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Maccabi fan ban was due to hooliganism, say police



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More than 700 officers from across the country policed the game at Villa Park

Phil Mackie, Midlands correspondent and **Rachel Russell**, West Midlands

7 November 2025

West Midlands Police has defended keeping silent over the "significant hooliganism" among Maccabi Tel Aviv fans, which it now confirms is the

reason they were banned from attending the Europa League clash with Aston Villa.

More than 700 officers from 20 police forces were deployed near Villa Park on Thursday, where hundreds took part in demonstrations over the controversial decision.

When it emerged in October that fans of the Israeli club would not be welcome, senior MPs, including Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, said it amounted to antisemitism.

Jack Angelides, CEO of Maccabi Tel Aviv, told the BBC their fans being banned meant it was "time for some introspection and retrospection".

'Hooliganism element'

Chief Constable Craig Guildford has been asked to appear before The Home Affairs Committee to explain the reasoning behind the ban, by Birmingham's Safety Advisory Group.

He defended the move to the BBC but until now the force had remained tight-lipped over the intelligence the decision was based on.

Shortly before the game, Ch Insp Tom Joyce said it was due to an "assessment of the risk that was coming from admitting travelling fans".

On Friday, a spokesperson for West Midlands Police explained: "Our original statement did not go into specifics as it wasn't deemed necessary or helpful at that time.

"When the political commentary around antisemitism developed, our priority was to engage key stakeholders within the Jewish community.

"We explained the hooliganism element very candidly to them, and we have since been working with those community members on how to deal with what is a very sensitive matter."



| Timelapse footage shows the scale of the police operation on the night

On Thursday evening, hundreds of pro-Palestine supporters and a smaller group of pro-Israeli protesters gathered outside the ground, waving banners and flags.

Despite some minor scuffles as the remaining Villa fans went into the ground, West Midlands Police said the night had "passed without major incident, with no serious disorder and no disruption to the game".

Ten people were arrested, including some for racially aggravated abuse towards both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine groups.

Five remain in custody, including a 21-year-old man accused of trying to throw fireworks into Villa Park and two men, aged 34 and 29, accused of racially aggravated public order after shouting abuse at pro-Israel demonstrators.

Two people were cautioned, two were released with no further action and a 21-year-old man was charged with failing to remove a face covering during a Section 60 order - temporary police powers allowing them to stop and search anyone.



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Police say the protests outside the stadium passed without major incident

Predictions on social media that tens of thousands would come to demonstrate outside the ground did not materialise.

Small groups of young people were seen trying to provoke a reaction, but police were quick to move them away.

About 20 minutes before the game kicked off, several hundred people were gesturing towards the pro-Palestinian protesters and singing the name of far right activist Tommy Robinson, but they were held back by a line of officers as well as mounted police.

Footage gathered from police drones as well as from body-worn cameras will be studied over the next days and weeks and may lead to more arrests.

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| It is the first time Maccabi Tel Aviv fans have been banned from a match

Jack Angelides, CEO of Maccabi Tel Aviv, questioned the ban again on Friday.

"Why is it that in decades of European travel with the club, that this is the only country that has banned our fans and this is the only country where we were told it was unsafe for us to stay in the city where we were playing the match?," he told the BBC.

"I don't know what that says, but I do think it is time for some introspection and retrospection about why this has occurred."

However, Ron Winch, a former Metropolitan Police officer, said the force "got the balance right" in maximising safety by sticking by the decision.

"Football policing has changed a lot over recent years and it's become much more steward-based. But police numbers had to be that high because the police didn't know what contingency they would require," he said.

"Villa park is one of those older fashioned type grounds with residential streets, so it's quite straightforward to police and seal off if necessary.

"My view is, credit to West Midlands Police for sticking with their decision."



REUTERS

Mounted police officers helped to keep crowds safe at the game

Adil Parkar, from the Al Falaah mosque, near Villa Park's Trinity Road stand, said he felt the evening was "overall very safe".

"From our side, from a security perspective, we absolutely commend police for the work they did last night, as it could have easily gone wrong," he said.

"We're in a place where we can say apologies on the West Midlands police after some of the statements that came out from politicians recently and nationally."

'National disgrace'

In the wake of the ban, Sir Keir criticised the move, saying "we will not tolerate antisemitism on our streets" and that the role of police was "to ensure all football fans can enjoy the game, without fear of violence or intimidation".

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy claimed the police's risk assessment was "based in no small part on the risk posed to those fans that are attending to support Maccabi Tel Aviv because they are Israeli and because they are Jewish".

And Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch branded the decision a "national disgrace".

She wrote on X that the prime minister should "guarantee that Jewish fans can walk into any football stadium in this country".

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