

SAFETY FIRST

Following the fifteenth anniversary celebrations of the Football Safety Officers' Association, new General Secretary, Chris Patzelt, discussed recent developments with Steve Frosdick.

The English football disasters of the late 1980s were followed by a flurry of safety management activities. New systems were developed on an ad hoc, reactive basis rather than in a co-ordinated, proactive effort, and there were soon concerns at the variations in standards and practices at different grounds. So in October 1992, safety practitioners got together to form the Football Safety Officers' Association (FSOA).

The FSOA aims to improve safety at grounds; to promulgate best practice; to enhance the role of stewards; and to continually develop safety officers' expertise. Over the last fifteen years, the FSOA has grown from 28 to over 300 members. Full and associate members are drawn from English and Welsh football grounds, while affiliate and corporate members come from the football authorities, stewarding companies, commercial suppliers, other sports, and academe. The FSOA holds two national conferences each year, supported

by other meetings at regional level. There is also a monthly newsletter and day-to-day communication via a secure website.

The FSOA's fifteenth anniversary dinner and conference in October 2007 coincided with the appointment of Chris Patzelt as the new full-time General Secretary. Patzelt's combination of commercial and safety experience in soccer made him the ideal candidate. He is aged 47 and has worked in soccer administration for over 25 years – as a ticket office manager, company secretary and safety officer. His interest in safety stems from 1991, when as Company Secretary at Huddersfield Town FC he found himself named as the responsible person on the safety certificate. In 1993, he moved to Barnsley FC where he combined the roles of Assistant Secretary and Safety Officer. This was unusual since most safety officers at that time were retired police officers. He joined Bradford City FC as Safety Officer in 2004 and was elected FSOA Vice Chairman in March 2007.

Training & Achievements

Patzelt is rightly proud of the FSOA's achievements over its first fifteen years. As previously reported in PanStadia (September 1996 issue, p34-36), FSOA members (with Steve Frosdick as editor) worked with the football authorities during 1995/96 to develop a multi-media training package for stewarding at soccer grounds. The training covers general responsibilities, maintaining a safe environment, response to spectators, emergency aid, fire safety and evacuations. Additional modules on dealing with racism and disability discrimination, as well as conflict management were added when the training was revised in 2003 and 2005.



<IMAGE_01> 'Chris Patzelt'

Chris Patzelt, the new General Secretary of the Football Safety Officers' Association.

“These are exciting times for safety officers. We have the 2012 Olympic Games in London, the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, and a possible 2018 FIFA World Cup bid by England. Elsewhere are the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the 2012 Euro in Poland and Ukraine, and the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. UK football safety officers stand ready to lend their expertise to all these events...”

— Chris Patzelt, General Secretary, Football Safety Officers' Association.

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The training package became the industry standard for stewarding and has been used by various sports, as well as in other countries, such as for the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France. Still today, the package remains the recognised learning platform for a variety of level two stewarding qualifications.

Writing in PanStadia in July 2000 (p70-71), Pat Carr questioned whether being a retired police officer was sufficient qualification for the demanding safety officer role. The FSOA had already seen the need and from 2002 began to deliver its own event and matchday safety management course. Delivered in three two-day modules, the course equips safety officers to manage the matchday operations; to assess and act on stadium risks; to create the required paper audit trail; and to plan for and respond to emergencies. The course provides 70% of the requirement for a level four national vocational qualification and many attendees have gone on to achieve this. A few have progressed to higher education (see PanStadia's January 2001 issue, p71-72) with FSOA President, Jim Chalmers, even obtaining a degree in risk and security management.

Patzelt does not think it will be long before all certifying authorities make it a requirement for the safety officer at a designated sports ground to hold or be working towards at least a Level Four qualification. This can only strengthen the popularity of the FSOA course.

Given the absence of anything similar, the FSOA course has extended its reach both beyond soccer, England and Wales. Delegates have attended from various spectator sports and courses have been

run in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. Patzelt would like to see the course exported further. He recognises that the safety culture in some European nations focuses more on security and policing than on safety in the round. Nevertheless, he commented that the FSOA would: “Welcome the opportunity to discuss with UEFA and FIFA how the FSOA course could help them with training safety officers both in domestic leagues and for international tournaments.”

Refresher Programme

It is five years since the first safety officers attended the FSOA course. There have been legislative and other changes, for example the more frequent use of soccer grounds for other events, such as pop concerts. Thus a two-day refresher programme has been piloted for delivery in 2008.

Reflecting on the key issues in soccer safety over the last couple of years, Patzelt highlighted two matters: the attempts by the Security Industry Authority (SIA) to regulate stewarding; and the ongoing problem of persistent standing in seated areas. Rebutting the SIA's argument that all stewards performed a security function and so needed to be licensed had been a Herculean effort. The eventual outcome had excluded in-house stewards who were fully trained; but required private stewarding companies to triple-train and double-licence many of their staff as stewards, door supervisors and manned guards – all this for casual staff earning as little as £30 a game.

PanStadia feature-writer Steve Menary dealt with the 'safe standing' issue in the Summer 2007 edition (p54-59). Although

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most fans are happy to sit in their seats, a sizeable minority stand up all through the match. There have been two supporter campaigns to allow standing. 'Stand Up Sit Down' fans argue that they should be allowed to stand in seated areas (see www.standupsitdown.co.uk). Meanwhile the Football Supporters Federation (FSF) has argued for clubs to be allowed to choose to reintroduce standing terraces (see www.fsf.org.uk/media/pdfs/safe-standing-report-web.pdf).

Subsequent to Menary's article, a debate in the House of Commons on 24 October 2007 concluded with the Minister saying that there would be no change to the current requirement, i.e. fans in all-seated grounds are expected to sit down. This is all very well at policy level, however safety officers are still faced with the practical problem of managing persistent standing week in, week out.

The Future

Turning to the future, and drawing on his commercial experience, Patzelt outlined his plans for the FSOA's further development. Now that funding from the Football Foundation has ended, the first priority will be to secure the FSOA's running costs. Membership and exhibitor fees will be reviewed and continued partnerships with small specialist companies are most welcome.

Patzelt is also thinking blue-chip and is: "...looking for a significant commercial partner." In parallel with increasing revenue, Patzelt is keen to improve the package of benefits offered to both members and sponsors. The website needs attention and other ideas could include merchandise and publications, help-packs for new members, and access to legal advice.

FSOA President, Jim Chalmers, confirmed: "The objective must be for the FSOA to become the leading authority on the practice of safety at sports grounds."

While representatives from other sports hold affiliate membership of the FSOA, Patzelt and the FSOA national executive committee do not wish to evolve into a sports safety officers' association. There are already safety officer associations for rugby union, rugby league, cricket, horse racing and motor racing, as well as an FSOA Scotland. The

vision, therefore, is to create an Institute of Sports Safety to act as an umbrella body for the existing associations. Such an Institute could be more influential than its constituent organisations, and thus lobby more effectively with government on overarching safety issues, such as the regulation of stewarding.

Patzelt can see two future training developments. One will be the further revision of the training package for stewarding at football grounds. Modern technology means that the modular approach could be superseded by individual topics delivered in any preferred order. Some private stewarding companies have adapted the training to provide e-learning materials for staff to use for distance learning with only the assessment provided on site. Patzelt agrees this approach can work for most of the underpinning knowledge, but believes that face-to-face training will remain essential for the more practical aspects. Accordingly, he would like to see the package revised to provide a 'blended learning' platform.

Development & Evolution

Given that there are Level Two qualifications for stewards and Level Four for safety officers, the obvious gap is at Level Three for supervisors. Patzelt anticipates that FSOA members will once again be heavily involved in the development of the relevant learning materials and that such a qualification will be mandated by certifying authorities by about 2010.

UK safety officers have an international reputation as experts in their field and continue to be called on for help by other countries. For example, earlier in 2007 FSOA Chairman (and Stadium Manager, Arsenal FC) John Beattie, was invited to address an Italian conference convened to discuss the problems of spectator behaviour in Serie A.

"These are exciting times for safety officers," concluded Patzelt. "We have the 2012 Olympic Games in London, the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, and a possible 2018 FIFA World Cup bid by England. Elsewhere are the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the 2012 Euro in Poland and Ukraine, and the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. UK football safety officers stand ready to lend their expertise to all these events." ☆



<IMAGE_02> 'Steve Frosdick'

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