

Sunderland ranked England's most football-engaged city ahead of World Cup

Findings highlight stronger engagement in industrial communities than major urban centres

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, June 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Sunderland has been named England's most football engaged city ahead of the World Cup, according to new research from consumer analytics firm Panolytica.

The company's Football Engagement Index ranks Sunderland above traditional strongholds including Liverpool, Manchester and London, based on millions of behavioural, media consumption and spending data points. The analysis goes beyond simple fan support to measure where football is most deeply embedded in everyday life and shapes local identity, culture and community.

The findings reveal a clear pattern. England's most football engaged locations are those rooted in industrial heritage. Sunderland, Oldham and Wolverhampton, which make up the top three, share long-standing ties to industries such as shipbuilding, coal mining and manufacturing. While these sectors have declined, football remains a defining feature of community life.

Top 10 most football engaged locations:

1. Sunderland (119)
2. Oldham (113)
3. Wolverhampton (112)
4. Liverpool (112)
5. Wigan (111)
6. Bradford (111)
7. Sheffield (111)
8. Blackburn (111)
9. Hull (110)
10. Bolton (109)

Notably, neither London nor Manchester appear in the rankings, suggesting that football engagement today is driven less by affluence and global profile and more by local identity and shared experience.

The index combines indicators including sports media consumption, football-related digital engagement, live viewing habits and spending patterns. The highest levels of engagement were found in areas with strong local identities and close-knit communities, where football remains central to daily life.

Martin Taylor, CEO of Panolytica, said: "Our data shows football is strongest in communities where it forms part of the social fabric, not just entertainment. In many places, matchday remains a shared ritual and clubs sit at the heart of local identity. If football is coming home this World Cup, the data suggests home is Sunderland."

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