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## ENGLAND FANS BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

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**Despite their team proving once again they are perennial quarter finalists, England fans across a broad spectrum of colours and beliefs brought a carnival atmosphere to the 2006 World Cup in Germany.**

The World Cup is the only sporting event, besides the Olympics, that brings people together from all around the globe. Teams and fans from five continents converged in Germany last month for a four-week celebration of the planet's favourite game. During the tournament, FIFA commended England's travelling supporters as an example of a multicultural role model.

In the past, England fans were predominantly white and male. During the World Cup, however, they were highlighted for their willingness to embrace supporters from ethnic minorities, especially those from black and British Asian backgrounds. Across Germany, in the stadiums and in the baroque city squares, a smorgasbord of different coloured faces representing diverse cultures and religious beliefs were unified under the red and white St George's Cross flag.

### Home and Away

Back in Britain, a journalist for German current affairs magazine Der Spiegel watching England's first group game in a London bar, wrote of his astonishment at seeing an eclectic mix of Britain's multicultural population cheering David Beckham and the team to victory against Paraguay.

And in a recent edition of the Times, Aki Sadiq, a 26-year-old British Asian fan travelling with his four white friends in Germany said: 'First and foremost, we're all English, born and bred. Second, we're all England fans and we'll sing and follow our team anywhere. I'm a Muslim and I don't drink with the rest of the boys but it makes no difference.'

### Kick It Out

FIFA have been stepping up their efforts to tackle racism in recent years, especially in Europe where the problem has reached epidemic proportions. Working closely with the association is Kick It Out, an organisation devoted to defeating discrimination and bringing about a positive change to the game's culture.

The campaigners travelled to Germany as FIFA liaisons. The group's director, Piara Powar speaking to the Daily Telegraph, said of the tournament: 'People are picking up on England being a great role model. People have always admired the English fan culture because it is very vocal, very passionate. Italians, Germans and Poles will always be a little bit in awe of the English fan culture. The forward thinking fans are looking to England as a role model.'

Powar said that the nature of England's fan base is changing. 'We see it here in Germany, where more black and Asian fans are following England. That started at Euro 2004,' he explained. 'There isn't this sense that your life is in danger if you follow England. We have gone from it taking the very brave (black and Asian fans) to follow England to those who love their football, and have the ability to travel.'

### Heads Held High

With estimates of 80,000 supporters descending on the host cities during England's matches, their German hosts were full of praise for the fervour that the fans brought to the finals. So despite the bitter disappointment of seeing their team return home somewhat earlier than hoped, England fans have at least something to be proud of - their own world-beating performance in Germany.

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*August 2006  
-Ben Lupton*

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