

Arranged confrontations

Insights into the phenomenon and input for the development of a police strategy

Conclusions and recommendations

In this summary, the research results are brought together. In the first section, attention is paid to the main and subquestions and set-up of the study. In the second section, the first four main questions are answered; the third is a reflection on possible future trends and developments. In the fourth and final section, the last question about a plan of action is elaborated in the form of recommendations.

Main and subquestions, research set-up

This study centres around the developments occurring in the area of pre-arranged fights between supporter groups in the public domain, their scope and their implications for the approach taken by the police. That is the main focus, from which the following subquestions were formulated:

- What developments are taking place in regard to the motivation, frequency and manner of organising (who, what, when, how) of pre-arranged fights?
- What is the background of persons involved in pre-arranged fights and what developments can be seen, compared to the past? More specifically, the background of participants could be considered (besides football, for example fighting sports).
- What are the motives of persons who take part in pre-arranged fights and to what extent does group pressure play a part, or to what extent is it possible for persons to evade pre-arranged fights?
- Are there any undesirable secondary developments (such as the emergence of easy to mobilise 'fighting groups' that may turn against other citizens or the police)?
- What experiences do police in other countries have with pre-arranged fights, what lessons have they learnt and what does this mean for the police approach in the Netherlands?

To answer the research questions, several research activities were carried out. Besides desk research, consisting of a media analysis and a study of scientific and other literature, a case analysis was conducted. In the case analysis, the files on three pre-arranged fights that have led to a criminal investigation were studied. In line with this, a total of seven persons involved in the

criminal investigation were interviewed. The criminal investigations provided leads to a total of 75 suspects. System information of the National Police (*HKS/BOSZ/BVH*) and the three probation organisations (*3RO*) on these persons was consulted to get an insight in their criminal career characteristics and psychosocial functioning (individual analysis). In addition to the desk research and the case studies, a phenomenon analysis was conducted. As part of this, a survey was carried out among police professionals home and abroad, which resulted in 50 completed questionnaires, including fifteen from other countries. Additional to the questionnaire survey, seventeen persons were interviewed, including six foreign respondents and six members of the Dutch Public Order Information Team (*Team Openbare Orde Inlichtingen TOOI*). Finally, a survey was held among Dutch professional football organisations (*Betaald Voetbal organisaties, BVO's*), yielding nine respondents.

Answers to main and subquestions

This study centres around the developments that take place in the area of pre-arranged fights between supporter groups in the public domain, their scope and their implications for the approach taken by the police. Each subquestion is answered in a separate subsection.

What are pre-arranged fights?

In their purest form, pre-arranged fights may be seen as confrontations between two parties willing to engage in them, based on agreements made beforehand concerning time, location, group size, use of weapons and distinctive clothing, among other things. Significant in this regard is the fact that the groups do not necessarily have to consist of 20 people, even if the alternative name seems to suggest this (20-20 fights); groups may be larger or smaller. Groups that take part in pre-arranged fights identify with professional football clubs; however, there is not always a direct link to a football match. On the contrary: many pre-arranged fights are not planned (spontaneously) around matches but take place on different days. Besides these planned confrontations, confrontations of a partly organised nature may be distinguished, so-called hit & runs. In those cases, a group launches a deliberate attack (for example on another group's pub). Although this is not always based on, perhaps extensive, arrangements, such an 'attack' may nevertheless be conducted in consultation with the other party or its representatives, or be announced in advance. Partly because suspects invoke their right to remain silent, in some cases it remains unclear to what extent a fight was completely pre-arranged or a sought confrontation of the hit & run variety.

Developments in the area of frequency and manner of organisation

The Beverwijk case (1997), in which Ajax and Feyenoord supporters sought to have a confrontation, is one of the best-known pre-arranged confrontations between Dutch supporter groups and the first that led to an extensive criminal investigation. Naturally, this does not mean that no pre-arranged confrontations took place prior to 1997; however, no materials that can be used for a scientific study of this phenomenon are available, or still available today. The media analysis was restricted to a review of the past ten years, which already shows that media reports of organised confrontations between supporter groups were published as early as 2007. Also supporters of other than the three traditional large clubs were represented therein (including supporters of AZ and ADO Den Haag). In a policy sense, this topic has been given attention in the annual reports of the Dutch Central Information Point for Football Hooliganism (*Centraal Informatiepunt Voetbalvandalisme CIV*) from 2012 onwards. In other words: the phenomenon of pre-arranged fights, also known as 20-20 fights, is not really new, definitely taking into account the fact that in eastern Europe – more specifically, Russia – such pre-arranged fights became common knowledge already earlier.

The sources consulted for this study, in particular the survey among Dutch police professionals, show that supporter groups of at least 29 clubs that are active in professional football take part, or in recent years have taken part, in pre-arranged fights. This means that a large proportion of the more fanatical supporter groups is involved. A significant development is that participants are recruited also outside supporter groups, and also include people staying in the Netherlands temporarily, for work-related purposes (e.g. people from eastern and central Europe). Recruitment takes place in gyms and at locations where people have the opportunity to practice fighting sports, among other places. One could say, therefore, that football may constitute a context for pre-arranged fights but that not just 'known' target group supporters necessarily take part in those fights.

For the period from February 2012 to July 2016, the number of known pre-arranged fights found in police listings and open sources is around 100. This means that during the period in question, an average of one or two pre-arranged fights took place or were thwarted every month. This is a conservative estimate, however, which suggests that this is a widespread but largely difficult to expose phenomenon. In that context, pre-arranged fights may be considered a side-effect of the security measures taken in regard to football matches, since these measures made it more difficult for supporter groups to seek confrontations there and increased the chances of them getting caught. In terms of football-related violence, therefore, there has been a partial shift from spontaneous confrontations around the match to controlled and regulated pre-arranged confrontations. The violence may be designated football-related since participants strongly identify with a specific club and coalitions are also entered into along those lines.

Internationally, the Netherlands is no exception. Respondents report pre-arranged fights also from seven other European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Norway, Poland and Switzerland. Trends differ per country: in some, the phenomenon increases, in others, its popularity among supporter groups is waning. More specific information, such as when pre-arranged fights started to take place there, and among supporters of which clubs, cannot be ascertained on the basis of the foreign respondents' answers. In the Netherlands, there seem to be regional differences. Some Dutch respondents assume, for example, that pre-arranged fights are more popular among supporter groups from the south than among supporter groups from other areas. It is important to note, however, that these estimations are based on instinct. How many pre-arranged fights actually take place, neither the foreign nor the Dutch respondents are able to say; not just because the police do not always know about the pre-arranged fights that took place but also because information about prevented ('thwarted') or actual confrontations is not registered in unequivocal fashion.

The question is to what extent the confrontation in Beverwijk (1997) should be equated to the pre-arranged fights supporter groups have nowadays; after all, the confrontation in Beverwijk took place in a context of great rivalry and increased tension between Ajax and Feyenoord supporters. Nevertheless, the case does provide some insight in the way in which supporter groups who seek a confrontation communicate and how the fights are arranged. Based on the three case studies it turns out that at the time – and in addition to possible face-to-face appointment in neutral locations – relatively new means of and options for communication were used to keep in touch. In 1997, for example, the newly introduced mobile phone was used for mutual communications (about each other's location, among other things), whereas in 2012 and 2015, smartphones and relevant apps – including WhatsApp – were used. This leads to low visibility for the police of activities engaged in to arrange a confrontation. In line with this, also other measures appear to be taken to reduce the chances of intervention – the risk that the police will prevent or 'thwart' a confrontation before it takes place. Judging from the criminal investigations studied, only a small number of people would be informed of the exact details, for example. Accordingly, many people knew that something was going to happen but did not receive the

most important information (when, where and how the confrontation was going to take place) until the last minute. Other actions to prevent police intervention are, or so the cases show, organising pre-arranged fights outside game days, choosing remote locations outside the visual field of police and citizens and not wearing club colours. To prevent recognition in retrospect, hoods and sunglasses are put on and/or scarves are worn over the mouth. Information from the national survey largely confirms these findings. Among other things, respondents describe that confrontations are organised inside a small social circle; this is done during so-called pre-meets (where persons belonging to the groups meet in person at a pre-discussed location) or using difficult or impossible to monitor means of communication (prepaid telephones, social media apps, gaming platforms). On the day of the confrontation, mobile telephones are left at home or must be surrendered, to prevent the risk that the location – which is sometimes determined only at the last minute – from being leaked. Also internationally, such *modi operandi* are reported; it should be noted, however, that in eastern Europe – in particular in Russia – there are clear signs of a competition.

Backgrounds of persons involved

Based on the cases studied, the profiles of 75 persons were recorded. The HKS (*HerKenningsdienstSysteem* - Identification System) and BOSZ (*Betere Opsporing door Sturing op Zaken* – Enhanced Investigation through Case Control) registration systems show that a large part of these persons have been in at least one previous incident – often more – besides the pre-arranged fight studied. Those incidents are mainly violent and group violence offences. Up to the moment of the pre-arranged fight, the profiles of the persons in question are very similar: in all three cases studies, their average age is around the mid-twenties. Also the average number of earlier incidents in which they were involved prior to the pre-arranged fight is nearly the same for all participants. In terms of participant demographics and criminal characteristics, no great shifts in comparison to the past seem to have occurred, therefore. For that reason, developments in the criminal record patterns of persons involved in the Beverwijk confrontation (1997) was studied. This shows that a considerable proportion (41%) continues to display violent and/or other delinquent behaviour. Persons who were involved in the more recent cases (2012 and 2015) may well constitute a risk group for future violent offences, therefore.

To get a clearer picture of the recent delinquent and criminal behaviour of persons involved, and of the context in which this behaviour takes place, the Dutch National Law Enforcement Database (*BasisVoorziening Handhaving BVH*) was consulted. A total of 51 out of the 75 (68%) persons involved in pre-arranged fights are registered as suspects of an incident.¹ This concerns a total of 303 incidents; in almost two-thirds of these, violence or group violence was reported. 43 persons were responsible for this; almost everyone (n=40) of these also perpetrates violence in other settings than football. Pubs and clubs are the most prominent venues (n=22), with obvious ‘fight seeking’ indicated in a few cases. In addition, a considerable number of persons (n=18) was also implicated in domestic violence. Also social neighbourhood issues are reported, with neighbours and other local residents as victims of violence.

1. The BVH records a maximum of five years back. Scientific research has shown that the number of offences committed decreases with age (see Moffitt, 1993). Most persons involved in the Beverwijk confrontation (1997) are not registered in the BVH, which may be explained by the fact that they are considerably older than the other suspects involved in the study.

Box 1: Psychosocial functioning

Regarding psychosocial functioning, attention was paid to childhood behaviour (at home and at school), working life, finances, additions and disorders. It turned out that the sources consulted mostly failed to yield any information, or information on all these topics. Nevertheless, it was found that 38 persons (51%) have problems in at least one of these forms of psychosocial functioning. Reference materials are largely absent; accordingly, it cannot simply be concluded that these numbers are high. Whether the other 37 persons have no psychosocial problems at all, whether these were simply never noted or whether the institutions consulted have no digital records of them is not known. All this means that the information on psychosocial problems should be considered an indicative minimum here.

In the area of psychosocial functioning, first of all problem behaviour in childhood was focused on. It turns out that at least ten persons had behavioural problems and/or inadequate family structure. This leads to conflicts or pedagogic neglect, after which those involved may choose to leave home or may be placed in (temporary) accommodation already at an early age. In eleven persons, childhood problem behaviour manifested also at school, among other things in the form of unmanageable conduct and bullying of classmates. In several cases, this led to these persons being placed in special education or being removed from school; these persons may not have any basic qualifications, therefore. This may subsequently result in work and finance-related problems, although it may also be related to addiction issues (alcohol/drugs/gambling). In relation to aggressive behaviour, impulse control and aggression regulation problems turn out to have been documented for thirteen persons (17%). In addition, ADHD was recorded for six persons and antisocial personality disorders were determined for two persons. Both disorders are related to aggressive behaviour. In particular the incidence of ADHD is higher in the research group than the national average of two to three percent. There were no reference materials for other areas of psychosocial functioning; whether the results found are high or low cannot be simply concluded, therefore.

Motives to take part

The sources consulted show that a large proportion of those involved (n=60; 80%) can be connected to hooligan groups or groups of fanatical supporters. This is clear from the fact that they often frequent pubs known to have the patronage of the hard core of the club in question, had identifying features such as tattoos, or were designated by the police as hard core members, for example. It was self-evident, therefore, initially to look at motives to take part in pre-arranged fights from a perspective of group dynamics. Two aspects seem relevant in this respect. The first is the will to defend one's group's honour. Persons interviewed illustrate this by referring, among other things, to the need for status felt by various hooligan groups. Group status is determined by the ability to mobilise a group for a pre-arranged fight, by the actual appearance of group members on the occasion in question and by the outcome or result of the confrontation. The second group dynamics aspect is related to this: from the group identity and group feeling, pressure may arise, or may be felt by persons, to join in the fight. Individual status in the group or fear of exclusion may play a part in this. Also the aspect of recruitment and selection of good fighters – from the young hard core or by the older hard cores – may affect this. Actual rivalry, in the sense of tension between supporter groups, was found as a possible motive for pre-arranged fights to only a very limited extent. This is supported by the fact that, among other things, respondents reported confrontations between supporter groups of clubs from different countries that had never played against each other.

In addition to the aspect of group dynamics, motives outside the group may play a part. The kicks and thrills involved in organising and taking part in pre-arranged fights were mentioned several times. That mutual tensions are not a precondition also shows from the fact that after a confrontation, participants may treat each other amicably, for example hugging or patting each other on the shoulder. In addition, it turns out that a number of persons cannot be related to the hard core and are not members or core members of the problematic supporter group. These are persons who train in martial arts and who see pre-arranged fights as a good opportunity to put their skills into practice. In view of their (supposed) qualities, they are drawn into the group to increase its chances of winning and getting greater status. These may be persons from another country; recently, for example, there have been reports of Polish fighters in a Dutch supporter group.²

Extent to which undesirable secondary developments occur

From the police documentation consulted and the interviews with respondents, to a limited extent information was obtained that persons involved in pre-arranged fights manifest as groups also in other places. Although according to respondents, the persons involved carry a higher risk of being violent in such settings – for example because of an individual proclivity – at least for now, there are no organised and trained groups that claim territory. An exception mentioned specifically for the Netherlands is an event with great regional appeal, at which several attending supporter groups have repeatedly arranged a confrontation. Also the respondents from the other countries usually see no secondary development in the form of violence from supporter groups involved in pre-arranged fights in other contexts than football.³

Trends and future developments

Pre-arranged fights have their origin in eastern Europe. Based on the information of foreign respondents, among others, the phenomenon seems to have continued its development over there, with focused training and confrontations taking place in a context of nearly organised competition. To what extent such a development will also pass on to other countries or the Netherlands cannot be predicted. More in general – from the perspective of football-related violence – one could say that there is a trend whereby organised confrontations are partly replacing the traditional spontaneous confrontations between football supporters. Moreover, persons from outside may be increasingly involved in this, for example because they want to use their fighting skills or because these may give them an added value to the group or for its status. Although the number of confrontations is unknown, police and open source information show that they take place between once and twice a month. However, an emphatic caveat to make is that, judging from the respondents' answers, this number is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Several aspects lead to the assumption that pre-arranged fights are no phenomenon that will blow over. Firstly, they have been taking place over a longer period, which has given the phenomenon a more structural character (at least among a number of supporter groups). Also the kick, wanting to establish a reputation – which is easily managed by disseminating footage or results information

2. This aspect is apparent from recent news reports (see <http://www.ad.nl/rotterdam/onderzoek-naar-vechtafspraken-tussen-hooligans~a0150244/>) and may constitute an item for future attention.

3. A confrontation between Russian and English supporters during the 2016 EC suggests that Russian hooligans acted with great purpose and were highly organised. However, that incident took place in the context of football. Since eastern European countries have largely failed to respond to the survey, it is unknown whether such a development occurs in those countries.

online – and the, to date, low chances of getting caught or being punished are relevant in this respect.⁴ To what extent confrontations between such groups in other settings (e.g. at festivals), or an enhanced escalation risk whenever a ‘fighting group’ is present, should be taken into account in the future remains unknown for now. However, various respondents’ answers show that this may be a future development to consider.

Recommendations

The trends mentioned and the possible future developments have different implications. One is that it must be decided whether or not, and if so, how, pre-arranged fights should be dealt with. Both at home and abroad, there are advocates and opponents of an approach on pre-arranged fights. Those who oppose action deem it unnecessary because participants make their own choices, because as far as is known, arrangements are usually complied with, and because confrontations largely take place out of public sight. Moreover, in their view a criminal investigation takes up too much capacity. Advocates of action point out that pre-arranged fights may have a direct impact on the public order and citizens’ sense of security (definitely when the fights take place at less remote locations) and that there is a risk of serious injuries or casualties among the participants. Other arguments, finally, are the possible attraction that such groups may exert on other young people and the risk that persons involved in pre-arranged fights will proceed to exhibit behaviour that transgresses moral standards also in other contexts.

As in the Netherlands, as a result of this debate any clear approach to pre-arranged fights is still at a very early stage also in other countries, which means that also there, fights will usually be prevented if the police hears about them, but criminal investigations hardly ever take place. If decisions for a more active approach of this phenomenon are made in the Netherlands, it would be obvious to draft a national guideline. From the idea that, based on information, more carefully reasoned decisions can be made about shape and content of an approach, our recommendations would initially be to focus on acquiring proactive control information. This is discussed in the first subsection below. In line with this, possible options for a national repressive approach are outlined.

Acquiring proactive control information

The first remarkable thing is that, both in the Netherlands and abroad, there is no clear notion of the scope of this phenomenon. There are several reasons for this. First, pre-arranged fights may be designated so-called ‘go get crimes’ or ‘go get cases’, which means that pre-arranged fights only become known, and as such, may be registered, if the police takes the initiative to independently gather information in their regard. After all, those involved will not voluntarily report them, in the way that victims of burglary, for example, will (so-called ‘brought cases’). The fact that pre-arranged fights are actually organised and occur in the greatest possible secrecy means that the police cannot possibly know about all impending and occurring pre-arranged fights. In other words: by definition, there is a – sizeable – dark number: what is recorded in the systems constitutes the tip of the iceberg, and fails to offer a clear picture of the actual scope of this phenomenon. In addition, knowledge on pre-arranged fights or the prevention thereof is saved in several different systems, including the Football Monitoring System (*Voetbal Volgsysteem VVS*) and the BVH. Some information may be known to football coordinators but stored under different social files (e.g. ‘general mutations’) or not registered at all. Finally, some information is only

4. Historically considered, wanting to establish a reputation links in with the ‘duelling culture’ that took shape in 19th century Germany.

available to covertly working teams (the TOOI team) and cannot be shared with other police officers. All this results in a fragmented picture; to be able to come to proactive control data, bundling the flows of information seems a necessity.

A national guideline to streamline the registration of incidents or possible incidents – and where possible, of those involved therein – may contribute to a more comprehensive overview than the fragmented information available at present. Several steps are needed to realise this, always taking into account the fact that also inside the police, information of the TOOI team cannot always be shared, or shared fully:

1. Taking stock of existing information (incidents list)

A precondition to be able to get a clear picture of trends and developments is for the existing, perhaps fragmented, information to be bundled. This may be realised by searching the BVH and VVS for information on signs of pre-arranged fights and to interview football coordinators about this. This results in a long list of prevented⁵ and realised pre-arranged fights. Topics that may be relevant for a picture of the trend in question include date, time and location, supporter groups involved and risk of injury (for example because weapons are brought to the fight). A similar request for information may be sent to the various TOOI teams (or the national TOOI team), to enrich this list and use it for one's own availability of information.

2. Centralisation of information

Based on the findings, a number of adjustments to the working process are desirable; these may contribute to the acquisition of control information. Firstly, at present no central bundling of information on pre-arranged fights takes place; the CIV might take this on for the future. In practice this would mean that football coordinators and – where possible – the TOOI teams pass on information on pre-arranged fights to the CIV.

3. More in-depth perusal of existing data and gathering of new information

Pre-arranged fights take place in a relatively small social circle, which makes information about persons involved in such confrontations even more relevant. The incidents list (drawn up in step 1) may be used to take stock of information on persons involved in pre-arranged fights and possible also their *modus operandi*. Again, the TOOI team might enhance this information and use it for its own availability of data. In addition, attention may be paid to using options to optimise the current position in this respect. For example, more frequent use might be made of the option to record personal data and car registration information of persons present whenever a pre-arranged fight is prevented. Footage that is disseminated online and becomes available through open sources also offers opportunities to identify persons and record their involvement.

Opportunities to investigate

When the police has information about a planned pre-arranged fight, prevention is usually attempted. This strategy consumes relatively limited capacity, is low-threshold and in line with the police's duty to prevent criminal offences.⁶ Although making arrests and starting a criminal in-

5. Naturally, confrontations that do not take place for other reasons (for example, because a group fails to mobilise sufficient people) are also interesting.

6. It should be noted that the secrecy in which these arrangements are made makes the interest of human intelligence very great. In other words, good availability of information from inside the target group is indispensable. This intelligence aspect is not considered in this report.

investigation are possible pursuant to Article 141a of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP),⁷ this almost never happens, due to considerations of capacity and the necessity to prevent severe injury and/or casualties (see in section 6.3.1 how such situations may be used to gather proactive control information). In other words, the interest of maintaining the public order prevails over that of investigating and punishing those involved. Nevertheless, there are situations that offer investigative opportunities, in particular where pre-arranged fights have actually taken place and footage becomes available on which persons can be recognised. A so-called 'Title V investigation' may be started in such a case: an investigation, carried out by an investigative team led by the public prosecutor, into the planning and commission of serious organised crime. This concerns a system of facts and persons whereby there need not yet be a suspicion of a specific criminal offence, committed by specific suspects, as defined in Article 27 CCP. The point of departure in this is, therefore, that based on available sources it is decided whether, thanks to additionally gathered information, there are prospects of conviction. A significant prospect for conviction in the current case is the identity of possible suspects, which may be established by, for example, police staff of a football unit.

Person-oriented approach

Both criminal investigations and proactive control information (in particular, more in-depth perusal) may offer an insight in persons involved in pre-arranged fights. This information may be used to draft a person-oriented approach (persoonsgerichte aanpak PGA). In the PGA, based on an information file a tailor-made plan of action is designed for the person in question. This custom design may consist of several kinds of intervention, which may be of an administrative, financial or criminal law nature and/or may involve a care context. In other words, a PGA adds focus and initiates one or several interventions, based on information (also see Van Ham & Ferwerda, 2016). Conducting a PGA is important for several reasons. Firstly, research findings show that a considerable proportion of the persons involved in pre-arranged fights also displays aggression in other settings. Accordingly, an approach may have benefits also in other areas. In addition, the investigation shows that not only intrinsic motivation but also group pressure may play a part in persons' becoming involved in pre-arranged confrontations. Paying attention to group pressure on an individual level may contribute to counteracting or preventing pre-arranged fights, therefore.

Local cooperation

At a local level, the authorities (the municipality, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and the police) work together with professional football organisations (BVOs) to give shape and form to a national football safety policy. Although initially, the approach to pre-arranged fights is a matter for the authorities – in particular, the police and the PPS – there is also a local role for professional football organisations; a role that partly ensues from the fact that the confrontations take place in the name of these BVOs, and that at least part of those involved are fanatical supporters of the clubs in question. This means that together with the BVO, measures (such as stadium bans) may be decided on if supporters can be shown to have been involved in a pre-arranged fight. In addition, and depending on the availability of information of e.g. supporter coordinators in supporter groups, the BVOs may cooperate with the police to try and prevent such pre-arranged fights.

7. In this article, the preparation or facilitation of committing group violence is penalised.