

Players are losers after Bowyer fine

By MARTIN HARDY, Daily Mail 8th July 2006

Lee Bowyer admitted in a police interview that his attack on team mate Kieron Dyer during a Newcastle match was a moment of madness. It is one that his fellow footballers could end up ruing for years.

Yesterday will go down in history as the moment football changed, when accountability followed stupidity and the law courts moved above the referee as the judge of a player's actions.

There was a chilling tone to the words of Nicola Reasbeck, chief crown prosecutor for Northumbria, after Bowyer finally accepted responsibility for his actions in the unforgettable fight with Dyer during Newcastle's 3-0 loss to Aston Villa in April 2005.

"The criminal law doesn't cease to operate once you cross the touchline of a sports field," she warned.

"Neither does being disciplined by an employer or a sport governing body make an athlete immune to the law. Most importantly, the plea shows that Mr Bowyer accepts his behaviour on the pitch that day was a criminal offence."

That it has taken more than a year to bring Bowyer to court said much for the desire to make an example of him.

Bowyer's lawyers have spent that time fighting to have the case thrown out. The fines he paid (around £270,000 to his employer and the FA) and the seven games he sat out through suspension were supposed to fend off a criminal prosecution.

It all proved immaterial. Bowyer appeared at Newcastle Magistrates' Court to plead guilty to causing harassment, alarm or distress under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986.

For the 29-year-old, who moved to West Ham last month, his £600 fine and £1,000 costs are loose change.

It is the ramifications for his fellow professionals that could prove far more costly. That it has since come to light that the PFA paid an undisclosed amount of his legal costs says much for their

desire not to have members face trial once they cross the white line.

PFA boss Gordon Taylor said: "He has been dealt with much more harshly in football than they can in the courts. This was a case of him being done twice, by the club and the FA, and it did not need the Crown Prosecution Service to step in."

Bowyer told police: "It was a spur-of-the-moment thing. Just a moment of madness. I lost my temper, it happens."