



## **ARE CLUBS AND AGENTS DOING ENOUGH TO PROTECT THEIR PLAYERS?**

### **The Game is the Easy Part**

**By Gareth Farrelly**

This article was written a while ago, edited as recently as this week and amended as more incidents have unfortunately occurred, David Beckham being the latest. Paul Pogba and his family had been the most recent victims. The headlines, quickly disposed of, stated that the player's World Cup winners medal had been stolen. I am sure that his priority was and remains his family. He commented that his family had been robbed of their "sense of safety and security". This trauma leaves an indelible mark. This followed on from Manchester City defender Joao Cancelo, who was violently assaulted at his home whilst his wife and young child were there.

Again, at the time, Mark Cavendish released a statement about the aggravated break in he and his family suffered. Four masked and armed men forced their way into their home as they slept, threatened his wife and children and violently attacked him. He articulates eloquently how, despite the loss of some material and sentimental items, the greater loss was the sense of security, safety, privacy, and dignity that him and his young family and everybody else is entitled to in their own home. I hope they can heal and recover soon. Those responsible care little for the trauma, pain, fear and damage caused, and the long-term effect this can have. It is hoped that those responsible will be apprehended and dealt with quickly.

I have unfortunately experienced this first-hand more than once. The first time was my first Christmas away from home. I arrived back from an away fixture and was met by local detectives at the training ground who took me back to my home. It was horrible to return to the house and see the sealed door, and missing items. As a side, the Christmas presents I had bought for my family and was looking forward to giving to them had been stolen and anything of value had been taken, purely material items but a small part of the anticipation of going home after the busy Christmas and New Year period. The second time was in a new property whilst my wife and I were home. We had been marked, studied and set up. It caused huge psychological damage which took a long time to heal. We couldn't remain in the property, and it impacted and affected every element of our lives. I didn't sleep and was in a heightened state of panic. It affected my football and performance.

Things have come to a pretty sorry state when violent robberies on elite athletes, be it footballers or professional cyclists, have become so commonplace that they barely merit a mention in the mainstream media. It is indicative of the strange times we live in. There are huge societal issues. Sport is merely a microcosm of those issues, and acts to distract the masses temporarily from their lives, and the true state of so much.

The mainstream media recently failed to pick up on what must have been a horrific experience for a Premier League footballer and his girlfriend whose house was broken into by a machete wielding gang who tied the pair up before ransacking the house. The psychological impact of having your house broken into while you are there, being tied up and threatened with machetes is appalling. Statistics indicate that most victims of common burglary, when the victims are absent from their homes, are left with long term issues of insecurity in their home

to the point where many have to move home to recover a sense of ease. You can only guess how the proximity of being tied up and physically threatened must leave deep psychological scars.

Armed robbery on footballers in their houses is so prevalent that you have to question what is happening. As we all know, Premier League footballers and managers are extremely well paid – a fact that clearly has not been missed by both domestic and also foreign crime gangs. It simply is not the case that the footballers who have suffered these attacks have not had enough money to buy the very best when it comes to home security. So, what security did the victims have in place and how did it fail so badly? Where does the responsibility lie? The Club, the individual?

The dressing room is critical to many trends and behaviours. With regard to personal security, it was only recently that the media were full of stories of players buying trained security dogs for substantial amounts, the cost in some way an endorsement of value. One newspaper carried a feature with the headline “Premier League stars turn to £75k attack dogs that 'spot bad intentions' says trainers”. It only goes to show you how vulnerable people are to exploitation even when they are trying to do the right thing. There is a requirement that more due diligence be undertaken, and research beyond a limited endorsement from a friend of the family or entourage.

You live in a bubble, in many ways insulated and removed from risk. It is not scaremongering to warn that it is becoming more of an issue.

#### What may be going wrong?

The Inkerman Group has a unique expertise and experience in this area. As is so often the case, people are relaxed, comfortable and fail to give any thought to these areas until they, or their loved ones, are directly affected -

1. Your car generally gets serviced every year, your teeth may be reviewed by your dentist every six months, your mobile phone downloads an update about once a month and, as a professional footballer, you will be medically examined at least weekly. When did you last have your home security system checked or updated?

For people exposed to the risks of armed burglary Gerald Moor recommends at least an annual security review by an expert, with systems being updated and software refreshed to take advantage of developments.

2. Your car is made up of many assemblies all of which have been exhaustively tested to make sure they work well together. Security systems are often bought as separate units manufactured by different companies to deliver certain functions. So, you often end up with an intruder detection system manufactured by a different company to the alarm system, the locks and bolts, CCTV etc. Has anyone checked that they are compatible and interoperate well?
3. You practice endlessly to maintain and test your fitness and to ensure your team is best suited to defeat its next opponent. Companies regularly commission penetration testers to test the strength of their cyber security. When did you last have your home security tested to see if it is robust and fit for purpose?
4. Through the testing recommended and the annual security review you may just find that that reporting line to the manned security centre hasn't been activated or that the line used is easily cut by any would be intruder.

5. The need for security does not stop when you leave your front gates. Many footballers have been subjected to car-jacking and robbery while outside their homes and sometimes when abroad. Yet few consider the security options that can travel with you. Gerald Moor's team has developed a mobile phone accessed platform that means you have security with you wherever you are. Activating Inkerman's Guardian app from wherever you are in the world instantly opens a line to their 24/7 operations room staffed with experts in crisis including kidnap and ransom. With location identification capability they can pinpoint you, provide immediate guidance and bring help to you.

Gerald Moor is also adamant that security is seen through modern eyes and that means keeping safe in the digital world as well as the physical. We mustn't forget that your assets are at risk of cyber-attack. From straightforward theft of monies to spying and the fraudulent use of your name and image, the opportunities for crime on-line are significant. As you would expect, Inkerman can deploy a full range of cyber security services to check your cyber security, monitor the use of your name and image on-line and come to your rescue in the event of an attack.

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**Gareth Farrelly** is an Irish former professional footballer who most notably played for Aston Villa, Everton, and Bolton Wanderers in the Premier League. He also made 6 international appearances for the Republic of Ireland. Farrelly's most significant goals include scoring for Everton on the final day of the 97/98 season, which saved them from relegation. Later in his career, he scored in the 2001 playoff final helping Bolton reach the Premier League. He was the player-manager of Irish giants Bohemians FC for 2 years prior to retirement in 2008, following a life-threatening illness.

After retirement, Farrelly returned to education and qualified as a solicitor in 2018. He is presently a Commercial Litigation and Sports Lawyer with leading law firm Bermans in Liverpool - and was quickly promoted to Senior Associate in 2021.

Farrelly is a member of the Football Association's Judicial Panel and sits on both the Chairman's Panel and the Football Panel. He is a member of Sports Resolutions' Independent Panel of Arbitrators and Mediators. He is a Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) Arbitrator and a member of the Premier League Judicial Panel. Gareth is also a graduate of the UEFA Master for International Players Programme.

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