

Away Fans Experience at Rams Park (Galatasaray) 29 November 2023
Compiled by the Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST) for referral to UEFA

Introduction

Our fans who travelled to Istanbul for the Champions League match against Galatasaray on Wednesday 29th November experienced a number of unacceptable issues, most significantly relating to access to the stadium, the operation of bus transport and the post-match holdback. The extent and impact of these prompted MUST to seek feedback from those who attended, facilitated by the club, from which we received almost 200 responses. We also sought and received feedback from our club that wholly corroborates our own findings. These are summarised below together with an annex of verbatim comments that reflect the issues raised (Appendix 2). While this was one of the worst experiences in recent times (and a number have said they will not return to Turkey) many of the issues are a common occurrence for travelling fans in many other countries, cities and stadiums. We therefore offer a number of proposals for Football Supporters Europe (FSE) to consider and discuss with UEFA.

Access into the Stadium

Access through the away turnstiles was both shambolic and dangerous. Although we were supplied with digital tickets, the local authorities had indicated a preference for us to use a printed paper version. Both versions struggled to register on the scanners resulting in major delays (paper tickets had two different QR codes, were poor quality and many became damp, and the scanners could not detect the QR codes on different sized phones).

There was a steady stream of arrivals from at least two hours before kick-off with increasing queue size, many being outside in the heavy rain. This was compounded by some turnstiles being closed (typically on 3-4 out of 6 available over the period). Consequently, some fans only gained access 30 minutes into the game, and then only because additional unofficial doors were opened.

Access into the covered area where the turnstiles were situated was cramped, congested and dark with dangerous crushing. Police and stewards remained inside (sheltering from the heavy rain!). There was no crowd management and no information was given. Few of the stewards or other staff spoke any English.

Pallet boards, some broken, had been placed over deep water puddles but the congestion and darkness made them more of a hazard than a benefit.

The extreme weather was clearly a factor but cannot be an excuse. The resulting issues could and should have been escalated at an early stage triggering timely mitigation.

Searches and Items Confiscated

Items forcibly confiscated far exceeded any reasonable risk. We had been advised that power banks were not permitted but this is unrealistic for fans who have used their phones all day then need digital access for a late evening kick-off. However, confiscations also included lipsticks & balms, other make-up, inhalers and coins. One person had expensive air pods confiscated as being 'dangerous'. There was no facility to collect any confiscated items of value after the match. The real risk of items being used as 'missiles' was negligible given the value of some of those items and the 10m high perspex screen with netting below at the front of the section. Fans who had initially gone through home area security did not have any of the above items confiscated.

Operation of Supporter Buses

Many fans had welcomed the availability of the bus transport but encountered issues. We are aware that the departure location of Sultanahmet Square and the advice not to use the metro, was backed and directed by the UK Foreign Office due to perceived risks of supporter clashes at the Taksim Square location that had been used in previous years. However, this added an hour to the journey and the consequently advised departure time of more than four hours before kick-off was unreasonable. However, the first convoy of buses did not then depart until 75 minutes after the advised time leaving fans stuck on the congested buses with no toilet facilities (for over 3 hours including the subsequent journey).

A significant number of fans chose to make their own way to the ground by taxi or the metro. We had no reports of issues using the metro (locals and home fans were friendly) although there was no signage directing them to the away area. A minority of fans arriving independently, should have been a reasonable expectation. We should expect many more to do this in the event of future visits, particularly if the bus route and timing is repeated.

The return journey back to Sultanahmet Square was quicker (around an hour) but more fans sought to use this (a reasonable expectation given the closure of other transport options) leaving some stranded and forced to take expensive (and overpriced) taxis. Public transport was also closed when the buses reached the Square. Many were grossly overcharged for taxis or had to walk long distances back to their hotels.

Post-match Holdback

Our fans were held back until after midnight, around 80 minutes after the match ended - one of the longest in many years. They were directed from the terraces to the concourse at an early point resulting in that area being heavily congested. There were no update announcements other than to those nearest to the police holding line. Some fans reported safety concerns with the eventual mass and uncontrolled descent of the 110 steps to ground level.

We see no reason why the exit process could not have started earlier. The away exit to the buses was in a secure area and allowing at least some if not all of the buses to fill and be dispatched earlier would have eased subsequent problems arriving back in the old city. It is also notable that they were held until the time that public transport closed. Again, the risk of confrontation with locals at that late time of night would have been minimal.

Food & Beverages

Food and drink were unsurprisingly overpriced, particularly in comparison to local prices. Mobile vendors selling on the terraces was a good service to offer although a few vendors were further overcharging and then bartering down if challenged. We are reliably informed that a significant price multiple was applied in the away fans' concourses. This runs counter to the principle of UEFA rules requiring away tickets not to exceed equivalent prices for home fans.

Feedback from our Club

We have obtained separate feedback from the MUFC security team that was present in the stadium, having previously attended the matchday planning meetings with senior stadium and local authority personnel. Their feedback, included as **Appendix 1** to this report, confirms all

of the issues that have been raised by supporters. It is clear that they made repeated efforts to raise growing concerns throughout the day but those representations were largely dismissed or ignored. They have confirmed that their concerns were reported to the UEFA delegate who was present in the stadium. They do not have access to the delegate's post-match report.

Our Conclusions

Stadium access failed at every level - digital/paper ticketing issues, insufficient turnstiles, restricted and badly lit access with added hazards, and a lack of effective crowd control and supervision created serious safety issues as well as significantly delaying the entry of many fans up to 30 minutes after kick-off.

We acknowledge that the extreme weather was a factor in some of these issues, but mitigating actions could and should have been implemented at an earlier stage. It is particularly worrying that these issues were escalated by the MUFC security team but these pleas were ignored.

The excessive holdback, more than double the previously advised duration, was wholly unwarranted and further added to the negative experience of our fans

There were flaws in the planning and operation of bus transport. Transport planning was based on an unreasonable view of the risks posed by away fans and a negative view of their value and importance. Should they return in the future, many more fans will choose not to use the provided transport.

We are not aware of any major incidents involving our fans, in spite of the accumulation of adverse circumstances they faced. It is to their credit that they did not react and their conduct serves to confirm the actual level of risk that should be reflected in matchday planning.

Our Proposals

Where supporter buses are deemed to be necessary, more consideration needs to be given to the anticipated behaviour of fans to make them the most desirable and practical option. This problem is not unique to Galatasaray/Istanbul, although the aggregated issues made it one of the worst experiences for many.

If digital ticketing is to be the future it must be backed by the technology to recognise and permit entry without delay. The blanket ban on power banks needs to be reconsidered, balancing real risk against fan needs

We call on Football Supporters Europe (FSE), to whom we have forwarded this report, to engage with UEFA to consider the issues raised in this report, many of which have also been evident in other recent matches in European competitions.

Through that dialogue, we would like to see the current UEFA safety and security procedures reviewed and strengthened with regard to common issues including holdbacks, digital ticketing, stadium access, prohibited items and food & drink prices. Rules and guidance need to balance safety and security with the reasonable needs and match experience expectations of away fans. Where those rules are disregarded by host clubs and/or city authorities including police (as seems to be the case for this match), appropriate penalties and sanctions should be applied. Crucially those standards should be independently monitored on a routine basis.

Appendix 1 Feedback from our club

We received the following feedback from MUFC safety & security officials who were present in the stadium throughout matchday and participated in the various planning meetings:

All the issues mentioned in the MUST report with regards to the stadium were flagged to the UEFA delegates.

The flooding was flagged early in the day allowing Galatasaray the opportunity to remedy the situation which did not happen. This may have been hard to achieve due to the continued rainfall. It was again flagged directly with Galatasaray and UEFA prior to turnstiles opening when MUFC staff arrived at the stadium. The UEFA delegate attended the turnstiles and ensured he would speak directly with the stadium staff to rectify.

With regards to the entry process, in all the meetings prior to the game, Galatasaray explained that the process would be as follows, supporters exit the buses into secure area, enter filter lanes where there would be a soft ticket check and initial screening prior to entry. None of this happened on the night and this was flagged to both Galatasaray and UEFA.

With regards to the prohibited items, these were agreed at the pre meetings with both Galatasaray, police and UEFA present and shared in our supporter comms. Again, this did not reflect the items confiscated on the night. This was also flagged with both club and UEFA. MUFC staff tried to negotiate with the police and security confiscating the items to firstly allow in and when this failed, at least allow supporters to collect from the turnstiles post-match, this again was declined.

With regards to the turnstiles, I think the aborted filter lane process added to the congestion around the turnstiles. This was exacerbated when two turnstiles temporarily stopped working. The club/police then opened side gates to alleviate congestion and allowed supporters in. A number of supporters that had chosen to travel independently arrived late which again added to the congestion in the queues.

The holdback lasted longer than we were told - the police stated this would be 30 minutes.

It's important to note that MUFC safety and security staff do not have any authority at these fixtures, and we try to ensure we can support the match day operations as best we can. On this occasion, despite numerous reassurances and promises pre match, Galatasaray and the Turkish police chose to ignore our requests for help and indeed refused entry to our own stewards who had travelled to assist our supporters at this fixture.

All of the above was reported to UEFA.

Appendix 2 Feedback from fans

The following responses from individual supporters encapsulate the range of issues that we have highlighted. We received nearly 200 responses – the fact that so many took time to respond is indicative of the collective level of concern and dissatisfaction that our travelling fans encountered. A full set of responses can be made available on request.

As much as I appreciated having the buses to and from the ground, the wait for the buses to leave was excessive, travelling back to the city centre was definitely much smoother and a slightly better experience. I've been to many away games, both domestic and European but I've never felt so unsafe when entering the ground. There was no crowd management at all, making it extremely dangerous, as a female I felt extremely uncomfortable, the crowd was pushing and there was nowhere to go. There were wooden pallets on the ground which made it very unsafe. Once at the turnstile, the security looked at the bags/ checked pockets and demanded all women to leave stuff like lipsticks and lip balms, claiming it's not allowed to bring anything like that into the ground (can't recall any details of that being shared). Our flag was initially binned by the stewards (without the indication that it can be collected after the game) and it took about 20 mins to get the stewards to accept it (it wouldn't happen without the help of an English steward who was extremely helpful), because of that we missed the kick-off. Overall, entering the ground was the worst experience I've ever had attending an away game.

Buses to the ground left far too early to be feasible to take this method of transport, communication regarding hotels around Taksim square sent too late. Getting in to the ground was a complete nightmare having to wait over an hour as wet paper tickets not working in addition to difficult scanning of phone tickets, only a portion of turnstiles open meaning a large number of fans crushed into a small space highly dangerous for everyone especially children, thankfully this was not as severe as it could well have been.

Small number of turnstiles for a large amount of away fans. A lot of fans in front couldn't enter the ground through the turnstiles as they had mobile tickets only, and the turnstiles weren't equipped well enough for this.

Some phones were too big for the barcode scanner and couldn't enter meaning queues grew larger and larger. Flooded area to queue for the turnstiles, flooded area after the turnstiles before going up the steps to the seating area.

Front row of seats in the ground was also flooded meaning fans crammed onto the second row. Buses after the game left half empty, leaving fans stranded at the ground.

Travelled to the ground with my wife on metro, got there 50 minutes before kick-off, joined the queue to get in, stood in muddy puddles, pouring with rain, crushed against a barrier, when we finally got in we had missed the first 2 goals, my wife was searched, where they emptied her purse of nearly £10 of English coins,

The hold back after was just designed for us not to catch the metro back, as the coach park was secure and we could have boarded coaches and set off straight away, instead we waited nearly 1 and half hours in the ground then the busses went the long way back, and dumped us 6 miles from our hotel, 1 o'clock in the morning soaking wet, no public transport, just taxi drivers waiting to rip us off, where we had the pleasure of paying £50 to get back to hotel

The buses to the game were fine, although the wait to leave was long. On arrival at the ground, we were all subjected to searches, which we had been advised about. However the confiscation of items not on the notified list was outrageous. I only had a lipstick taken, but they needed convincing to let me keep my asthma inhalers. There was no reasoning with the security staff and although I later found out that a MU steward was there, I saw nobody.

The lock in after the game was awful. We kept being told "30 minutes", then "10" but in the end it was almost 90 minutes. This meant that many of us were too late for tram connections at the bus drop off point. Many of us had no option but to get taxis - at hugely inflated costs. One wanted 300 euros for a 20 minute ride, although we finally got one for 30 euros (Google said 10-12 euros).

This was my 10th in the last 11th and came back saying this was the most organised and thought through away by Turkish authorities and police. There was no issues with the buses, in fact they left an hour later because all the united fans didn't turn up and were in the bars drinking. We all had a police escort to the ground. The traffic in Istanbul is a problem on a normal day but coming back was perfect as they took us route that wouldn't go through the Galatasaray areas. The items such as power banks taken after the turnstiles at the search point where clearly included on the "do not bring into stadium" page on the away guide provided by Manchester United. The hold back was not excessive, it was circa 1 hour which allowed all the traffic to die down around the stadium and so that our police escorted run was clear. I'm slightly embarrassed by this email and those that made the complaints. They probably didn't do Madrid or Villarreal 1000000x worse. I would like to have evidence that this response is provided to the club.

Where to begin.... we arrived at RAMS park via taxi an hour before kick-off. We walked around the circumference of the ground and did not see any clear signage that indicated where the away turnstiles were situated. Once we established that the entrance was in fact away from the main body of the stadium and underground, we were greeted with an enormous queue of people trying to get in. This is now about 40 minutes ahead of kick off. There was nobody on the turnstiles and there were no stewards around to advise. There were pallets on the floor that were unsafe. Nobody told us what was going on and as more people started to arrive, the push to get in increased. Suddenly a side door opens and there is a massive crush to get it. At this point, having arrived at the ground in more than enough time, we have missed the first two goals.

The fact that it was close to midnight when the metro shut when they chose to let us out was ridiculous. The crush to get out was frightening, my feet didn't touch the ground for the first few steps down the stairs. If someone had fallen, I would have been powerless to protect myself.

Having been to Copenhagen, it was night and day in terms of how we were treated (as people looking to attend a football game) vs Galatasaray where we were essentially treated like cattle and expected to comply. I personally feel the club massively let us down here.

As much as I appreciated having the buses to and from the ground, the wait for the buses to leave was excessive, travelling back to the city centre was definitely much smoother and a slightly better experience. I've been to many away games, both domestic and European but I've never felt so unsafe when entering the ground. There was no crowd management at all, making it extremely dangerous, as a female I felt extremely uncomfortable, the crowd was pushing and there was nowhere to go. There were wooden pallets on the ground which made it very unsafe. Once at the turnstile, the security looked at the bags/ checked pockets and demanded all women to leave stuff like lipsticks and lip balms, claiming it's not allowed to bring anything like that into the ground (can't recall any details of that being shared). Our flag was initially binned by the stewards (without the indication of it can be collected after the game) and it took about 20mins to get the stewards to accept it (it wouldn't happen without the help of an English steward who was extremely helpful), because of that we missed the kick off. Overall, entering the ground was the worse experience I've ever had attending an away game.

It was an absolute shambles - the pickup buses to and from were on the other side of Istanbul where most of the United fans were not there. Whilst I understand the idea of keeping it within the city of Istanbul, Taksim Square and Sultanhamet are nowhere near each other and so this ended up being a taxi to the ground (dropped off on the motorway and initially having to go into the stadium vicinity with the home fans, which was somewhat unnerving). We then had to wait, after it had been raining all day, for nearly an hour just to get through the turnstiles which was pretty annoying and unhelpful.

I had no issue with the police, but the fact the holdback was nearly two hours (which was a bit like Fenerbahçe a few years ago) was ridiculous and completely unnecessary, not to mention dropping us off in Sultanhamet Square which was nowhere near Taksim and so there had to arrange a taxi which the driver tried to take £120 off us for a 20 minute trip - we paid £30 which was twice the price but was just nice to get back to our hotel. I felt there should have been a choice between Taksim or Sultanhamet and this would have been helpful but we weren't even given that choice. To be honest, this had to be one of the worst organised Euro aways I've felt we've been a part of and it's definitely put us off going again. I'd rather have not attended the game. It was exhausting, extremely stressful and completely demoralising.

The visit to Gala left a nasty taste, not because of any overt aggression from authorities or fans (far from it regarding fans, who were happy to exchange banter and songs on the metro to the ground) but because it felt like the authorities had gone out of their way to just make life difficult for us. We arrived more than one hour before KO but still missed the first 5 mins. That was just very poor organisation and must have been done on purpose because Gala would know from previous experience how long it would take to enter the ground.

Everybody kept relatively calm, despite the claustrophobic conditions but my frustration went up a notch when getting through the turnstiles, to be met by a mass of Utd Stewards and even UK police. To my shame, I vented my frustration at them, when I guess on reflection, they couldn't do much about the situation. But then again, in that case, why were they there? What was their role? They seemed to be just spectators of the general disorganisation and making no effort to improve the situation.

Then after the game, it felt like Gala kept us in the ground just long enough that we would miss the last metro. Completely unnecessary to be stuck there for 80 mins. Thankfully, we ran to the metro and just squeezed through the barrier before it closed for the night but we were the lucky ones. All of the above was avoidable with some decent management that took into account the needs of visiting fans. Gala are not stupid and are fully capable of such management and so we are left with the conclusion that it was all done on purpose, simply to make life difficult for us. All the more galling when we, Utd, roll out the red carpet for visiting Euro fans, most notably Gala themselves.

It was dangerous the way we were kept outside up to and after kick off. Credit to the United fans for staying calm. They knew it would happen as well because apparently "the same happened with Bayern".

Also, being kept 80 minutes post-match was incredibly unnecessary. The shuttles were right at the exit from the stadium. The home fans were long gone because of the rain.

People shouldn't be made to feel like a criminal for trying to get into and out of a football ground. Sadly, it seems par for the course across Europe for away fans based on a conversation I had with a police officer as we waited when being held back after Sevilla away in April, "it comes from UEFA".

We arrived 1 hour before kick-off. The away fans area was very poorly lit and there was no cover from the torrential rain.

The queue, which was 50-100 yards in length, was moving very very slowly. Underfoot were large, ankle deep puddles. There were also wooden pallets on the ground, many of which were broken. Because the area was poorly lit, away fans were tripping over the pallets which was an obvious health & safety concern.

Finally as we got to the woefully inadequate and undermanned turnstiles, it was obvious that paper tickets weren't scanning due to them being ruined by the rain. Also phones with QR codes for entry were not fitting into the scanning slot.

A complete disaster. Very lucky there wasn't a very serious incident.

Arrangements in Turkey were farcical. The Away supporters pack suggested that bus travel to the stadium would leave at 4.30. I was on the first bus and it didn't leave until 5.45 by which time we had been onboard since 4pm. It then took 2 hours to get to the stadium. We were not offered water nor kept informed.

There wasn't a single helpful steward at the away end. Only one steward seemed to speak English and he offered no assistance even when asked.

For those who had ticket scanning issues they were referred to a ticket office kiosk. The kiosk was pointless and offered no assistance. They simply took you back to the turnstile and told you to speak with a steward there. On arrival at the stadium at 7.10pm only 4 turnstiles out of 8 were operational. The area where you access the turnstiles was heavily flooded and the floor had unsafe wooden pallets down that people continued to trip over.

There is no emergency exit route next to the turnstiles. Once in the turnstile entry, the only way out is back the way you came, or one at a time through the turnstiles. 20 minutes after kick off there were still 100s of fans trying to get in through the turnstiles. There was no crowd management in effect and Turkish Police were seemingly only on the inside of the stadium. Had there been a rush from the back there would have been absolutely nowhere for fans at the front by

the turnstiles to go. It is no exaggeration to say that it was exceptionally dangerous and the fact that there was no disaster is a testament to the fans, not UEFA, Galatasaray nor the local authorities.

I do not say this lightly, the entire experience was atrocious! that said, I do not consider blame rests with United - it rests with UEFA, Turkish Authorities and Galatasaray.

Poor entry to the ground took over an hour and a half to get in, turnstiles went down had to enter via a side door, pallets in the middle of the floor for everyone to trip over, unable to stand in allocated seat as police prevented access allowing locals to stand in them, unable to see most of game due to congestion of fans stood around top of steps unable to get into allocated seat kept back for 2 hrs after game had to get taxi back to centre due to overcrowding on buses

Getting into the ground was very slow, I only saw two turnstiles open at the gates where I was going in. After the game we were kept in until the metro had finished. This seemed designed to get everyone on the buses which then dropped people off at the Blue Mosque around 1am. It was miles away from where I was staying and meant I had a two hour walk in the rain to get back to my hotel. Another example of being treated without a respect or humanity. The Galatasaray fans we met were great. We saw no trouble and heard of no trouble between fans prior to the match so why we could not have been let out earlier to get the metro is beyond me.

The security team took my Air Pods from my pocket and just said 'dangerous' and pocketed themselves. I was in the crush before to get in. Was a nightmare. Missed the first two goals despite arriving 45 mins before. Police around were laughing at us. In the ground they didn't allow me to get to my seat via a stairway the police were on. It's only when we started filming that they finally let me up. Not that it should matter but this was my allocated seat

Getting into the stadium was a nightmare. Turnstiles flooded, got crushed a number of times. No stewards on gates to help. Then my bag was checked, £50 worth of makeup taken out and their excuse was that it was "forbidden" however everything was plastic and didn't say it was forbidden in the match-day guide. I also suffer with asthma and my inhaler was also taken off me. The only thing left in my bag was my phone and my ID.

One of the key problems was access inside the stadium for people who did not take the bus. I walked through from the other side of the stadium as the directions given by United were not feasible as the police had blocked the roads. On the other side when I tried to enter, the security took my phone cover which had a battery in it saying it is not allowed. This is obviously incorrect as it is not thick and it is not mentioned anywhere. Second problem was getting to our stand, to get to the away section we had to stand in mud with rain pouring and the line moving at snails pace. How do you plan to accommodate 2500 people in 3 turnstiles. Took me over 1 hour to get in. By the time I got in I was drenched.

Another problem was people who got general admission tickets were entering in with us and they didn't speak English and fans couldn't speak Turkish. They created a massive backlog as they couldn't scan their tickets on their phone. Third problem, if printing the tickets was imperative then it should have been made explicitly clear in the email. So many fans did not print their tickets which caused another backlog.

Fourth problem, the cost of food and drinks was astronomical and I would personally like to understand on what basis were the charges allocated. I had friends in the Galatasaray end and I showed them the food and drinks price and they burst out laughing. They gave 1 cup of fizz free Pepsi for €2.5 how is that ok?

And lastly, while exiting the stadium we had to wait almost 90 minutes in freezing cold weather. There was no food or water available while waiting, we are humans who have paid money to see a game, we are not criminals who were forcefully held back when we can't charge our phones or can't eat/drink anything just to get to the buses which was another nightmare. The bus took a long route and it was not worth travelling that far. I would have rather left early than dealt with this again