



## KATRINA HAMMOND: ENGLAND'S NUMBER ONE FAN

Katrina Hammond, a top tier member of the disabled branch of englandfans, is a fine example of what a positive impact football can have. Born with cerebral palsy and consequently wheelchair bound, seventeen year old Katrina saw her first football game eight years ago supporting her beloved Ipswich. “It was on my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday when my Dad took me to see Ipswich up at Bolton on a freezing winter’s night. It was cold, snowing and we lost!”

Even so she was hooked and saw her first England game against Slovakia in June 2003 at Middlesbrough’s Riverside stadium. Since then supporting England has become her passion. “Following football has opened my mind and I have made a lot of new friends with England.”

She has had many experiences that most teenagers are not exposed to; most good, some bad but all through football. Being disabled heightens the importance of decent facilities at football stadia.



Throughout her travels with England she has encountered a number of problems, often centring on access to and within the ground. “When I was in Poland for example they didn’t know about wheelchair spaces, they didn’t have anywhere to put me so I ended up in the media box with the coach driver as one of my escorts!”

The recent game in Russia was on a similar level but even more intimidating. There were a lot of access problems. “The ramp to the wheelchair platform was so steep I needed four men help me up. The view was not bad but there were literally hundreds of Russian soldiers in front of us so we had to try and see over them. The toilets were terrible and there were loads of steps all around the stadium.”

All of these issues only go to highlight how important a minimum standard of facilities - as simple as an unrestricted view, under cover and with your own fans with accessible toilets and bars - must be followed. Katrina praises a number of the German World Cup stadia and particularly the home of English football, Wembley. “It’s a nice new modern stadium. We had a great view from the level 5 platform. Everything was very organised and I was impressed.”

The experiences that Katrina has had following England have helped her confidence. She is currently at college and spends two days a week working at a school for disabled children. Football remains her driving force. “It has taken over my life. I am only 17 but already I have visited over 20 foreign countries which I couldn’t have done without being an England fan member. I like England games because you get to meet people and make instant friends. It’s nice to be able to have a joke with the other fans without all the club rivalry. I’ve found that all of the fans are very protective and caring. In fact we are one big family.”