

We're cig scapegoats, claims vending boss

■ Councils under fire for pub prosecutions

■ Kids just don't use our machines, he says

EXCLUSIVE NEAL KEELING

THE boss of a vending machine firm has criticised two councils for making his industry a 'scapegoat' in a bid to curb under-age smoking. As reported in the M.E.N.

Salford council and Lancashire county council are bringing landmark court cases against firms who install cigarette machines in pubs and clubs.

The move has been welcomed by a leading anti-smoking group which believes the machines have let tobacco companies cash in on child smokers.

But Rod Bullough, managing director of Blackpool-based R Duckworth, said: "They are using a hammer to crack a nut."

"Only 0.8 per cent of cigarettes come from vending machines. Thirty per cent of those



UPSET
Cigarette vending machine firm boss Rod Bullough said his turnover had been slashed

bought are counterfeit or smuggled - that is where the authorities should be concentrating."

Lancashire is prosecuting his firm after it was caught out in part of a region-wide crackdown. A total of 120 pubs were

visited across the north west and cigarettes were obtained by under-age volunteers in 75. But only Lancashire and Salford followed up with prosecutions.

Children went into pubs with an adult and were given change to buy cigs from a machine.

Mr Bullough said: "They are looking for scapegoats. Kids don't use vending machines."

"In any other business, what Trading Standards have done would be entrapment."

"We employ 50 people and have 1,200 machines in the north west, including Greater

Manchester. The pub smoking ban cut our turnover by 60pc.

"As soon as we were told of this operation, we converted 60 of our machines to token-controlled. This enables face to face contact with customers, so age can be checked."

His firm is pleading not guilty to an allegation that it committed an offence under the Children and Young Person's Act which says it is an offence to sell tobacco to anyone under 18.

Salford council's prosecution of two other companies is due to be heard next week.

Praise for drama that exposes extremists

A POWERFUL play has been hailed for tackling both Islamic extremism and far-right politics.

Tameside drama company GW Theatre has won national praise for a hard-hitting play which tells the stories of troublemakers in both Muslim and white families.

The production, *One Extreme to the Other*, has already been seen by more than 100 schools and community groups around the country.

Writer and theatre group founder Mike Harris created the play following the London bomb attacks of 2005 and interviewed families, community groups and politicians in Oldham about their experiences.

Youngsters

The hour-long play tells the stories of an Islamic extremist and a racist politician who visit different neighbourhoods of the same town and try to enlist youngsters to their cause.

Actor David Jones said: "The issues aren't always easy for people to talk about, but after watching the play, it is easier for people to talk about what they've seen."

"We wanted to provoke young people into thinking about why people became extremists - either politically or from a religious point of view."

"Oldham council was trying to get people to talk to each other and wanted a challenging way of bringing these issues up - and they supported us."

The play, praised in a government report on tackling extremism, was also performed at the House of Commons.

A website set up by the drama group - extremenews.org.uk - allows pupils and teachers to develop issues raised by the production.

Real boy racer who's right on Hamilton's tail

HE may be a real life boy racer - but at just 15 Max McGuire is already on track to be Britain's next Lewis Hamilton.

Like thousands of other schoolboys, Max enjoys steering around Silverstone and Brands Hatch on his video games at home.

But then he gets behind the wheel of his 115mph Ginetta G20 car and does it for real.

Max, from Altrincham, can only do practice laps outside racing weekends because of his age, so relies on the racing driver games on his Sony Playstation to work out tactics before getting into the real-life hot seat.

He said: "Most people don't believe I go out and do it for real. There are some very famous drivers out there and then there's me, a 15-year-old kid. I love every aspect of motor racing - the winning, the speed and the adrenaline."



➤ **RACE ACE** Max regularly beats older drivers in his 115mph Ginetta G20 car, which had to be modified by bringing the pedals forward so he could reach them, and, below, the real-life boy racer in fast track action Photograph Angus Matheson

Max, a pupil at Altrincham Grammar, began racing karts after he went to a track in Manchester as an eighth birthday treat. He soon found success in Britain and Europe, becoming the British Open Cadet

champion in 2006 - an honour that eluded F1 ace

Hamilton more than a decade ago.

Last year, Max became Britain's youngest racing driver, taking part in the Ginetta Junior Championship.

The youngster finished an impressive seventh, beating drivers aged up to 17 in his car, which had to be modified by bringing the pedals forward so he could reach them.

But his future looked in

doubt due to sponsorship worries until an 11th hour deal with newly-formed team Paul Boulten Racing meant he could compete again this season.

Max, who is currently fourth in the championship table, said: "Only two drivers make it to the top from each generation, but hopefully I will be able to try my luck at F1 one day."

Dad John said: "We're all really proud of him."



Judges give playground games the all-clear

BOISTEROUS school playground games were given the all-clear by senior judges who threw out a claim by a school dinner lady who was badly hurt while playing tag.

Michelle Orchard, 42, suffered a broken nose and damaged teeth when a 13-year-old boy ran into her during the game. Her lawyers also claimed

she suffered serious brain damage, leading to partial paralysis and balance problems and had been unable to work since.

However, three judges sitting at the Court of Appeal threw out her claim for thousands of pounds in damages against the boy, Sebastian Lee, saying: "Boys will be boys."

Ms Orchard spent six

weeks in hospital after the accident at Corfe Hills School, Devon.

Lord Justice Waller, dismissing the appeal, said he felt sympathy for her but the boys playing tag were not breaking any rules and should not be held liable for the accident.

He said: "Parents and schools are there to control children

and it would be a retrograde step to visit liability on a 13-year-old for simply playing a game in the area where he was allowed to do so."

He added: "Thirteen-year-old boys will be 13-year-old boys who will play tag."

Her claim was originally dismissed by a County Court judge in April last year.

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