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"In light of Michael Essien's recent 'challenge' on Didi Hamann, under what circumstances have players been convicted in court for violent acts undertaken in the course of a match?" wonders Andy Bienefeld. **"Other than Duncan Ferguson, of course."**

We have to delve back to 1988 to find the first example in the English game of a footballer being convicted in a court of law over on-field violence, Andy. In this case, Sky Sports' excitable pundit Chris Kamara was the culprit; 'Kammy', then of Swindon Town, caught Shrewsbury Town's Jim Melrose with his elbow, breaking Melrose's cheekbone in the process. He was fined £1,200 for causing grievous bodily harm and also ordered to pay £250 compensation.

Beyond that, however, incidences of convictions are rarer than you may think. While the likes of Gordon Watson (Bradford), Chris Casper (Reading), Matt Holmes (Charlton) and Brian McCord (Stockport) have all successfully sued opponents for horrific challenges, and others have settled out of court, the next instance of a conviction following on-field violence came in 1995. Falkirk striker Steve Kirk kicked the ball into a group of Hearts supporters during an SPL game at Tynecastle and, in doing so, struck a 12-year-old girl on the head. Kirk was charged with recklessly kicking the ball without regard for spectators' safety and fined £250, despite his protestations that he had only put the ball out of play to allow an injured team-mate to receive medical treatment.

A similar case followed during a game between Reading and Bristol City at the Madejski Stadium in 1999. Robins full-back Gerard Lavin responded to fans' taunts by thumping the ball into the stands. Supporter Mark Stevens caught the full force of Lavin's strike and fractured his wrist: the defender was sent off, and was later fined £1,000 for common assault and ordered to pay Mr Stevens £300 and the same figure in costs.

Of course, if we mention player-fan 'interactions', then how can we forget Eric Cantona's kung-fu kick on Matthew Simmons during Manchester United's Premiership clash at Crystal Palace in 1995? The Frenchman, who launched himself at spectator Simmons after being sent off, was sentenced to two weeks in prison, which was reduced to a community service order on appeal. Then there is the case of El Hadji Diouf spitting on a Celtic supporter during Liverpool's Uefa Cup tie at Parkead in 2003. Glasgow Sheriff Court fined him £5,000 after finding him guilty of assault.

The latest example of on-field GBH comes from overseas, as Henk van Maanen recalls. "In August 2005, Sparta Rotterdam's Rachid Bouaouzan received a suspended sentence of six months' jail time and 200 hours of community service for deliberately causing bodily harm with a career-ending challenge on Niels Kokmeijer of Go Ahead Eagles. Kokmeijer suffered multiple fractures to his right leg after the challenge during the Dutch second division game a year earlier, and it's still doubtful that he'll ever walk normally again."