

Calamities

SOCCER FANS IN A DEATH TRAP

Chris Parsonage will probably always be a soccer fan. But he may think twice about ever going to another match. For the rest of his life, he will remember April 15, 1989—when an afternoon soccer game turned into a deadly stampede.

² Chris, a 29-year-old math teacher, was looking forward to Saturday's soccer match at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, England. He lived just outside the city of Liverpool, and he had been excited about the game all week. He was planning to watch Liverpool's team play in the semifinal match for the national cup. Liverpool fans love their soccer team, so Chris knew the stadium would be crowded.

³ Soccer is tremendously popular all over Europe, and English fans are famous for their team loyalty. But that loyalty has sometimes gotten out of hand. Mobs of supporters have damaged property and started deadly brawls with rival fans. In fact, English soccer fans have been so violent that for several years their teams were barred from European competition.

⁴ But Chris Parsonage didn't expect any trouble at Saturday's playoff game. He and



Soccer fans are crushed against fencing in the Hillsborough Stadium in Liverpool.

two friends arrived at the stadium and began to make their way through the crowded turnstiles. His friends had tickets for seats in the stands, but Chris was headed for the terrace behind the Liverpool goal. It was cheaper than his friends' seats because it had standing room only.

5 Local police and England's soccer association knew that soccer matches had a reputation for violence. And Liverpool fans were especially prone to brawls. So officials had erected security fences at either end of the field, between each terrace and goal. They hoped the steel mesh would keep Liverpool fans from pouring onto the field to attack the fans of the rival team.

6 Outside the turnstiles, the crowd began to thicken as Liverpool fans gathered at their gate. Most people in the crowd did not have tickets. They came to the match planning to buy them at the door. But for some reason, fans of Liverpool's opponent, Nottingham Forest, had been allotted more tickets. So while the rival fans streamed in at their gate, many Liverpool fans were forced to wait outside.

7 Angry and noisy, the fans milled around the gate. The crowd had swollen to 3,000 people by now, and police began to fear a riot. To keep the pressure from

building up outside the arena, an officer opened a gate to the stadium.

8 Meanwhile, Chris Parsonage had managed to get through the turnstiles. He walked along the tunnel that led from the gate to the terrace. Nearby he heard someone mention that the police had opened the gates behind him, but he wasn't worried. He said later, "Everyone was pushing forward to get in and see the kickoff, but I had been in crowds like this before." Confident that he would find a place to stand, Chris just wasn't prepared for the chaos that happened next.

9 He made his way to the terrace and tried to move to a place where he could see the game. But then he realized that he was trapped. The crowd was so tight that he could not move to either side, and the situation was getting worse. He felt the pressure building up behind him like the swell of a giant wave. Thousands of fans had now surged through the tunnel.

10 Chris and the people around him were lifted off their feet from the extreme pressure. One of Chris's legs was pulled forward while the other was trapped against a barrier. He began to scream. "I honestly thought my leg would snap," he remembered, "and I was panicking."

11 All around him people were screaming and fainting. He watched in horror as a

man in front of him turned blue. But there was nothing Chris could do to help. His arms and legs were pinned by the crowd around him.



An injured soccer fan is comforted by a friend after the tragedy at the Hillsborough Stadium.

12 The fans tried yelling for the police to stop the game. But they couldn't scream for long because they had to save their breath. Chris said he struggled to keep his mouth up high so that he could keep breathing.

13 At the front of the terrace, hundreds of fans were pressed against the steel-mesh security fence, as the crowd continued to squeeze forward. Some people fell and were trampled, while others were crushed to death against the 10-foot-high immovable fence. Bill Eastwood, a safety expert who was present at the disaster, said, "There must have been a half ton of pressure across each person's midriff."

14 Chris Parsonage was lucky. Somehow the surge of the crowd pushed him into an empty seat. He sat there for an hour and a half, unable to walk on his injured leg. He recalled, "I started shaking and crying because I knew very well I could have been dead. I could see all those people being carried away like dolls in a toy shop, with arms hanging all over the place."

15 Ninety-four fans were killed in the stampede, and nearly 200 more were

injured. Many of the dead were children and teenagers, who had been crushed and suffocated by a crowd of taller adults.

Chris Parsonage, who is more than six feet tall, believes that his height saved his life.

16 Amazingly, many people at the soccer match had no idea that fellow fans were being pressed to death. Because the people on the terrace couldn't breathe, they also couldn't scream. So the danger wasn't realized until it was too late. Soccer officials, unaware of the tragedy, did not call off the match immediately. The players on the field continued the game for six minutes while their fans were being killed in front of them.

17 The tragedy at Sheffield is just one example of the ongoing problem with English soccer crowds. And some researchers believe that the stadiums themselves are the cause of many incidents. A number of popular stadiums are small and outdated. Others are built in cramped city neighborhoods, where there is no room to organize a crowd. Some people believe that if England wants to avoid crowd disasters in the future, the country must invest in larger, more

modern stadiums. They will make police security easier and safer. And they will also attract families who are now afraid to attend soccer matches.

18 But a new stadium won't make Chris Parsonage forget Sheffield. "I still wake up crying in the middle of the night and see that guy's face in front of me. At the stadium I think I was crying because I was alive. Now I don't know. I think I am crying for the dead." ❁

If you have been timed while reading this article, refer to our reading time below. Turn back to the "Notes" for a minute table on page 195 and look up your reading speed in words per minute. Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 196.

Reading Time Lesson 16

Minutes Seconds

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea B—Too Broad N—Too Narrow

- _____ 1. English soccer stadiums cause many crowd problems.
- _____ 2. The Sheffield tragedy was caused by a crowd that surged against a security fence.
- _____ 3. Chris Parsonage had been looking forward to watching the Liverpool team.

_____ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.
 _____ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.
 _____ Total Score: Finding the Main Idea

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

- 1. Chris Parsonage worked as a
 - a. social studies teacher.
 - b. police officer.
 - c. math teacher.
- 2. The Nottingham Forest fans had
 - a. received more tickets.
 - b. been crushed against a fence.
 - c. started a riot at the gate.
- 3. When the crowd began pushing, Chris was
 - a. lifted off his feet.
 - b. squeezed against the fence.
 - c. able to leave by an exit.
- 4. Most of the people killed were
 - a. elderly people.
 - b. players and officials.
 - c. children and teenagers.
- 5. Some researchers believe that crowd problems are caused by
 - a. political disagreements.
 - b. the stadiums themselves.
 - c. difficulties with the players.

_____ Score 5 points for each correct answer.
 _____ Total Score: Recalling Facts

C

Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference F—Faulty Inference

- _____ 1. Chris Parsonage had never been very interested in soccer.
- _____ 2. English fans have caused trouble at European matches.
- _____ 3. Chris didn't want to spend very much money to see the game.
- _____ 4. A police officer solved the problem by opening the gate.
- _____ 5. Sometimes it can be difficult to control a crowd.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ Total Score: Making Inferences

D

Using Words Precisely

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key. Do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

- 1. In fact, English soccer fans have been so violent that for several years their teams were barred from European competition.
 - _____ a. necessary for
 - _____ b. invited to take part in
 - _____ c. excluded from
- 2. And Liverpool fans were especially prone to brawls.
 - _____ a. ready to participate in
 - _____ b. fearful of
 - _____ c. unwilling to participate in
- 3. But for some reason, fans of Liverpool's opponent, Nottingham Forest, had been allotted more tickets.
 - _____ a. overcharged for
 - _____ b. refused
 - _____ c. given
- 4. Angry and noisy, the fans milled around the gate.
 - _____ a. moved about in an aimless way
 - _____ b. marched with a clear purpose
 - _____ c. set small fires

5. The tragedy at Sheffield is just one example of the ongoing problem with English soccer crowds.

- _____ a. one time only
 _____ b. terrible
 _____ c. continuous

_____ Score 3 points for each correct C answer.

_____ Score 2 points for each correct O answer.

_____ **Total Score: Using Words Precisely**

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

- What does the author mean by the statement "[Chris] watched in horror as a man in front of him turned blue"?
 - a. Rival fans painted the man blue.
 - b. The man turned blue because he couldn't breathe.
 - c. The man turned blue because he was angry at the crowd surging around him.
- What is the author's purpose in writing "Soccer Fans in a Death Trap"?
 - a. To express an opinion about the rowdiness of English soccer fans
 - b. To inform the reader about the outdated soccer stadiums in England
 - c. To describe a situation in which fans at a soccer stadium were caught in a stampede
- How is the author's purpose for writing the article expressed in paragraph 17?
 - a. The author explains some of the reasons for the stampede.
 - b. The author tells the reader that families are afraid to attend soccer matches.
 - c. The author tells the reader that the stadium was too small for the crush of fans anxious to see the game.
- The author tells this story mainly by
 - a. retelling Chris Parsonage's experience at the stadium.
 - b. comparing English soccer fans with other European fans.
 - c. retelling several people's experiences at the stadium.

Enter the four total scores in the spaces below, and add them together to find your Reading Comprehension Score. Then record your score on the graph on page 197.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 16
_____	Finding the Main Idea	
_____	Recalling Facts	
_____	Making Inferences	
_____	Using Words Precisely	
Reading Comprehension Score		_____

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 198.