

## Football Fans 'Up Against It'

*Consumers are discovering "life is getting tougher" when it comes to managing their finances, figures from Virgin Money have revealed.*

September 5, 2007 (FPRC) -- The announcement comes as the financial services firm reports that the surging cost of attending football matches is causing fewer fans to go to live games. According to the company, increasing expenses will see about one in ten (nine per cent) Premiership supporters reduce how many times they will get behind their team in person, as they face rising pressure on areas of their finances such as credit cards and personal loans.

Overall, Middlesbrough and Chelsea fans are said to be the most apathetic in watching live games as 24 and 19 per cent of supporters from these clubs claim that they will not be attending their respective stadiums as much. On the other hand, those following Blackburn Rovers are shown to be the least likely to reduce their attendance as only two per cent are considering going to less games.

Meanwhile, consumers are reported to be "feeling the pinch" as they start to feel the effects of five base rate rises by the Bank of England since August 2006. And with a decrease in disposable income noted, in addition to a rise in football-related costs, the company suggests that attendances could be set to dwindle more in the future as less money is spent on merchandise.

John Franklin, spokesperson for Virgin Money, said: "The ordinary football fan is up against it this year. While it's true that some clubs have frozen or even reduced ticket prices, our analysis shows that the overall cost of following your team continues to rise. And while perhaps last season fans were able to ride the storm thanks to some favourable market conditions, the effects of five interest rate rises will make life very difficult for many. Financially life is getting tougher, but dedicated fans won't want to sacrifice following their team as a result."

Virgin Money's announcement comes as its latest Football Fans Price Index reveals that the cost of attending matches has increased by 22 per cent since February last year. Eighteen months ago, the 'match day basket of goods', which includes expenses such as tickets and match programmes, was reported to stand at £77.95. However, this figure is now £95.08, with the rise largely attributed to the increasing costs of replica shirts.

Malcolm Clarke, chair of the Football Supporters Federation, added: "Virgin Money's survey shows again what any fan in this country knows. The cost of watching football here is still at ludicrous levels." He pointed out that financial pressures on attending games on the continent in countries such as Italy, Spain and Germany is much lower as fans abroad are able to take advantage of cheaper match tickets and reduced public transport.

However, those adamant about supporting their team in the face of rising costs may wish to apply for a personal loan as a means of financing such expenses. Earlier this year, Frances Walker, spokesperson for the Consumer Credit Counselling Service, claimed that although the majority of people who borrow do so wisely, more consumers need to take a sensible approach to the money they have received.

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For more information contact Abbi Rouse of All About Loans (<http://www.allaboutloans.co.uk>)

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