

Violence and anti-social behaviours in amateur football –2017-2018 season

During the 2017-2018 season, 11,335 matches marred by incidents were recorded at the French Football Federation's "Behaviours Observatory". On that basis, it is estimated that violence and anti-social behaviours occurred in 1.8% of matches played. This figure is slightly higher than in previous seasons (+0.2 points).

In the majority of cases, the most serious act of violence is committed by a player (89%). Moreover, the victims are players in 57% of cases and are referees in more than a third of the cases (38%).

Nearly half of these instances of violence or anti-social behaviours are verbal, characterised in particular by rude or insulting language (in 40% of the most serious incidents). On the other hand, physical assault accounts for 45% of cases.

The category of club members most concerned by such violence is the U19/U18, made up of 17-18 year-old male players, since 3.4% of matches played in this category were marred by incidents (versus 1.7% on average for the other categories of players).

Every year since 2007, the National Observatory of Crime and Criminal Justice (ONDRP) has produced an overview of the violence and anti-social behaviours that occur during amateur football matches. Relying on a stable, long-standing partnership with the French Football Federation (FFF), this Note sets out to provide insight on this phenomenon and highlight certain trends.

The data in this study come from the "Behaviours Observatory", a computer tool set up at the FFF back in 2006. This Observatory is used by each resource centre (district, league or federation) to report incidents occurring during an amateur football match (including futsal). For each match where an incident occurs, i.e. recorded in the tool as having been marred by violence or anti-social behaviour, information about the match (date, location, player category, clubs involved, etc.) and the most serious incident is described¹.

During the 2017-2018 season, 11,335 amateur football matches were recorded in the Behaviours Observatory as having had incidents of violence or anti-social behaviours. When compared to the overall number of matches played throughout the season (618,867 matches), it is estimated that 1.8% of matches were marred by violence or anti-social behaviours last season. This therefore indicates a slight upward trend compared to previous seasons [1]. However, according to the FFF, this trend may reflect an improvement in the recording of incidents, thereby increasing the number of recorded offences rather than the number of actually committed offences.

1 Recorded number of matches with incidents and proportion relative to the total number of played matches



Source: Behaviours Observatory, FFF, processing by the ONDRP.

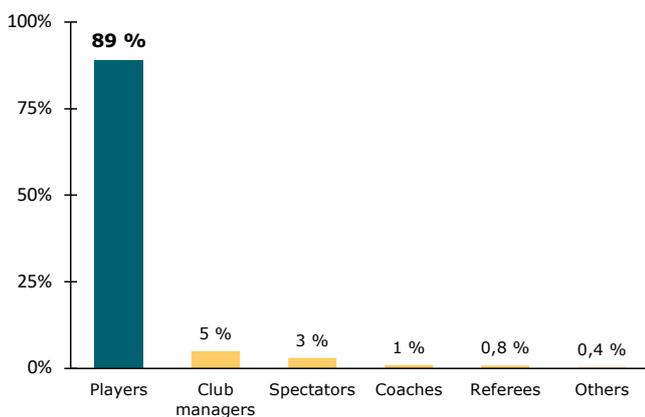
(1) To define the most serious incident, a severity scale has been established. This ranks physical assault at the top, followed by violence towards a referee. For more information about how matches with incidents are recorded and analysed, refer to the Methodological overview, at the end of the paper.

The offenders

In nearly nine out of ten cases, at least one player was responsible for the most serious incident (89%). Club managers were involved in the most serious case of violence or anti-social behaviours in 5% of matches where incidents occurred. Note that in 3% of the recorded incidents, the spectators at the football match were the perpetrators [2].

The offenders came from the visiting club in 47% of the matches marred by violence, and the home club in 46% of them. In 6% of the matches in which violence occurred, the offenders were from both clubs.

2 Offenders behind the most serious act of violence



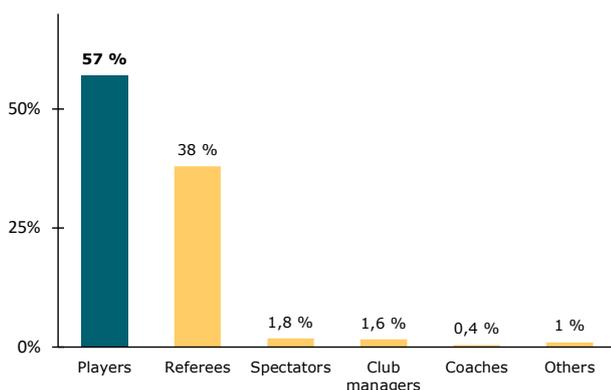
Source: Behaviours Observatory, FFF, 2017-2018 season, processing by the ONDRP.

The victims

In over half the cases, the victims of the most serious act of violence were players (57%). Referees were victims of violence in more than a third of the matches involving incidents (38%). Note that the victims were either spectators or club managers in similar proportions (in 2% of cases) [3].

The victims were from the home club in 29% of the matches with incidents and from the visiting club in 28% of them. For 6% of the matches with incidents, victims came from both clubs.

3 Victims of the most serious act of violence



Source: Behaviours Observatory, FFF, 2017-2018 season, processing by the ONDRP.

The offence

In nearly half of the matches with recorded incidents, the most serious offence was verbal abuse. Indeed, in 49% of cases, the incident committed was of a verbal nature. More specifically, it involved rude or insulting language in 40% of the recorded matches, and threats or intimidation in 9% of cases.

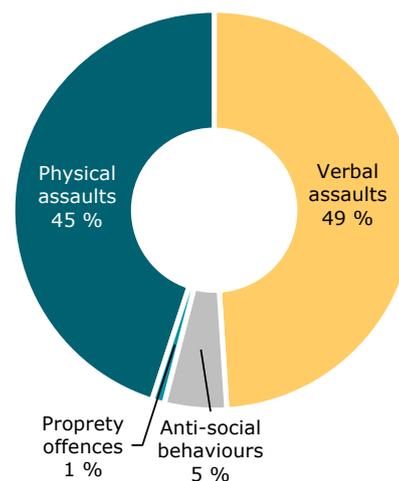
Physical assault accounted for 45% of the incidents of violence. Blows or brutality were perpetrated in 37% of recorded matches, while pushing represented 4% of incidents. Attempted assault accounted for 2% of violence committed, which is the same proportion as fights or brawls. Note that 9 armed assaults have been recorded over the 2017-2018 season, which represented less than 1% of offences observed. These figures are stable in comparison with previous seasons.

Furthermore, anti-social behaviours such as throwing projectiles, obscene gestures and behaviours, as well as spitting were also committed in 5% of matches during which at least one incident was recorded.

On a final note, in less than 1% of cases, the most serious incident involved property offences (vandalism, destruction, theft, etc.) [4].

Note that for 76 matches recorded, the most serious incident was of a racist or discriminatory nature (which concerns less than 1% of cases recorded).

4 Most serious type of incident



Source: Behaviours Observatory, FFF, 2017-2018 season, processing by the ONDRP.

The matches concerned

More than two-thirds of the recorded incidents were committed during matches between senior teams (68%). However, this proportion needs to be considered in light of the total number of matches played. Indeed, when compared with the number of matches organised, it appears violence is committed relatively more often during matches between 17-18 year-old male players (U19-U18 category). During matches between this category of players, 3.4% are marred by at least one incident. This proportion is 2.7% for matches between players over 18 (senior, recreational and enterprise football categories combined) and 2.5% for the U17-U16 category (15-16 year-old players). Note that, regarding futsal, 1.2% of matches are marred by violence or anti-social behaviour during the 2017-2018 season [5].

Following these incidents of violence, 3% of matches were ended early and, according to the information available in the recording tool, the police or gendarmerie was called for 32 matches with incidents (*less than 1% of cases*).

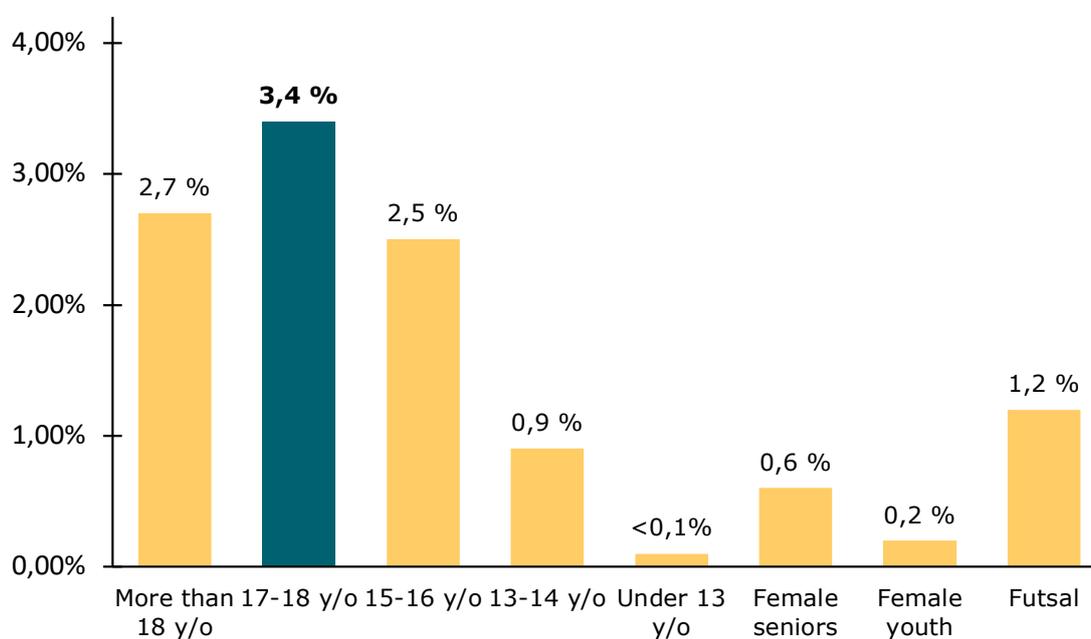
Less than 1% of matches where incidents of violence were recorded were flagged as "sensitive", i.e. a previous encounter between the two clubs had already been marred by violence.

The benefits of data recording

One of the benefits the Behaviours Observatory brings is to flag matches as 'sensitive' when previous encounters were recorded as having been marred by violence and anti-social behaviours. With this advanced warning, additional means may thus be deployed during future matches to prevent any offence.

It is therefore important to highlight the benefits of recording incidents of violence and anti-social behaviours in order to better respond to this phenomenon. Enhancing knowledge about this subject also helps improve the relevance of FFF crime prevention policies. In this respect, we could cite the Federal Educational Program (PEF) for example, which is guidance material designed for coaches and other football stakeholders in the form of a folder containing a set of factsheets. Organised by theme, these factsheets teach young club members the benefits of this sport as long as the rules of the game and of life are upheld. Thanks to the Behaviours Observatory, a problem encountered within any membership category can be identified and the guidance provided in the PEF tailored accordingly.

5 Rate of matches with incidents depending on the membership category



Source: Behaviours Observatory, FFF, 2017-2018 season, processing by the ONDRP.

Methodological overview

The data required to conduct this study comes from the "Behaviours Observatory", a tool developed by the FFF in order to record incidents during amateur football matches. When a match marred by an incident is recorded in the tool, questions about the most serious incident committed are asked. The seriousness scale ranks physical assault at the top, followed by violence against a referee. Questions about the most serious incident bear on the form it took (assaults, threats, theft, vandalism, etc.), the people involved, whether or not it was discriminatory, whether or not the police or emergency services were called, etc. All of this information will enable additional and more appropriate prevention measures to be set up during the next match between the two clubs involved.

Some districts or leagues are not included in the estimation of the proportion of matches with incidents, as some resource centres do not use the tool and others record fewer than ten acts of violence. The few incidents reported by some leagues or districts spark doubts for the FFF regarding the quality of recording efforts. It was therefore agreed that only centres reporting more than ten incidents over a season would be counted when calculating the incident rate, so as not to underestimate this indicator.

Cases of assault and anti-social behaviours recorded without perpetrators or victims (excluding vandalism and throwing projectiles) are not included in the analysis of the characteristics of the offence, as, without such information, they cannot be properly described.