

POLAND Top clubs kick racism out of football stadiums

Przemek Krajewski and Rafal Pankowski for *Nigdy Wiecej* and Antifa-Net report from Warsaw

TWO OF POLAND'S top football clubs, Legia Warsaw and Widzew Lodz, joined the celebration of the International Day Against Racism when both teams' players ran out onto the pitch wearing t-shirts with the slogan "Let's kick racism out of the stadiums".

After the game on 22 March, the shirts, signed by the players, were sold to fans in an internet auction.

The money raised went to Searchlight's Polish sister organisation Never Again, which is a founder member of the international fans' organisation Football Against Racism in Europe. FARE and its affiliates campaign against racism and intolerance in many spheres of life, not only football.

Commenting on the participation by the Warsaw and Lodz clubs, Marcin Kornak, chairperson of Never Again, said: "We are pleased that such famous clubs as Legia and Widzew have got involved in action against racism in the football stadiums. Let's hope that, thanks to such initiatives, Polish football will soon be associated only with sporting emotions."

Leszek Miklas, president of Legia, emphasised that his club "supports all initiatives which shape the sensitivity of the fans towards otherness and cultural differences". Miklas's views found a ready echo from the players, including Legia midfielder Martins Ekwueme, who has graced Polish football for the past nine seasons. He said: "Happily, the times when bananas flew from the terraces are now past".

Ekwueme, who has experienced

stadium racism first-hand, explained further: "When I was playing in Jeziorak Ilawa, there was one game when people threw bananas at me and my black colleagues. Though it was a long time ago, I have never experienced such cruelty".

Takesure Chinyama, Legia's star striker and top scorer, commented that it was unfortunate that "during the game fans of opposing teams make strange noises which escalate when I have the ball," adding, "I try not to care. I concentrate on scoring for Legia and shutting their mouths with a good game."

The International Day Against Racism takes place every year to commemorate the events of 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, when police massacred 69 people taking part in a peaceful demonstration against apartheid. The United Nations designated 21 March International Day Against Racial Discrimination. Most of the events to mark the day in Europe are coordinated by the Amsterdam-based UNITED for Intercultural Action, of which Never Again and Searchlight are members. ◀

