

Twenty's Plenty for Away Tickets

The FSF's Bid to Make Football More Affordable...



£62 for Arsenal v Man City: the ember that sparked a media fire

Fans contact the FSF to talk about a huge range of issues. With the best will in the world some aren't exactly fundamental to following your team ("The kiosk ran out of Mars bars at half-time") while others can be more serious, such as concerns around heavy-handed policing or stewarding.

Cut through all of that though and the truth of the matter is we all love going to the game, even if it isn't perfect. It's what differentiates the match-going football supporter from the passive TV viewer. We love being there. With that truth in mind it's reasonable to argue that the single biggest issue facing football fans is cost.

Unaffordable ticket prices put a barrier between the match-going fan and live football in a way that no other single issue does. If you can't afford a ticket, you can't go – nothing else matters in that equation.

This isn't news to football fans of course. Many of us pay eye-watering prices week-in, week-out for the privilege of entering a stadium to watch our team play. And that's before you consider the associated food, drink and transport costs. It all adds up.

Back in 2012 our National Fans' Survey was completed by 4,000 of you and 92% told us that ticket prices were too high. In politics they call that a

landslide. 40% said you were going to fewer games because of those prices (up from 25% in 2009).

FSF Chair Malcolm Clarke told the BBC, "There's a huge amount of wealth swilling among Premier League clubs, and there's no excuse to keep charging the prices they often do. But it's not just the top-flight where fans face high prices - those in the Championship and beyond can face similar hurdles in following their teams.

"The game is playing Russian roulette when it comes to attracting younger fans, who might start voting with their feet to become 'pub only' fans, or even turn their backs on the game altogether."

However, it did seem to come as a shock to some journalists and the news that Manchester City returned 900 tickets for their visit to Arsenal on Sunday 13th January was the ember that sparked a media fire. You could almost hear the penny dropping, "If the Premier League champions can't shift away tickets then something must be up!"

Twenty's Plenty Launch

With that in mind we snapped into action and organised two meetings to test out our ideas for a campaign called Twenty's Plenty for Away Tickets. The first took place in Manchester on Thursday 24th January, with a follow-up in London on Thursday 31st January.

The idea behind Twenty's Plenty is simple – we want clubs to agree to charge no more than £20 for away match tickets (£15 concessions).

Around 80-100 fans attended each meeting with dozens of clubs represented including some of the biggest supporters' groups in the country . Twenty's Plenty was warmly received. It's the first time that many of these individual fans, fanzines, websites and groups from rival clubs have joined forces and agreed on, well, anything really.



Groups like Spirit of Shankly and Against Modern Football handed out this flyer at the Fan Meetings

We were also proud to welcome Marc Quambusch to the London meet. Marc's a Borussia Dortmund fan and one of the key players behind Germany's Keim Zwanni - Fußball muss bezahlbar sein (roughly translated that means No Twenty - Football must be affordable). In fact, Twenty's Plenty even popped up on a couple of banners in Germany!

"The idea behind Twenty's Plenty is simple – we want clubs to agree to charge no more than £20 for away match tickets."

Bring a bunch of fans together in a room and you're bound to face some awkward and challenging questions, in the best possible way.

Any two fans have three opinions, so you can imagine what it's like facing a roomful of passionate supporters. We think this is a good thing. Challenging questions test a campaign's strength and see if it stands up – so what were the common queries?

Twenty's Plenty Q&A

Q: "Twenty's Plenty just seems to be about the Premier League – what about fans of clubs outside the top-flight?"

A: The Twenty's Plenty campaign applies to fans at all clubs - high ticket prices are a blight on our game throughout the leagues.

The weekend after Twenty's Plenty was launched (Saturday 26th January 2013) we looked at on-the-gate prices for League Two. At five out of eight away ends you wouldn't have got change from £20.

We appreciate that some fans pay less than £20 and this campaign might not apply to you. That's great and we're pleased that football is affordable for you! We'd love to get to a stage where everyone is paying £20 or less and we certainly aren't saying that all away tickets should be £20. That's just the maximum cap we'd like to see.

Of course there are many other elements of the away fan "experience" which are as important as ticket prices - transport logistics, policing and stewarding, matchday facilities and so on. Twenty's Plenty is simply one tenet of an upcoming campaign to celebrate and support the away fan.



Arsenal's Black Scarf fans' group march to the Emirates in December; an estimated 2200 fans attend

Q: "Why does Twenty's Plenty only focus on away fans?"

A: We're unequivocal on this – too many clubs charge too much money for home and away tickets. However, a campaign targeted at away ticket prices (currently) has more chance of success. The Premier League claims home "occupancy rates" of 95% and the whispers we hear from within the game suggest clubs are more concerned about away fan attendance.

Travelling supporters improve the "matchday experience" for everyone, as anyone who's ever been to a game with no away fans can tell you. If stands look empty and atmospheres suffer you can bet the money raked in from media rights will fall too. A TV subscriber in Asia or North America wants to pay for a "product" that looks exciting off-field too.

The amount of money that football brings in through TV dwarfs the revenue generated from away ticket sales. The Premier League's combined media rights package tops £5bn over the course of a deal covering 2013-16 and the increase in revenue from the domestic TV deal alone is £1.2bn.

With Premier League total season attendances hovering at around the 13 million mark it means that every single ticket at every single game could be subsidised by £32 from the increase in the domestic TV deal alone. Cheaper tickets for away fans helps Premier League clubs future-proof tomorrow's media windfall. £5bn deals won't roll in forever if the stands are empty.

We also believe that away fans are the beating heart of football. Travelling supporters bring colour and atmosphere to grounds, spend the most money watching their teams and invest the most time in their clubs. The away fan should not be taken for granted and a targeted campaign has more chance of success than one without specific focus.



Q. "Is a £20 cap not unrealistic?"

A: Sometimes you have to aim high (or low, when it comes to prices!) and in any campaign or negotiation process you have to be ambitious in your initial plans. What's the point in calling for a £35 cap if most fans feel that's too expensive anyway?

Q. "Why not organise a boycott, surely clubs would listen then?"

A: There are both practical and moral considerations at play. It's extremely difficult to organise a boycott that has any impact on the national conscious or TV viewer. Even if there were gaps in the away end there's no guarantee anyone would even notice.

How many knew about Huddersfield Town's very impressively organised boycott of Bramall Lane? Thousands of Terriers fans boycotted the game but there was little to no national media attention. There are other ways to get coverage such as a peaceful demo on match-day.

"How many knew about Huddersfield Town's very impressively organised boycott of Bramall Lane?"

Thousands of Terriers fans boycotted the game but there was little to no national media attention.

There are other ways to get coverage such as a peaceful demo on match-day."

The FSF also represents more than 220,000 individual and affiliate members and the call for a boycott on ticket prices remains a minority view. Most members we speak to see boycotts as the "nuclear option" and still want to watch their club play – even if prices are too high.

Q. "What happens if my (smaller) club loses fans to the Premier League giant down the road because they offer £20 tickets?"

A: Twenty's Plenty is aimed at away fans only - it does not affect home tickets. Nothing would be any different. Regardless, it would be unimaginable for a fans' organisation to support very high prices at the top of the game in order to maintain a differential with clubs lower down the pyramid. But we do continue to lobby the FA and Premier League with regards the distribution of income which should be spread far more evenly throughout the game.

With all the above considerations in mind we've chosen to focus on away tickets. And who knows? In the future the momentum from a successful campaign on away tickets could kick-start a campaign on home ticket prices or educate owners to the benefits of more affordable football.

We shouldn't let the "best" be the enemy of the very good. And we do believe Twenty's Plenty has very good, achievable aims. If Twenty's Plenty was successful not a single fan would pay a penny more to watch football. But every fan would benefit from the availability of cheaper away ticket prices given on a reciprocal basis.

So What Can I do to Support the Twenty's Plenty Campaign?

The Football Supporters' Federation can tell the story on a national level and we'll continue to lobby the FA, Football League and Premier League around the issue of ticket prices. While we can explain the central tenets of the campaign to them in our regular meetings, we firmly believe that issue will be won by fans at club level.

Clubs are more inclined to listen to their fans than anyone else. If a club's fan-base is prepared to say,

"We back Twenty's Plenty and think away fans should be rewarded for their loyalty" then we, as fans, might have a chance of more affordable away football.

Different things will work for different fans at different clubs, but as a starter for ten see the "Actions for Fans" (below) which outlines plenty of ideas. Some of them will only take minutes while others are ideal for those who have a little more time and energy to commit.

Actions for Fans

- » Sign the Twenty's Plenty for Away Tickets petition: www.fsf.org.uk/tickets. This will automatically trigger an email to your club and the relevant league outlining your support for Twenty's Plenty. It's the first step, the easiest step and around 10,000 fans have already done it.
 - » Tell your fellow fans about Twenty's Plenty. Email, Facebook, Twitter or whatever other social media the cool kids use nowadays - spread the word!
 - » We've had loads of flyers printed which explain why we launched Twenty's Plenty and they're available free of charge to fans, fanzines and supporters' groups who would like them. Contact us and get your batch to hand out at games.
 - » Protests outside the ground/handing out flyers. Again, we'd advise you contact tickets@fsf.org.uk before going ahead with this action as there are often other factors which need to be considered (e.g. informing the police, club and council). It also allows us to promote your actions to your fellow fans.
 - » Bring together the fans' groups, fanzines, websites and blogs who support your team and write a joint letter to the club outlining your commitment to Twenty's Plenty. How about doing that but on a regional basis with rival clubs? We can help you contact rival supporters' groups or fanzines. FSF affiliate Spirit of Shankly have done this and brought together traditional rivals such as Everton, Liverpool and Manchester United.
 - » Visual displays are another way for fans to support the campaign's aims. If you're going to organise a visual display please email tickets@fsf.org.uk for further advice as it's not quite as simple as turning up at the ground with your banner at the ready. Clubs like to be informed in advance and there might be other issues such as fireproofing, ensuring other fans' views aren't blocked and so on. But get it right and your banner could be big news.
 - » Designated "walkouts" or boycotts (such as Germany's Kein Zwanni) or mid-match actions (e.g. fans turn back en masse for a minute or two). Some fans in attendance at FSF meetings argued for boycotts while others felt they were unachievable, unrealistic or even counter-productive.
- It's an enormous challenge but if you genuinely think you could successfully pull it off at your club then you're almost guaranteed media coverage and YouTube fame. We'd suggest exhausting the actions above before trying this though.

Premier League Response

Back in January **Goal.com** reported that Premier League clubs were "weighing up" a proposal to offer free travel to away travel to fans. Stoke City Chief Executive Tony Scholes came up with two initiatives in November 2012.

The first was for clubs to agree that away fans should never pay more than the cheapest home ticket. At present away fans must be charged the same price for "comparable accommodation" which means they can still pay more than home fans in the cheapest seats.

The second idea was for clubs to provide free coach travel to all fans. Scholes told the Premier League shareholders, representatives of all 20 clubs and the FA, that the scheme would cost each club between £500,000-£800,000 per annum.

"The consensus among the clubs at the Premier League meeting was that the issue of subsidised travel was specific to individual clubs, although there was an agreement that the issue would be given 'further consideration' and a report brought to the shareholders 'in due course,'" said Goal.com.

While we would welcome free coach travel for fans it isn't a magic bullet to making football more affordable. Many fans prefer to travel by car or train, they'd rather be able to make their own way there and pay cheaper prices at the gate. Other fans contacted us to say they had concerns that this would lead to an increase in enforced police escorts.

Ticket Prices Five Times Inflation

The BBC's Price of Football survey showed that the average cost of the cheapest adult ticket in the top four divisions of English football has risen by 11.7% - more than five times the rate of inflation. The results were published in October 2012 and covered 166 clubs including those in the Blue Square Bet Premier and Women's Super League.

Lowlights:

- » The average price of the "most affordable" ticket in league football has gone from £19.01 to £21.24 in the past year.
- » Only two out of 92 league clubs offer a day out for less than £20 this season. Last year it was 12.
- » Arsenal have the most expensive season ticket at £1,955, while Montrose's was the cheapest at £90.



Sunderland lift the 2012 Women's Premier League Cup

Sign the Twenty's Plenty Petition:

Supporters call upon football clubs at all levels of the game to recognise and reward the amazing contribution of away fans by getting together to agree an across the board price cap on away match tickets of £20 (£15 for concessions).

**ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER
THAN WORDS**

Sign the Petition:
www.fsf.org.uk/tickets

