, football supporters and pundits⁵, referring and talking back about the history and about where these clubs are rooted, so they're talking about the history of the clubs and the communities that the clubs exist in and this ... I think this goes to the crux⁶ of it really - as Mark says, a lot of the owners are from America or they're from Russia or from the Gulf States and, I think there's a sense from the supporters, that they don't really have an understanding about how important it is, for the supporters and how rooted they are, in the communities. Football is a very important part of a lot of people's identities, right across the world, but especially in the UK. It's tied up with ideas of civic pride, regional identities, even class, and to some degree religious and political identities in the UK.

(8:45)

As I said, much has been made, of the gulf between the current owners and some of the founding principles of some of the clubs involved. especially the fact that they had their origins in working class communities. Something really, that's a million miles away⁷ from some of the current owners. So when we look at clubs like Everton, Aston Villa: they were founded by Methodist Churches. Or we look ... a club that wasn't involved - but Glasgow Celtic - they were formed by a Catholic priest in the East End [of Glasgow], to support the immigrant communities in Glasgow and things like that. So

³ John is making a joke here, because he doesn't think Tottenham really count as a successful club - I'm sure their fans would disagree!

⁴ UEFA - Union of European Football Associations

⁵ pundits are journalists and broadcasters, often former players, who comment on the game of football

⁶ crux - the essential heart of the issue

⁷ John is using 'a million miles away' in a figurative not a literal sense - meaning 'very different from' ... although the foreign owners do actually live a long way away from these communities.

there's a great deal of history that supports these clubs and people feel very, very passionate about.

One of the most interesting histories that we've come across has been the history of Manchester City who are now owned by - as Mark points out - the Sheikh from the United Arab Emirates. Now they are, to my knowledge, I think the only major football team who were founded by a woman, which is very interesting, obviously, in a very male - traditionally, a very male-dominated - area of culture. So Sheena, can you tell us a bit about Anna Connell and the history of Manchester City?

Sheena Anna Connell came from Harrogate and moved to Manchester, where her father became the vicar of St Mark's Church and this was in West Gorton, which was a very, very poor area of Manchester, at the time. And her and her sister helped their father and to start with, because of the poverty, they set up a soup kitchen⁸ and they were amazed by, you know, the fact that in their first week they actually gave away one-and-a-half-thousand gallons⁹ of soup, a thousand loaves of bread and ten tons¹⁰ of coal, which I think shows the extreme poverty in the area.

One thing that I think Anna was more concerned about was the heavy drinking and the gang warfare that happened. I think, at the time, they called it scut - scuttling - and that would be when maybe up to 500 people would fight - so there would be 250 from one gang and 250 from the other - who, after a lot of drinking, would fight in the streets, so to try and stop that, Anna set up a Male Club - she called it a Male Club - to try and improve the community spirit. At first only three men turned up to her meeting of the Male Club, but eventually she went out and she knocked on a thousand doors in the area, to get the men to come along, and eventually, she got more than 100 men turning up and that was the start of her real success.

To start with, they had a cricket team and the cricket team became quite successful and to keep fit in winter, she decided to set up a football team and originally, it was called St Marks and then it became Gorton Association Football Club and then, just two years later, in 1887, they moved to a new ground, at Hyde Road, changed their name to Ardwick and, in 1891, won the Manchester cup: so, just 6 years after Anna had set up this team. Two years later, the name was changed again and it became Manchester City.

(12:30)

John That is probably the most extreme example of what supporters have been talking about this week. So, like we said, lots of clubs founded by churches or by working men's associations, or founded in working class communities. I think the fact that it were *[was]*

⁸ a soup kitchen was where food, including but not only soup, was provided to poor people who couldn't afford to buy enough food for themselves and their family.

⁹ gallons = one gallon is slightly more than 4.5 litres

¹⁰ tons = one ton is slightly more than a metric tonne; One ton = 1016 kilograms

founded by a woman and a woman who was seeking to improve the lives of labourers and unemployed and working class people and the fact now that Manchester City - as Mark pointed out - is owned by the United Arab Emirates - who have one of the worst human rights records in the world - so civil rights for women, for working class people, for the workers who build the stadiums, Amnesty International Human Rights Watch have condemned many of these groups and they've used the word ... it's a bit of an unusual word: but "sports-washing" - so some of these ... it's from the word "white-washing" - so: to cover things up - so quite often we've been hearing this word - "sports-washing". So the oligarchs, the big businesses from the Gulf States - they're buying clubs like Manchester City or Paris St Germaine, or these other clubs, in order to try and improve their image ...improve their image, through sport - and I think this - on top of, like we were saying - the increasing commercialisation, the big increases in ticket prices, the fact that it's been taken off terrestrial television¹¹, I think the scenes we've seen in Manchester and other grounds, kind of ... after a long period of time, people have kind of had enough, and supporters - and I think as Mark points out - the idea of this break-away league were [was] - I think we'd call it - would be **the final straw**, wouldn't we? ...really, for supporters, of some of these clubs.

Obviously, Manchester City - their great derby rivals would be - the word "derby"¹² we use is for, when two clubs from the same city or the same area, compete against each other - so their derby rivals, obviously, would be Manchester United. They were founded in similar circumstances to Manchester City - and they were founded by members of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Railway Corporation. So they were, effectively, what we refer to as "a works¹³ team". So again, you know, back to working class people, founding these clubs for their own entertainment and the betterment of their communities. Similarly, through their history, Liverpool has always been a club who have been, especially through their most famous manager, Bill Shankly, the great Scottish manager, been identified with a very working class city, to some degree, if you like, socialist ideals - ideals of working class solidarity - so I think, you know, it's come as a big shock and a bit of an insult to the traditions of these clubs - the idea that they are going to break-away and the fact that they are owned and controlled by multi-billionaires.

Mark The other thing that's interesting is the way the Government has got involved now and I think this is because they've realised how unpopular this is. So the Government have stepped in; they're actually said they're going to set up a review into the ownership of football clubs. I'm not terribly optimistic about what would come out of this, but one of

¹¹ the original free tv channels in the U.K., eg. the BBC, are known as 'terrestrial' to distinguish them the satellite channels such as Sky which people have to pay for.

¹² Derby is also a town in the North Midlands and the name of a Football Club in its own right, but the use of the name here comes from, historically, the Earl of Derby

¹³ works = this is another way of saying "company" or "business" or "factory", and "works teams" might have been supported financially, by the owners of the business, for whom the members and supporters of the team, worked;

the things I know they've said, they are going to explore, is the idea that football fans might have some involvement in the running of football clubs in this country and the interesting thing is that actually does happen, in some countries. In Germany, as I understand it, most of the big teams in Germany will ... the fans of those teams ... actually have ... are involved in the decision-making of those clubs, in the way that doesn't happen in this country.

(16:38)

I mean the other thing, we maybe ought to say, is, of course, in those original days, that the two of you were talking about - the players of the teams all came from the local area. That's where they came from - they played for their local team. Today, as most people, I'm sure, will know, the vast majority of players in all of the top leagues in this country and in many other countries, actually can come from all over the world. And they're just basically it depends on what they're prepared to pay them as to whether ...who ...which teams attract which players. But certainly all those teams that we were talking about earlier, these days, the vast majority of their players are ...do not come from the local area where the team is formed. You do still get the occasional player who is local - Marcus Rashford would be a good example, from Manchester United, where he was actually born and brought up, in the area which Manchester United serves.

Sheena I'm really interested in what you've both had to say and I just wonder what you think now, is the future of football, in the UK?

Mark Well - it's a highly successful and popular sport. I think the premier league is one of the top leagues, if not the top league in the world, and is almost certainly here to stay, in its present form. I think this European break-away looks to me as if it isn't going to get anywhere, but it could be that there will be some changes to the structure of the European competitions, as they currently exist, at the moment.

What do you think, John?

John I hope you're right, Mark. One of the things that's kind of worried me about this "super-league" idea is - when you look at how football's changed in Europe. You know - we used to have a knock-out competition, that became the Champions' League. It's been over the last decades - it's kind of been fixed and pushed, in order to favour the big clubs over the smaller clubs. So when you introduce stages and group stages, in the leagues, it means that smaller teams - teams like Huddersfield¹⁴ - can't get in there and knock a big team like Juventus. So in a way I'm a little bit cynical about this - I kind of saw this as the logical next step for how UEFA have been pushing football.

¹⁴ Huddersfield - a town nearby to Halifax

I really hope it doesn't come off - I don't want to see just the biggest teams playing each other - I want to see the small teams like Leicester City¹⁵ or teams like that be able to get up and be able to compete with the bigger teams. I mean it is interesting that a lot of English fans now look to Germany - so they look to clubs like Borussia Dortmund or Schalke¹⁶, where they have, what is called "50% plus one" - so as Mark says - the fans do have the final say. But you also look at Barcelona - they are effectively owned by the fans and they've also been very keen to push into the super-league.

I think a lot of it comes down to the fact that as we've talked about the history and about the foundation of clubs within their communities, one of the big things now is that millions and millions and millions of people watch Manchester, or Barcelona, or Liverpool, all across the world, so I wonder how important it is, to these owners, what people in Salford¹⁷ think of Man United - what people in Liverpool think about Liverpool when you know they do make hundreds of billions of dollars from people watching across the United States or Asia - or anywhere else. So, we'll just have to see but I certainly think they've been put in their place for the time being. The supporters have made their ... their voices very clear - they don't want anything to do with it - I think for the time being, we're safe.

(Music) (20:53)

Mark **Language Support**

This is the part of the podcast where I choose some words or phrases from the episode and talk about them in more detail.

So we're going to talk about some **idioms or proverbs** today and John, in this episode, said that the setting up of the European Super-League or the proposal to do so - had been "**the final straw**" for some fans. Now the idea of **the final straw** comes from another idiom which is the "**straw that broke the camel's back**" and what this means is: that an apparently small action can cause a much larger and sudden reaction, because it is the last of a whole series of actions. So, in this case - it's not a particularly small action - it was quite a large one to set up the European Super League - but it came on the back of a lot of other things that football fans were unhappy about: the commercialisation of the game, the money that was dominating it, the fact that a lot of the owners were foreign owners - so this was **the final straw - the straw that broke the camel's back**.

¹⁵ Leicester City - in the English Midlands

¹⁶ Schalke 04 - "04 refers to 1904 - the year of the founding of the team. Schalke is an area of Gelsenkirchen, in Germany; they are one of the biggest clubs in the Bundesliga.

¹⁷ Salford - a city that is a close to Manchester

So, you have this image of a camel, loaded up with lots and lots of things, to represent the problems, the difficulties, the unhappiness the fans were having and then one more thing on top of it finally **broke the camel's back** - it meant that the fans protested and came out and demonstrated.

So that made me think about: are there more specific football-related proverbs? Well - there's one of them - which is "**to move the goal posts**". Now the goal posts are those things in football that create the goal and the idea of "moving the goal posts" is changing the rules or changing the context of something, whilst you are in the middle of the game. So - if the government decides, at the last minute, to change the rules about, for example, the lockdown over the virus, then you could say "**they had moved the goal posts**".

Another one I was thinking about, which is a tactical issue about football, you can sometimes say - **this team "parked the bus"** - now obviously to "**park a bus**" normally means that you have this vehicle - a bus - and park it, at the side of the road, but in this case to **park the bus** means to put all your players in a defensive position in front of the other team, to stop the other team getting near the ball and not really trying very much, to score goals the other end, but to just to defend your end and that is called "**parking the bus**".

Another one is: you can say that a team has "**had a clean sheet**" - and a clean sheet doesn't refer to washing your bedding, in this case; in football: **a clean sheet means that you didn't have any goals scored against you**. So you can say, the team had a clean sheet or you could say the goalkeeper had **a clean sheet**, because nobody was able to score against him.

One last one: you can talk about **a game of two halves**. This doesn't have to be specifically football, and again, in fact, it is used much more widely. And what it means is, if one half of something is very different from the other half so if one team, for example, has been completely on top, in one half of the game, then in the other half, the other team is on top - you can say it is **a game of two halves**. But people will also use that to describe general situations where something radically changes from one time period to another.

So I hope those are helpful - I'm sure you can think of some other football-related proverbs and idioms yourself.

That's it for this week - for those of you who want to find out more about how to get the transcript for this and other episodes or to make contact with us, stay listening and we'll give you the information below. Apart from that, thank you very much for listening - keep up your practice at English and we will be back with you, very soon.

(Music) (26:24)

You can find the transcript - that's the written version of this episode - on our website:

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

And that's where you can also find links to all the other episodes, and the transcripts, so you can listen and read along at the same time. That's also where you can find out how to donate, to help our work. We are a charity, supporting particularly, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants but also, all those in need in our local area and we would welcome your support, if you felt able to give it. If you follow on the website, the links to "**Get Involved**" and "**Donate**".

We also have an email address - that's **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**

And we would love to hear from you - your thoughts on our podcast and ideas for the future.

We also have a Twitter account : **@EsoISaint**

and there is additional material on that site.

I'll spell out all those addresses:

So, the website: w-w-w-.s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x.org.uk

So that's the website.

The email is: **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**

And that's "English for" spelt: f-o-r

And finally, the Twitter account: is : @ [at] [capital E] E-s-o-l- [capital S] -S-a-l-n-t.

Music (29:08) (ends)