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British Football on Continental Tour, 1904 - 1939

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of football tours within the development of international football in Europe prior to the Second World War. While previous football histories have examined the creation of governing institutions, international competitions, and the ways diplomacy has shaped the game, this study shows how the internationalisation of football occurred through the movement of teams, players, and officials across national borders. Football tours created sustained encounters between different nations and sporting cultures, forming Europe-wide networks while simultaneously reflecting the wider social and political transformations of the early twentieth century.

Drawing upon newspapers, club records, governing body archives, and contemporary commentary, this thesis analyses football touring as a form of transnational mobility, demonstrating how tours functioned as cultural and political encounters shaped by national identity, diplomacy, and ideology. Early tours undertaken by British amateur and professional clubs facilitated the spread of football during the Belle Époque, while the First World War redirected the movement of the game through the infrastructures of military mobilisation and prisoner-of-war camps. In the interwar period, football touring intersected with processes of commemoration, reconciliation, and international competition as European football became increasingly institutionalised. Football tours were embedded within the ideological conflicts that shaped interwar Europe. British footballers' encounters with communist and fascist sporting cultures reveal how international football could be a site of tension as well as exchange.

International football developed through networks of mobility, with communities across Europe connected in sporting circuits and competition. Examining these encounters across a wide range of social actors, including professional clubs, amateur teams, works sides, and women's teams, the study expands upon existing scholarship and shifts focus from national teams and elite-level sport to the experiences and perspectives of varied historical actors. Tours acted as vehicles of cultural exchange, instruments of diplomacy, and arenas in which new political conflicts could be observed. In examining British Football on Continental Tour 1904-1939, this study offers a new perspective on the relationship between sport, politics, and international society in the first half of the twentieth century.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Michael Madgwick and Anne Lawton, who both passed away while I worked on this thesis. Michael and Anne were both born within the period this thesis examines, and listening to their accounts of their childhoods and later lives shaped my interest in learning from and sharing history.

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List of Abbreviations

AFA – Amateur Football Association

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BWSF – British Workers' Sports Federation

FA – Football Association

FC – Football Club

FIFA – Fédération Internationale de Football Association

IOC – International Olympic Committee

IWM – Imperial War Museum

LGB – Lloyds Banking Group

NFM – National Football Museum

PHM – People's History Museum

POW – Prisoner of War

TNA – The National Archives

UEFA – Union of European Football Associations

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WWI – First World War

WWII – Second World War

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Introduction

Introduction

"History is movement; and movement implies comparison"

E.H. Carr, *What is History*?, 1961[1]

"Football is Europe's most important and most widely spread form of popular culture, one of these social practices that may be called 'ordinary passions' and that establish emotional and horizontal bonds between individuals and groups"

European Commission, *Football Research in an Enlarged Europe*, 2015[2]

Across the modern world, few cultural practices possess the popularity and resonance of association football. In Britain, Europe, and around the globe, football brings together mass audiences, occupying a significant position within the everyday lives of millions. Recent studies affirm the place of football in contemporary society. According to a 2023 YouGov survey, most British adults follow sport, with football "by far the most popular sport played and followed".[3] In 2024, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) reported that "229 million supporters attended football matches during the 2023/24 season", illustrating the remarkable reach and appeal of the game.[4]

The process by which football has acquired this position in Britain and continental Europe was not an inevitable one. The sport's growth aligned with social and cultural transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when new practices of communication, mobility, and leisure reshaped the lives of Europeans. As Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson note, "the period from the 1870s to the mid-1920s has been termed the 'take-off' period of globalization, when transnational relations expanded massively… and the world

[1] E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Vintage, 1961), 108.
[2] European Commission, "Final Report Summary," *Football Research in an Enlarged Europe: Identity Dynamics, Perception Patterns and Cultural Change in Europe's Most Prominent Form of Popular Culture* (Brussels: European Commission, 2015), accessed 10 January 2026, https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/290805/reporting
[3] UK Parliament, "Contribution of sport to society and the economy," *House of Lords Library*, 13 May 2024, accessed 7 February 2026, https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/contribution-of-sport-to-society-and-the-economy/
[4] UEFA, "New UEFA Landscape Report Shows Popularity of European Football," *UEFA*, 12 September 2024, accessed 7 February 2026, https://www.uefa.com/news-media/news/0291-1bd655648c06-6b05b0dbe265-1000--new-uefa-landscape-report-shows-popularity-of-european-foo/

underwent intensified 'sociocultural compression'".[5] The expansion of modern transport, migration, and cultural exchange brought people closer than ever before. Within this context, football developed from localised customs to one of the most visible practices of modern mass culture.

Britain occupied a distinct position within this process of transformation. As Tony Mason has observed, economic and labour conditions within Victorian Britain shaped the development of codified sports and thus explain "Britain's dominant influence in the development of new forms of recreation".[6] The formation of the Football Association (FA), along with clubs and competitions, saw football emerge as the most successful of these recreations. By the early twentieth century, football had evolved into what A. J. P. Taylor has described as "the most democratic game, and also the most international", drawing spectators across classes and beyond borders.[7]

Football's growth beyond Britain was never a simple story of British instruction followed by continental imitation. The internationalisation of the game depended upon multidirectional exchange, as travellers and migrants carried football across borders and communities, reworking it within their own social settings.[8]

Writing of football's twenty-first century developments, David Goldblatt notes that the embrace of European football in North Africa and the Levant should not be understood "as a simple form of neo-colonialism" as these peoples have been "resistant and flexible enough to absorb and domesticate rather than merely mimic their temporary imperial overlords".[9] Such a challenge and understanding of football's growth can also be applied to the earliest period of international football history. Continental communities shaped their own adoption of the game, embedding football in traditions old and new. Football tours did not, therefore, represent simple outward sporting transmission but encounters of cultural negotiation and contestation.

Nevertheless, tours were among the most significant mechanisms through which British football interacted with proponents of the sport on the continent. From the late nineteenth century onwards, British clubs travelled widely, taking part in friendlies and tournaments, while establishing networks of international sport. Throughout this period, Britain occupied a

[5] Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, "Recovering the Social: Globalization, Football and Transnationalism," *Global Networks* 7, no. 2 (2007), 170-171.
[6] Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 3.
[7] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1975), 392.
[8] Matthew Taylor, "The Global Spread of Football," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 183-184.
[9] David Goldblatt, *The Age of Football: The Global Game in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Macmillan, 2019), 98.

symbolic position as the birthplace of football. Bill Murray notes that as Europe sat on the brink of the First World War, "without seeking the role, Britain had become the Mecca for association football".[10]

Encounters between British and continental teams were more than sporting contests; their meetings were moments of cultural contact in which national identity and sporting authority were negotiated. This thesis assesses the role of football tours in the broader development of international football up until the outbreak of the Second World War. Tracing the journeys undertaken by British teams across continental Europe illuminates the historical processes through which football developed from local and national customs to a shared European practice. The study situates football among the transformations and revolutions of modern Europe, as increased interconnectedness coexisted and clashed with deep social and political divisions.

The Study of Football Tours

Despite the widespread practice of touring within early football history, the subject attracted limited attention for most of the twentieth century. A 1933 survey of the 'history and romance of football' devoted a chapter to outlining West Ham United's experience of touring overseas, offering a useful contemporary reflection on the practicalities of football travel, though the discussion is focussed on amusing anecdotes and places narrative over analysis of tour practices.[11]

Some more extensive studies of British football's relationship with the continent emerged following the Second World War, at a time when British football was confronted with defeat on home soil against Hungary and the formation of formalised continental competitions. Writing in this 1950s context, Denzil Batchelor described football as "a very visible export" that maintained "England's name in the background of universal consciousness as the founder of the world's most widely popular sport".[12] Likewise, his contemporary Morris Marples argued that football was a "universal game", spreading across all parts of the world "like the western hat and the cloth cap".[13] Geoffrey Green's 1956 study of football's global history similarly presented the sport's growth as the most successful of British exports:

[10] Bill Murray, *The World's Game: A History of Soccer* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 37.
[11] W. Capel-Kirby and Frederick W. Carter, *The Mighty Kick* (London: Jarrolds, 1933), 178.
[12] Denzil Batchelor, *Soccer: A History of Association Football* (London: Batsford, 1954), 139.
[13] Morris Marples, *A History of Football* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), 246.

"Out into the big, wide world, for though an insular race, our people have always sailed the seven seas, taking with them the British way of life, British customs and British games. Of all these exports, association football was the commodity that took root the firmest in other lands so that in a short span of time it had become as a vine that spreads its branches across the world."[14]

Though these 1950s texts acknowledged football tours in passing, their greater concern was in charting the popularity of football rather than exploring the mechanisms through which football circulated around the continent. Nevertheless, these histories established many of the themes that would shape future understanding and study of football's development, emphasising Britain's role in forming and sharing the game, and presenting the geographical development of football as a process of diffusion. The more complex dynamics of football's early international exchange were left unexplored.

Histories of football's international development have necessarily devoted considerable attention to the diffusion of the codified British game, the establishment of national associations and FIFA, the emergence of international competition, and the formation of distinctive national football cultures. Touring appears in this literature, though often as an episode in the history of particular clubs, nations, or competitions rather than as a significant historical process in its own right. Prior accounts organised principally around institutions or national traditions lack analysis of the regular physical movement through which these footballing worlds encountered one another. This thesis places that movement at the centre of the analysis. In doing so, it shifts attention from diffusion alone towards interaction. The internationalisation of football ought not to be understood as the outward transmission of a finished British product, nor the inevitable consequence of expanding institutions. Football was repeatedly made and remade through encounters: between clubs and officials, players and publics, competing understandings of the game, and the different political and social worlds through which football travelled. Mobility was therefore not a consequence of football becoming international, but one of the processes by which international football was produced.

Only in recent decades have historians begun to recognise the extent to which football tours illuminate wider processes of cultural exchange, diplomacy, and transnational interaction. Peter Beck was among the first to place early twentieth-century football within the framework

[14] Geoffrey Green, *Soccer: The World Game, a Popular History* (London: Sportsman's Book Club, 1954), 95.

of international politics, noting that footballers of the 1930s were presented by some at the time as “ambassadors in soccer kit”.[15]

Studies of athlete migration have further demonstrated how football’s European development was shaped by intricate and extensive patterns of movement. Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor’s examination of the global migration of footballers challenges assumptions of ‘British isolationism’ with regard to sporting contact with the continent, emphasising that “Britain was not absent from the twentieth-century migratory flux. Many hundreds of British players have experienced professional football abroad.”[16] Taylor’s study of early twentieth-century professional English football further highlighted the impact of football tours on the culture and economies of Football League clubs during the interwar period.[17]

More focussed studies have illuminated the particularities of certain touring networks and their connections to wider transnational forces. Matthew McDowell’s research on Scottish football club tours to Denmark before the First World War indicates how these encounters were the product of political and commercial interests, as well as a reflection of evolving transport infrastructure.[18] McDowell’s study concludes that “given the other destinations visited by British clubs during this period, one can assume that this article is a highly incomplete example of what is out there with regard to the potential of transnational research during this period of football’s history”.[19] This signals both the breadth of early tour networks, and the extent to which their histories remain only partially recovered and interpreted.

Recent scholarship has further reinforced the importance and relevance of historical football tours within the broader field of international sport. Taylor’s transnational history of sport argues that tours were an “essential element of early international sport”, adding that “tours should be seen as invaluable to transnational and global historians as much as to scholars of diplomatic and international history”.[20] Such an approach has been undertaken at club level, with Chris Bolsmann and Dilwyn Porter’s study of the touring activities of the Corinthians football club emphasising how the team travelled as representatives of both sporting

[15] Peter Beck, *Scoring For Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 38.
[16] Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, *Moving with the Ball: The Migration of Professional Footballers* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 68.
[17] Matthew Taylor, *Leaguers: The Making of Professional Football in England: 1900-1939*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 220.
[18] Matthew McDowell, “’To Cross the Skager Rack,’ Discourses, images, and tourism in early ‘European’ football: Scotland, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Scandinavia, 1898–1914,” *Soccer & Society* 18, no. 2-3 (2017), 264.
[19] Ibid., 265.
[20] Matthew Taylor, *World of Sport: Transnational and Connected Histories* (London: Routledge, 2024) [Accessed via: VitalSource Bookshelf], 96.

amateurism and the nation.[21] The findings demonstrate that tours were not simply trips to play matches, but were themselves performances of national and sporting values.

A 2025 special issue of *Soccer & Society* places the history of Football League tours as central to debates about football's internationalism, with Beck's introduction stating that tours are "an under-researched topic despite their perceived footballing and extra-footballing historical significance" with the topic "rarely featured in the footballing literature covering the pre-1939 period".[22] Taylor's concluding remarks within the same issue reinforce the point, encouraging future historians to "acknowledge that 'domestic' football cultures were constructed from the outside as well as the inside".[23]

This thesis builds upon these findings and approaches, analysing football tours as complex cultural encounters involving diverse actors and motivations. The organisation of many British football tours occurred independently of national associations and the British government, emerging through localised initiatives and the ambitions of club administrators. Beck acknowledges his limited attention to "elite-level sport", stressing that his "selective focus on England and Football League clubs should not obscure the under-researched politico-diplomatic roles performed by not only national and league teams from the other home countries, especially Scotland, but also British amateur teams conducting foreign tours".[24] This thesis picks up directly on this challenge by broadening the lens of football tours to incorporate amateur clubs, women's teams, and schoolboy sides, from each corner of the British Isles. This wider focus on different footballing institutions offers a more comprehensive interpretation of the networks within which football travelled across the period and allows for case studies overlooked by previous historiography.

Though this thesis concerns touring, its subject is ultimately broader than the tour itself. The movement of British football teams across continental Europe offers a way to examine the processes through which football became international before 1939. Tours brought players, directors, officials and, on occasion, supporters across national borders. Still, they also carried footballing practices, institutional assumptions, commercial interests, political ideas, and understandings of national and local identity. Such movements therefore constituted more

[21] Chris Bolsmann and Dilwyn Porter, "'The Most Famous Amateur Football Club in the World': Creating and Curating the Corinthian Brand," *History* 109, no. 388 (2024), 553.
[22] Peter Beck, "Chapter 1: Introduction: Football League clubs and close season foreign tour," *Soccer & Society* 26, no. 7 (2025), 1077.
[23] Matthew Taylor, "Chapter 11: Reflections on Football Club tours, cultural encounters and transnational history," *Soccer & Society* 26, no. 7 (2025), 1295.
[24] Peter Beck, *International Football as Cultural Diplomacy*. (London: Routledge, 2024) [Accessed via: VitalSource Bookshelf], 65.

than a succession of fixtures played abroad, creating repeated points of encounter between football cultures which were neither isolated from one another nor simply passive recipients of a British game. The tour provides the principal unit through which these encounters are reconstructed in this study, with mobility providing the wider process through which they are understood. By following football actors across borders, the thesis consequently examines not only where British teams travelled, but what travelled with them, what they encountered, and what was altered through the processes of movement.

The periodisation of this thesis is intended to reflect the key structural moments in the history under examination, with a focus on the years 1904 to 1939. The starting point, 1904, marks both the creation of FIFA and the first overseas tour undertaken by a Football League club.[25] Though Chapters One, Two, and Five discuss some tours prior to 1904 in order to determine the longer genealogy of football travel, the thesis focusses on the period after 1904 to consider how football tours interacted with the sport's nascent international structures.

The endpoint of 1939 reflects the rupture of the Second World War, interrupting touring schedules and beginning the reshaping of the political borders and social conditions under which football operated. Between 1904 and 1939, football tours transitioned from occasional activities of predominantly amateur clubs to high-profile international encounters as cross-border football became routinised, professionalised, and politicised.

Though financial considerations of touring are considered throughout this thesis, with issues of gate receipts and travel costs recurrent and significant, surviving evidence of the finances of tours is fragmented and uneven. For that reason, this thesis does not claim to be an economic history of football tours; instead, it emphasises the social, cultural, and political dimensions of touring. Nor does this study provide a systematic analysis of the touring of Britain by continental football teams, though some such visits are discussed in order to help illuminate the central themes of British football's relationship with the continent. As Beck notes, touring prior to the Second World War remained a largely "one-way process… with only a small, albeit slowly rising, number of foreign clubs playing in England".[26] Focussing on outward travel does not mean to imply a Britain-centred narrative. Touring encounters were co-produced by actors from both sides of the Channel, with tours shaping British as well as continental football cultures.

[25] Beck, "Chapter 1," 1073.
[26] Ibid., 1084.

A Note on Sources

This study is based on the qualitative analysis of primary source material relating to the movement of British football teams across continental Europe. The approach is both chronological and thematic, following the development of these movements while considering the contexts in which tours were conceived, organised, and undertaken, as well as the consequences that followed. This study therefore combines institutional histories of association football with broader concerns of transnational cultural and social history, using the movement of football as a lens to understand the sport's development and the varied historical relationships within which it was embedded.

Where appropriate institutional archives have been consulted, including the minute books of the FA, the Scottish Football Association, and the Football Association of Wales, in addition to relevant British government records, and club collections. However, such material is uneven and, for the purpose of reconstructing football tours, often limited. For example, though the FA minute books record some applications by clubs seeking permission to travel overseas, such references generally reveal little about why tours were undertaken, how they were organised, or the various considerations that shaped the FA's decision to approve or prohibit such travel. Comparable records from the Scottish and Welsh associations offer similarly limited insight, and the relevant material within individual club collections is inconsistent. Therefore, newspapers provide the principal evidence by which the movements traced throughout this study are reconstructed. Newspaper reports recorded not only the results of matches, but also information about the journeys, receptions, banquets, and civic ceremonies surrounding them, as well as details of the experiences and observations of players on tour, and, crucially, some explanations offered by managers and directors for the intended purpose of tours. Such newspaper reports must be read critically. Few British journalists accompanied teams on their travels; therefore accounts published at home depended upon information supplied by the touring parties themselves. Though this limits the objectivity of such accounts, it also helps reveal the meanings that clubs and their officials intended to attach to their journeys. This study is particularly concerned with the relationship between movement, experience, and representation.

The extensive use of newspapers nevertheless presents some methodological problems. Digitisation of newspapers has transformed the opportunities for such research, allowing searches across a wide range of local and national publications. Yet this record is neither complete nor neutral, with not all newspapers having survived and been digitised. In addition,

newspapers themselves can be partisan, sensationalist, derivative, and at times demonstrably inaccurate. Since newspapers frequently reproduced material from other titles, news agencies or information supplied by football clubs, reports appearing in multiple publications do not necessarily constitute independent corroboration. Where possible, accounts have been cross-referenced with other available records. Newspaper articles are not treated as definitive accounts of tours, or of wider British society, but rather particular interpretations of events, produced according to editorial, local, political, and social contexts. The assumptions, attitudes, and interests of newspapers shape their partiality; this partiality is itself part of their value. Newspapers record not only what football teams did abroad, but the assumptions and interests through which such journeys were understood. Throughout this study, they are consequently used both to reconstruct the history of touring and to recover the meanings contemporaries attached to it.

Chapter Outline

The chapters of this thesis have been organised around a dataset of fixtures and tours compiled from a variety of sources, including press articles, club records, and FA documents. Existing compilations of tour data have also been utilised, in particular Javier García's database of British and Irish club tours from 1890 to 1939, which provides an extensive point of reference.[27] However, this thesis extends beyond the limits of previous records of continental tours, examining women's football clubs, company football teams, and schoolboys' sides, who have otherwise been omitted from previous records.

Chapter One establishes the historical foundations for the thesis, examining the initial emergence of football from diverse folk forms that were transformed through processes of codification, institutionalisation, and internationalisation up to the outbreak of the Second World War. The Chapter illustrates how the development of football was not a simple narrative of British invention and export but was subject to the complex factors and forces of social change and international appropriation. Situating football within the broader transformations of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe, the chapter reveals how associational culture, education, and mass leisure shaped sport as it became embedded in the lives of millions. The creation of the FA in 1863 is framed not as the creation of the game itself, but as a historical intervention which transferred authority over the game, standardising its practice, and supporting its spread. Educational institutions in Britain and the continent are considered as centres of the standardisation and dissemination of football, with teachers and students

[27] Javier García, "British and Irish Clubs – Overseas Tours 1890–1939," *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*, accessed 5 February 2026, https://www.rsssf.org/tablesb/brit-ier-tours-prewwii.html.

pivotal to the game's early growth. Subsequent sections focus on the emergence of clubs, competitions, and governing bodies at both national and international levels, with FIFA's 1904 formation discussed in detail. Tracing football's development through the interwar period, Chapter One also includes an examination of the commercialisation and professionalisation of football, as the sport became a recognisable mass spectator industry during a period of mass politics. Following football from fragmented local practices to a shared international system establishes the cultural context within which football tours were conducted across the period.

Chapter Two focusses on the beginnings of football tours from 1890 until the outbreak of the First World War. Tours are situated within the wider context of the Belle Époque, with the period, and sporting internationalism, shaped by new networks of travel and communications across Europe. The earliest overseas football tours were undertaken exclusively by amateur sides and therefore reflected the class backgrounds and interests of their players, with tours embedded within elite sporting networks and shaped by amateur ideology. The accompaniment of amateur tours with banquets, civic receptions, and sightseeing excursions reflected the impression of amateur tours representing new forms of leisure and cultural diplomacy. The Chapter traces both the commercial and regulatory changes which allowed professional clubs to travel during the close season, accelerating the expansion of overseas tours by some of England and Scotland's leading league clubs. The negotiation of tours as commercial ventures saw gate receipts and financial guarantees become an increasingly important aspect of football travel. Also considered is the emergence of representative national team tours, which began within the limited boundaries of amateurism but expanded in relation to the growing demand for football on the continent, revealing early tensions between amateur ideals, commercial interests, and international institutional authority over sport. By 1914, British football tours had become regular occurrences in parts of continental Europe, operating through ever-expanding sporting networks and encouraged by the growing international attention to the game.

Chapter Three considers how the outbreak of the First World War disrupted football's international circuits, though simultaneously led to the formation of new environments in which football was performed by the British on the continent. Prior to 1914, football's internationalism had been exercised through voluntary mobility; however, the war redirected the lives and movements of millions, with sport inevitably following the mass mobilisation of soldiers and prisoners across borders. The Chapter frames football within the social and cultural transformations of war, addressing wartime debates over domestic football and tensions surrounding class, sport, and national duty. For British troops stationed on the continent,

football was both an activity of recreation and a reconstruction of home, with soldiers organising matches behind the front lines among themselves and their allies, performing international sporting exchange in the harshest of circumstances. Prisoner-of-War (POW) camps are also considered as understudied sites of play, with prisoners creating and sustaining organisational forms of football throughout their captivity. The chapter reveals that the First World War did not end the international life of football, but fundamentally rerouted the channels through which it operated, from voluntary cultural exchange to military mobilisation.

Chapter Four situates the re-emergence of football tours after the First World War, indicating how post-war journeys were shaped by the Europe-wide efforts of reconstruction and commemoration. The resumption of civilian tours in the 1920s reflected processes of remembrance and reconciliation, with football teams travelling through countries marked by the devastation of war, their sporting encounters contributing to new practices of commemoration**.** Initially, tours echoed ties between allied nations, with competitions such as the Inter-Allied Games affirming wartime solidarity and functioning to express selective unity. The Chapter also examines how commemorative acts were integrated into the practice of tours, as teams travelling to and through France and Belgium included battlefield and memorial visits in their itineraries. Professional, amateur, corporate, and women's teams all engaged in such mourning. The tentative reinstatement of football tours to Germany was shaped by political and diplomatic developments of the 1920s, with British clubs encountering opportunities for peacebuilding during their time in Germany. Football tours during the early interwar period functioned as more than just sporting exchange, with cultural practices of commemoration a key dimension of their enactment.

Chapter Five surveys the creation and progression of international football competitions from the turn of the twentieth century to the Second World War. Cross-border tournaments shaped the form of football tours, institutionalising international fixtures and increasing their competitiveness. Prior to the First World War, competitions such as the Challenge International du Nord, the Dubonnet Cup, and the Sir Thomas Lipton Trophy illustrated how competition was conducted through private patronage, commercial sponsorship, and civic initiative. During the interwar period, continental competitions became increasingly organised and politically significant. The Mitropa Cup and the Coupe des Nations represented attempts to create structured international competitions among Europe's leading teams, though repeated British absence reflected distinct perceptions of football's internationalism. British participation within Olympic football competition, and absence from the FIFA World Cup, are examined, evidence that the staging of international football competitions was an uneven rather than universal process. Throughout the chapter, the complex and often ambivalent

relationship between British football and continental competition is highlighted. While leading British clubs and Home Nations associations were cautious of embracing overseas tournaments, British referees, coaches, and a limited number of clubs did participate in the growing field of continental competitions.

Chapter Six explores the ideological tensions of football tours, focussing on the relationship between Britain and communism on the continent. Where earlier chapters demonstrate how football facilitated extensive cultural exchange, this chapter shows how British sporting relations with post-revolutionary Russia were tightly controlled, as anxieties over political radicalism limited tours of the Soviet Union. The Soviet state's organisation of sport is considered, with football forming part of its attempts to utilise sport as an instrument of the state, both at home and abroad. Such practices contrasted with British conceptions of sport as an apolitical leisure activity operating outside of government through voluntary association and civil society. British perceptions of sport as a vehicle for deradicalisation are considered, along with the actions taken by the British government to limit football tours of the Soviet Union, reflecting broader anti-communist motives. The British Workers' Sports Federation's 1927 tour to the Soviet Union is then examined, an atypical instance of direct football exchange between Britain and the Soviet Union, its orchestration and representation a vivid demonstration of a very different kind of football tour. Tours undertaken by other labour and workers' movements are also examined. Encounters with communist Europe reveal how football could be framed within ideological frameworks, with rival visions of international order seeking to exert control of football's international networks.

Chapter Seven assesses the impact of fascism's rise upon football touring during the interwar period, with encounters between British football and fascist regimes further illustrating the diplomatic and ideological intersections of sport. Journeys to Italy and Germany exposed British footballers to the regimes that mobilised sport to garner national unity and international status. Mussolini's government used football to display Italian vitality, with the winning and hosting of the FIFA World Cup celebrating fascist strength; meanwhile, in Nazi Germany, sport was integrated into state structures that promoted discipline and regeneration. Both club and international fixtures against Italian and German opposition attracted the interest of the British government, as football became a stage on which diplomacy was enacted. Gestures such as ceremonial salutes and language of cooperation reflected the atmosphere of appeasement amid growing international uncertainty. Encounters with fascist football were interpreted in Britain with a mixture of admiration and anxiety, as these continental tours raised questions about the purpose and practice of football. Football tours of the 1930s operated in an arena

of ideological conflicts, with tensions between nationalism, internationalism, and authoritarianism defining touring networks in the years leading up to the Second World War.

Research Questions

This thesis seeks to answer four interrelated questions. Firstly, how did touring emerge as a regular practice, and how did this practice develop between 1904 and 1939? Secondly, how were tours shaped by infrastructure and institutions, and by the changing domestic and international game? Third, how did encounters on tour reflect and intersect with political and ideological tensions of early twentieth-century Europe, particularly during the interwar period? Fourth, how did touring practices and representations vary according to the social and institutional make-up of the teams involved, including professional clubs, amateur sides, workers' teams, and women's teams?

In addressing these questions, the thesis contributes to existing historiography by further positioning touring as a central mechanism of football's early internationalisation, complementing existing accounts which predominantly document the role of governing bodies and major tournaments. Widening the social base of focus beyond that of elite professional clubs and national teams to be inclusive of amateur, occupational, and women's teams also demonstrates the diverse networks and routes through which football moved.

As David Goldblatt has observed, "no history of the modern world is complete without an account of football".[28] Following British football tours from 1904 to 1939, this study traces the movement of football teams as part of a distinctly modern international order, exposing how a popular game was entangled within the politics and identities of modern Europe. To paraphrase E. P. Thompson, the aim is to rescue all those travelling footballers, including the Durham miners, the Essex schoolchildren, the Birmingham businessmen, the Scottish professionals, the Preston women, the London trade unionists, and even the prisoners of war, from the enormous condescension of posterity.[29] These touring players lived and travelled through times of acute social disturbance and engaged in cross-cultural exchanges which can tell us much about the complexities and contradictions of their era.

[28] David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football* (London: Penguin Random House, 2007), xiv.
[29] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1968), 12.

Chapter One: British and Continental Football, Origins to 1939

Introduction

In May 1863, Thomas Jones Barker unveiled his painting, *The Secret of England's Greatness*, at the International Exhibition in South Kensington. Both the exhibition and the painting were designed to exhibit the industrial, imperial, and moral intentions of British power. Barker's painting portrays a fictitious encounter between Queen Victoria and a West African Ambassador, where, upon being questioned as to the reason for Britain's success, the Queen presents the ambassador with a Bible. Behind the Queen stand Prime Minister Lord Palmerston and Foreign Secretary John Russell, anchoring the political context of imperial governance in the scene. The artwork conveyed the belief that the identity and power of Britain and the British Empire were intricately linked to the Christian faith.

Following its debut, Barker's painting embarked on a national tour to Newcastle, Glasgow, Dundee, and Belfast, with prints of the image sold to a mass audience. According to Lynda Nead, the painting's power lay in its "confidence and unambiguous" portrayal of British identity, imperial expansion, and cultural superiority.[1] Mid-Victorian Britain governed an empire of unprecedented scale, yet it sought cultural reaffirmation. Barker's artwork thus reflects a broader mid-Victorian perception that national success could be understood in terms of a coherent ethical purpose, guided by religion, monarchy, and the virtues of British political culture.[2] Positioning the Bible as the 'Secret of England's Greatness', Barker portrays the British Empire not as the outcome of conquest, but as a natural consequence of moral responsibility, presenting imperialism as inevitable rather than debatable.

In the same year that Barker's painting portrayed British morality and authority, an institution was established which would at times perform similar functions. In November 1863, representatives of London football clubs met at the Freemasons' Tavern to produce the first rulebook of the Football Association, another artefact representative of Victorian values and

[1] Lynda Nead, "The Secret of England's Greatness," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19, no. 2 (2014), 161.
[2] Ibid.

culture. The codification of football at this moment shifted authority over the sport, which would spread across the world and become a 'planetary passion'.[3]

Previously, the practice of football had varied by locality; now written into law, it could be interpreted and rewritten by communities and committees, and exercised through the emergent customs of voluntary association. This relocation of authority was characteristic of a longer development in British social life. As Mike Huggins notes, "from the late seventeenth century onward, it was a new form of associativity, the voluntary associations and clubs formed by the elite and upper middling groups, that slowly aided the construction of sporting culture".[4] Sport did not become modern solely because factories appeared or cities expanded, though industrialisation and urbanisation created the conditions for mass participation and spectatorship. Rather, it became modern because leisure itself was reorganised through institutions, clubs, committees, subscriptions, regular fixtures, and unified authority.

The FA created the codes of practice, as well as the model of governance. Ahead of the centenary of the Football Association, Geoffrey Green reflected on the FA's founding for an official FA volume, deploying constitutional language to reflect this implication: "The Football Association is the highest parliament in English football… the mother of football parliaments".[5] The metaphor signals what the FA would come to represent: legitimacy through procedure, authority through representation, order through laws. Green's summary of the FA's purpose is equally revealing, stating that "quite simply, the F.A. set out to make one set of laws… to bring order out of the chaos".[6] Such a claim is moral as well as organisational, with order presented as an intrinsic good, and conformity to a shared rule system offered as a form of civilising achievement.

Yet the values commonly attached to codified football, of fairness, restraint, and sportsmanship, never belonged to the rules themselves. Rather, they were social meanings conferred by institutions, above all by elite education. Richard Holt's account of Victorian sport supposes that "fair play embodied a new philosophy that was probably more pervasive and influential than the more widely known 'work-ethic' and 'call to seriousness' among the

[3] Christian Bromberger, "Football as World-view and as Ritual," *French Cultural Studies* 6, no. 18 (1995), 293.
[4] Mike Huggins, "Early Modern Sport," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 120.
[5] Geoffrey Green, "The Football Association," in *Association Football Volume One*, ed. A. H. Fabian and Geoffrey Green (London: Caxton, 1960), 47.
[6] Ibid., 48.

Victorians… 'Athleticism', as it was sometimes called, was a kind of moral code or system of ideas".[7]

The codes and ideas associated with football were prescribed initially by those of the classes who had codified the sport. In this respect, codified football belongs to what Hobsbawm later conceptualised as the "invention of tradition", practices presented as natural and continuous, but which were, in fact, reorganised to stabilise status, transmit discipline, and authorise a particular social order.[8] The FA's Laws of the Game were framed as rational distillations of existing play, but their effect was even more transformative, changing football from fragmented local ritual to a portable and scalable phenomenon.

That portability underpinned football's international growth. British commentators framed the game as an imperial export, often using civilising language to describe this process. Geoffrey Green's formulation is typical: "British soldiers, sailors and business men… had dropped the British seed of association football wherever they went," with Britain finding in football "its greatest export… to provide a common language between the nations". Within the same FA volume, Willy Meisl similarly insisted upon an English "birth certificate" for modern soccer and notes that export followed only after the game was "well organised in its homeland".[9]

However, these narratives of transmission, while not entirely false, are incomplete. Football's movement across Europe depended both on Britons abroad and continental actors who took up the game as a marker of modernity. As Matthew Taylor argues, for many European students, professionals, and businessmen Britain signified "technological advancement… and, above all, modernity," with football being "highly fashionable" and appealing to "upper and middle class people with 'advanced' and cultivated ideas".[10] Yet as rules travelled, the meanings of the game did not always remain in accordance with the British upper classes. The growth of the game also meant the adaptation of the game. Even if football arrived on foreign shores as a representative of Victorian moral virtue, it could continually be reinterpreted according to the needs, pressures, and rivalries of other communities.

Football's abstraction from local custom to singular code made it universally reproducible; its governance structures supplied a template that others could copy, modify, and ultimately contest. Thus, the history of football from 1863 onward is one of growth from Britain, but also of the progressive internationalisation of a practice whose social meanings were continually

[7] Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), 350.
[8] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.
[9] Green, "The Football Association," 71.
[10] Taylor, "The Global Spread," 186.

remade. It is in this tension, between a British belief in rule-making authority and a European and global capacity to appropriate and redefine, that the later institutional conflicts of the game must be located.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. It will outline how, from its foundations, football has been a political practice rather than a wholly neutral pursuit and pastime. Secondly, this chapter will document the transformation of football from varied folk games to a unified international sport through codification, governance, and social change. Thirdly, it will frame the tensions that shaped British football's relationship with the continent. In the decades up until 1939 football was not simply a 'British export' as some have suggested, but a growing international practice, with both its play and power shared by peoples across the world. To achieve these aims the chapter begins with an examination of pre-codified football, before considering how educational institutions furthered the codification and early dissemination of the game, then investigating the national and international processes through which football was institutionalised, as well as the emergence of clubs as social organisations. Finally, the chapter will examine the growing professionalisation and commercialisation of football, reflecting upon how such shifts informed the political and social relations within the game.

Pre-codification

The history of association football does not begin in 1863. The process of football's development up until that point was long and cannot be mapped with either certainty or simplicity. Like many institutions of modernity, retrospective narratives of descent have been applied to football, including some tracing ancestry to antiquity. The Ancient Greek ballgame episkyros and its Roman relation harpastum have both been cited as proto-football games, lending the modern sport a venerable ancestry.[11] However, historical scrutiny exposes the limitations of such logic. As Derek Birley has observed, unlike chariot racing, there is little evidence that these classical ball games were transmitted to Britain, and claims that nineteenth-century codes of football share a lineage with them are dubious.[12]

The significance of such ancient sporting precedents does not lie in their formation of traceable sporting codes, but as illustrations of the universalities of sporting competition, with the recurrence of ball games across disparate times and places underscoring how varied forms of play could serve varied social and civic purposes. Understood as such, association football

[11] Geoffrey Green, "The Dawn of Football," in *Association Football Volume One*, ed. A. H. Fabian and Geoffrey Green (London: Caxton, 1960), 39.
[12] Derek Birley*, Sport and the Making of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 10.

is not a descendant of ancient rules but is descended from some of the impulses and desires also seen in the ancient world. The differences between ancient and modern games arise from the differences in the social conditions in which they were produced and played, organised and authorised.

The formalisation and codification of British football rules in the mid-nineteenth century marked the transition from a multitude of local and regional variations to a standardised game recognisable today. Across the British Isles and the continent, these games were locally embedded according to seasonal calendars, often associated with Shrovetide, Eastertide, or other festivals or times of gathering, with games entangled with the patterns of agriculture, church, and community.

Traditions of folk football ought not to be considered as a mere primitive prelude to the modern game, but as coherent products of their own cultural conditions, and as those conditions changed, according to labour patterns and re-settlement, the forms that the games produced shifted with them. Folk football should also not be understood as a single unified custom, with both its practice and meanings varied according to nation and locality, distinctions which would shape how later forms of the game could be adopted, interpreted, and politicised.

Since the Middle Ages, football was repeatedly portrayed as a source of disorder, with attempts to suppress and regulate it often pursued. In 1314, a proclamation against "rumpuses with large football" was issued by the Lord Mayor of London on behalf of King Edward II.[13] A century later, under King James I, the Parliament of Scotland passed the Football Act to prohibit its play.[14] Angela Gleason notes that ball games "frustrated the ruling classes" throughout the Middle Ages, leading to over thirty bans by English kings because of concerns about the disorder, drunkenness, and distraction from work that games caused.[15] These tensions and anxieties have followed football up until the present day.

Despite the establishment's efforts to condemn and control football, playing games could also confer social status. James White's mid-nineteenth-century history of England claims that in the early modern period, praising the football skills of the Archbishop of Canterbury was a major compliment, illustrating how the game could be incorporated into elite sociability.[16] Further accounts describe a football game arranged to entertain King James I of England on

[13] Birley, *Sport*, 32.
[14] Ibid., 42.
[15] Angela Gleason, "Medieval Sport" in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 106.
[16] James White, *History of England from the Earliest Times to the Year 1858* (London: Routledge, 1860), 520.

his visit to the Wiltshire village of Bromham, underlining the capacity of games to act as prominent civic performance.[17]

Folk football was never unified or uniform, with meanings and practices varying by nation and locality. In Scotland, Francis Magoun has observed how football was embedded into the festive life of different rural communities.[18] Robert Chambers' accounts of shepherd communities in Fife at the turn of the nineteenth century describe football and golf as regular activities, though a decline in such games occurred as shepherding itself declined.[19] This illustrates how folk football was sensitive to shifting patterns of labour and settlement, just as its codified and professional descendants would be a century later.

Welsh examples further exemplify folk football's role as a communal ritual, producing both cohesion and conflict. In Cardiganshire, football matches formed part of eighteenth-century gatherings which also featured wrestling and kicking games.[20] Such gatherings often resulted in violent quarrels, underscoring both the competition and confrontation involved with play. Prys Morgan examines the Cardigan games as part of his discussion surrounding the 'invention of tradition', referring to the autobiographies of Anglesey peasants Rhys Cox and Matthew Owen, "which show an island obsessed with sports often of a violent kind, with terrible football matches which would put today's terraces to shame".[21]

Football in Ireland is also rooted in centuries of tradition. The Statute of Galway of 1527 permitted the playing of football within city limits while banning other sports like hurling and handball, evidence that football could be treated as comparatively acceptable, or at least governable, versus rival forms of play.[22] The game of Caid, often discussed as a precursor to both hurling and modern Gaelic football, again reflects a longer Irish history of ball games beyond British influence.[23]

The cultural presence of football in Britain is recorded not only through evidence of its playing but also through how it influenced language. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

[17] "Column for the Curious", *The Illustrated London News,* 5 December 1863, 23.
[18] Francis Magoun, "Scottish Popular Football, 1424-1815," *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (1931), 1.
[19] Robert Chambers. *Popular Rhymes of Scotland* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1858), 55.
[20] Thomas Rees, *The Beauties of England and Wales, or, Delineations, Topographical, Historical, and Descriptive, of Each County Vol. XVIII*. (London: J Harris, 1815), 531.
[21] Prys Morgan, "From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 53.
[22] Thomas Reilly and Kieran Collins, "Science and the Gaelic sports: Gaelic football and hurling," *European Journal of Sport Science* 8, no. 5 (2008), 233.
[23] John Connolly and Paddy Dolan, "The Civilizing and Sportization of Gaelic football in Ireland: 1884–2009," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 23, no. 4 (2010), 574.

football was sufficiently familiar to function as a descriptor and metaphor, employed by Shakespeare in *King Lear* and *The Comedy of Errors*.[24] Other figurative uses underline this point. Francis Willughby's 1687 ornithological study described tumbler pigeons resembling "football in the air", a comparison understood and echoed by Charles Darwin two centuries later.[25] Robert Martin Lesuire Louvel's 1764 satirical novel used 'football' to describe the treatment of an Englishman by an aggressive French mob.[26] References to football are also present in some eighteenth-century travel and colonial writing with the 1759 work *The Modern Part of the Universal History*, describing a fruit found in Guam as a 'football', explaining the unknown through comparison to a known object of familiarity.[27]

Britain is not unique in having a long history of ball games. When association football began to spread abroad in the late nineteenth century, it did so to a continent where forms of ball games had been played since antiquity. Such existing traditions would shape how association football was received and understood across Europe, and how the sport could express local and national significance.

In France, la soule was a popular medieval ball game which Tony Collins claims "occupied much the same place in popular culture as football did in Britain".[28] The political dimensions of la soule have been noted in areas of France affected by agrarian enclosure. At times, la soule could function as a form of rural resistance against authority, with participants purposefully damaging hedges created by landowners during the course of play.[29] Some claim that la soule arrived in France from South West England, with Cornish migrants to Brittany possibly carrying the sport between the fourth and seventh centuries.[30] Though it is challenging to determine the genealogy of such games, the possibility of longstanding cross-channel exchange underlines the permeability of cultural boundaries and the extensiveness of historical ball play.

Calcio storico fiorentino, a ball game played in Renaissance Florence, was part of a popular local ritual and was also explicitly regulated long before the nineteenth century. Mike Huggins outlines how Calcio was vigilantly ordered, with an Italian priest, Antonio Scaino, publishing a

[24] RSC, "Key moments and facts," *Royal Shakespeare Company*, accessed 9 November 2025, https://www.rsc.org.uk/king-lear/about-the-play/key-moments-and-facts
[25] Charles Darwin. *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* (London: John Murray, 1868), 209.
[26] Robert Martin Lesuire Louvel, *The Savages of Europe* (London: Dryden Leach, 1764), 32.
[27] *The Modern Part of the Universal History, Vol. IV* (London: Osborn, 1759), 235.
[28] Tony Collins, *How Football Began: A Global History of How the World's Football Codes Were Born* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 11.
[29] Henning Eichberg, "Laughter in Popular Games and in Sport. The Other Health of Human Play," *Gesnerus* 70, no. 1 (2013), 138
[30] Mike Tripp, "Cornish wrestling in the nineteenth century," *Sport in History* 43, no. 2 (2023), 138.

set of rules for the game in 1555, and Florentine count Giovanni Bardi amending the rules for the game in 1580.[31] Notable Florentines, including members of the Medici family and Popes Clement VII and Leo XI, took part in playing games of Calcio, though Peter Burke notes that "calcio seems to have had more in common with the ritualised ball-games played by fourteenth-century Japanese courtiers or by the pre-Columbian Maya than with the contemporary world of Pele, Gazza or Maradona".[32] However, despite such evidence of its codification and elite patronage, calcio declined in the early seventeenth century, only re-emerging in the 1930s under fascist rule. By contrast, the codification of association football in the nineteenth century brought with it institutions capable of reproducing the game across different generations and places.

In other nations and regions of continental Europe, other ball games are evidenced, illustrating how varied communities produced and sustained such activities.[33] Understanding these various forms of folk football is essential to framing the codification of football, as it gives clarity to what codification changed. Whereas pre-codified football was varied and localised, association football would become unified and then global. The transition from folk to association football, and other codes of football, reallocated authority over playing the game, from sovereignty lying with local communities to the institutional governance of committees determining the role and practice of the sport at national and international levels. Such a process was not limited to sport. Christopher Young observes that "the move from traditional/folk activities to regulated ones… took place in Britain, Europe, and the United States from the mid-to late nineteenth century".[34]

Seen in this context, codification was not a natural refinement of play, but a historical intervention which shaped authority over the game. Examining pre-codified football traditions reveals what was at play in the nineteenth-century transformation of football. From the rural resistance of la soule to the elite rituals of calcio, and the festive disorder and prohibition of British folk football, forms of football functioned as activities to negotiate identity and power. This significance did not begin with the creation of the Football Association, though such significance was enhanced and spread through the institutionalisation of the game.

[31] Huggins, "Early Modern Sport," 118.
[32] Peter Burke, "The invention of leisure in early modern Europe," *Past & Present* 146 (1995), 138.
[33] Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: a History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29.
[34] Christopher Young, "Sport in West and North Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 331.

Codification built upon the established social importance of football and reshaped how it was organised and understood on a global scale.

Education

The period from the 1820s to the 1850s saw prolonged efforts to codify football across Britain, evidenced by the creation of a mosaic of clubs and rulebooks. These decades of early codification helped establish the foundations for the sport's further evolution in the 1860s and 1870s under the FA's leadership. The efforts of schools, universities, and pioneering clubs saw football transition from patchworks of localised pastimes into structured and regulated games, allowing for further and lasting growth. The recognition of football as a legitimate pursuit within schools and universities provided both a platform for the sport's development and also contributed to its wider acceptance as a morally edifying activity. Educational institutions provided both the infrastructure and personnel for the transformation of football. Many of the associational norms required for modern sport, be they committees, subscriptions, fixtures, and elections, were learned and reproduced within Victorian schools and universities. In this sense, codification was inseparable from pedagogy, with football reshaped by institutions ensuring order and discipline.

The Foot-Ball Club of Edinburgh was founded in 1824 by University of Edinburgh students, playing games under a set of six written rules until its dissolution in 1841. Other forms of football codes within English schools soon followed, at Aldenham School in 1825, Rugby School in 1845, and Eton College in 1847, though confirming the exact dates and continuity for such games remains a disputed matter.[35] As Derek Birley has observed, football around this stage was "not so much a single game as an array of roughly similar tribal codes preferred by different public schools".[36]

These codes reflected parallel attempts by distinct communities to impose institutional order on inherited play. Key elements of the game, including handling, hacking, and bodily contact, remained fiercely contested, revealing that codification was a process of negotiation rather than refinement. The Cambridge University Foot Ball Club, created in 1847, produced a set of rules in 1856 to impose greater consistency on inter-school matches.[37] By bringing together

[35] Neil Tranter, "The first football club?," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 10, no. 1 (1993), 104.
[36] Birley, *Sport*, 257.
[37] Green, "The Dawn of Football," 47.

former pupils of rival public schools, Cambridge forced compromise and helped establish a framework that would influence the FA's rule-making seven years later.[38]

The embedding of football into schooling life also reframed the game's social meaning. What had once been a potentially disorderly folk pastime was recast as a tool of moral and physical development. An 1860 *Bath Herald* article, invoking the apocryphal claim that the Duke of Wellington had declared the battle of Waterloo to have been won on the playing fields of Eton, affirmed that "the manly exercises of our schools and universities, as boating, cricketing, foot-balling; and in Scotland of golfing and curling on the ice, and other juvenile games, strengthen both mind and body, and contribute to form that manliness and hardihood of constitution that characterise the Briton all over the world".[39]

Historians have interpreted this transformation as part of a broader ideological project. Drawing on Bourdieu, Siegelbaum and Siegelbaum note that elite youth appropriated popular games and "simultaneously changed their meaning and function".[40] Goldblatt has characterised Victorian public schools as the "ludic zoos of the age", highlighting how games were enclosed, regulated, and repurposed as technologies of character formation and muscular Christianity.[41] Knowledge of the Laws of the Game was presented as a partial pathway to ethical conduct, aligning football with amateur ideology and the moral language of Victorian athleticism. By the late nineteenth century, such athleticism had become an educational orthodoxy, sustained by compulsory participation, specialised spaces, and institutional oversight.[42]

Crucially, schools and universities were also transient social spaces, including pupils from across the world and dispersing them into professions, regiments, colonial administrations, and commercial networks. This explains why education helped to simultaneously codify and spread the game. Former pupils founded clubs, joined committees, and reproduced associational norms. The formation of the FA in 1863 was therefore the outcome of a society increasingly organised through schools, clubs, committees, and other associational institutions.

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[38] Colm Kerrigan, "'Thoroughly good football': teachers and the origins of elementary school football", *History of Education* 29, no. 6 (2000), 520.
[39] "Military School Education", *Bath Herald*, 17 March 1860, 6.
[40] Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Sasu Siegelbaum, "Class and Sport," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 431.
[41] Goldblatt, *The Ball*, 24.
[42] J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 68.

On the continent, educational institutions likewise provided crucial frameworks to support the development of football, following its arrival from Britain. Football travelled through transnational bourgeois circuits, with schools and universities central to such networks. As Matthew Taylor observes “in the late nineteenth century, students and teachers… regularly came into contact with British people, culture, and values,” and for many such actors Britain signified “modernity” and “cosmopolitan sophistication”.[43] Goldblatt provides a complementary account of this overseas growth, highlighting how football’s “initial beachheads” in Europe were those places possessing a healthy population of “university students and young urban bourgeoisie”.[44] Football’s adoption tracks the geography of modernity: cities, ports, railways, educated elites, and the early formation of cultural bureaucracies.

In particular, Switzerland occupied an important position, with its elite boarding schools acting as transnational hubs, where British pedagogical influence interacted with the privileged continental class. Christian Koller demonstrates how these schools were the earliest sites of football on the continent, acting as transit zones for football to spread across Europe and beyond.[45] Philippe Vonnard’s study of football in the Lake Geneva region further illustrates how football first appeared there, played by British expatriates and students, before it was adopted by local schoolboys who then founded Swiss clubs and competitions.[46] The trajectories of figures such as Walter Bensemann and Hans Gamper, both of whom were educated in Switzerland, and later played important roles in developing football in Germany and Spain respectively, underscore how educational migration translated directly into institutional diffusion.[47]

Yet the embedding of sport within schooling was not universally celebrated. While educational reformers often framed games as instruments of moral formation, some contemporaries questioned their educational value. Writing in 1873, the education reformer and future Liberal MP Swire Smith contrasted British schoolboys’ enthusiasm for organised games with relative continental restraint for such activities, lamenting that in England, playing sports saw “time, energies, and thought sacrificed by many boys”.[48]

[43] Taylor, “The Global Spread,” 186.
[44] Goldblatt, *The Ball*, 199-200.
[45] Christian Koller, “The establishment of football at Swiss schools: from the mid-nineteenth century to the inter-war period,” *Soccer & Society* 26, no. 4 (2025), 591.
[46] Philippe Vonnard, "A Tale of Clubs, Pitches and Men. How Association Football Took Root in the Lake Geneva region (1860s-1910s)," *Sport in History* 44, no. 3 (2024): 289-290.
[47] Taylor, “The Global Spread,” 186.
[48] Swire Smith, *Educational Comparisons Or Remarks on Industrial Schools in England, Germany, and Switzerland* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co, 1873), 40.

Such criticisms reveal an early tension surrounding sport in education, with its prominence sometimes celebrated as a vehicle of British discipline and character, though viewed elsewhere as a potential distraction from intellectual labour or civic preparation. These debates foreshadow later anxieties about the social and political consequences of organised sport, underscoring that football's educational dissemination was never a simple story of enthusiastic adoption but one determined by competing visions of modern schooling and citizenship.

Across Britain and the continent, education functioned as a central mediating mechanism in the formalisation and dissemination of modern football. Codification rendered the game portable, and educational institutions supplied the human and organisational infrastructure through which it could be reproduced, transmitted, and embedded into new settings. This helps explain both the spread of football and the limits of British cultural authority over it. While British influence shaped the game's early forms and institutional templates, football's expansion depended on its appropriation by other societies, who each adapted the game according to their own social, political, and national contexts.

Football Club Formation

The football clubs that met to found the FA at the Freemasons' Tavern in 1863 were products of middle-class sociability, their members drawn from public schools and professional occupations. As organisations, they were not institutions representative of their neighbourhoods; but as voluntary leisure societies, they were representative of their class. The members of these clubs sought to regulate play between one another rather than expand play to the growing British population. Early FA activity reflected such limits, with fixtures played clustered around London and the south-east, and participation socially bound.

Wray Vamplew outlines how "sport clearly did not invent the club but borrowed the concept from an extant associational culture, adopting and adapting the format to its own purposes".[49] The formation of football clubs, whether by public school boys, parishioners, or proletariat, was part of a wider transformation of Victorian leisure culture, with the institutionalisation of recreation through localised organisational structures reflecting the existing and evolving social networks of that era.

The social exclusivity of early football clubs is visible in an examination of club founding in north-west England, one of the first regions where football became popular beyond the

[49] Wray Vamplew, "Theories and Typologies: A Historical Exploration of the Sports Club in Britain," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 14 (2013), 1581.

metropolitan south. Peter Swain's study of Lancashire football clubs in the Victorian period stresses that the earliest clubs were founded and controlled by leisure-oriented middle-class men, and as such were socially selective and uninterested in sharing games with their working-class neighbours.[50] However, such social exclusion encouraged the creation of new alternative clubs better representative of lower-class communities, thus generating the social conditions for new football practices and cultures.[51]

The foundations of Association Football may well have been elite, but the forces which grew the game were decisively popular. Collins notes that "the 1870s saw the game leave the world of exclusive gentleman's clubs to become a sport played and watched by all classes", though he emphasises that such a "radical metamorphosis into a mass spectator sport was not the intention of its leaders".[52] The creation of the FA Cup in 1871 accelerated this shift by widening the field of competition, drawing in provincial clubs, and stretching the sport's social field. Collins emphasises that the success of association football derived not from the clauses of its rule book, but from capturing the imaginations of the masses through the construction of clubs and competitions.[53]

The arrangement and cultures of football clubs, though initially shaped by public school and university traditions, became a vehicle through which communities across Britain and the continent could claim the game as their own, leading to professional and commercial developments of the sport in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The emergence and growth of football clubs in Victorian Britain were closely associated with the social geography of industrialisation, with clubs becoming expressions of collective neighbourhood identity for different areas.

In the industrial towns and cities of Britain, football clubs often originated from local workplaces, embedding them within the social and economic life of their community. Examples include Newton Heath LYR Football Club, founded in 1878, from the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway depot in Newton Heath, Manchester, which would later become Manchester United. Likewise, Arsenal Football Club traces its origins to the Royal Arsenal, a munitions factory in South London where workers formed a football team in 1886. Bishop Auckland Town, a County Durham club with roots in a team of Oxbridge theology students studying at Auckland

[50] Peter Swain, "Football Club Formation and the Lancashire Leisure Class, 1857–1870," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 7-8 (2017), 510.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Collins, *How Football Began*, 39-40.
[53] Tony Collins, "Early Football and the Emergence of Modern Soccer, c. 1840–1880", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 9 (2015), 1139.

Castle, by the 1890s had a team comprising “a bookmaker, a brewer, a builder, a miller, a miner, two painters, a pit banksman, a plumber, a teacher, and a whitesmith”.[54] Such wide composition is an indicator of both the broad interest in the game, as well as the new temporal infrastructure that enabled play, with the expansion of leisure time for workers, particularly the half-holiday. It is also worth noting that a number of football clubs emerged as seasonal offshoots of cricket teams, whose members sought a winter activity to fill out their sporting calendar. Both Sheffield Wednesday and Sheffield United were created this way, evidence of how association football developed through existing sporting infrastructures, as well as creating its own systems.

The emergence of sports teams in workplaces was not unique to Britain. Robert Wheeler outlines that similar impulses were present in the United States, with baseball and football teams also founded by mill and factory owners, including Andrew Carnegie, in the late nineteenth century.[55] However, Lincoln Allison warns against presuming football clubs were founded to “pacify plebians”, as “even where the game was organized from above for reasons of principle and interest, it was the demand or need from below which caused it to spread, change, and develop”.[56] Undoubtedly some early football clubs had been founded upon elite sponsorship and moral supervision, but organised football proved to be self-sustaining because it was reshaped through popular participation and collective investment.

Similar processes can be observed in clubs founded through religious institutions. Many renowned British football clubs have their roots in churches. Everton Football Club was founded in 1878 by members of St. Domingo's Methodist Church in north Liverpool. In Scotland, both Hibernian and Celtic were founded by Catholic priests. Other examples include Aston Villa, formed in 1874 by members of the Villa Cross Wesleyan Chapel, and Manchester City, originally founded in 1880 by members of St. Mark's Church. However, such moralistic direction of football clubs would shift with the advent of the game's professionalisation and commercialisation, which saw clubs outgrow their ecclesiastical patrons.

Another reason for the creation of church teams was to offer an alternative meeting space for teams to the public house, with some football clubs originating from pubs. Teams across

[54] Mike Huggins, “The Spread of Association Football in North-East England, 1876–90: the Pattern of Diffusion”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6, no. 3 (1989), 312.
[55] Robert Wheeler, “Organized Sport and Organized Labour: The Workers’ Sports Movement,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 2 (1978), 194.
[56] Lincoln Allison, “Association Football and the Urban Ethos,” *Stanford Journal of International Studies* 13 (1978), 222.

Britain, including Kilmarnock and Everton, used pubs as changing rooms, and often played on their premises.

Works teams such as Arsenal and West Ham, formerly Thames Ironworks, also met in pubs and used them as changing rooms.[57] Collins and Vamplew's study of the ties between pub and early football clubs notes that "many landlords found that it was to their advantage to have a football club attached to their pub and were prepared to make a considerable commitment to its success", sometimes loaning clubs money and offering free food and drinks.[58] As they grew, football clubs would become community institutions with an influence and reputation comparable to or greater than both parish and pub.

The formation of football clubs was a central mechanism for the transformation of the game and its role within British society. Though the governance template of the FA's founding clubs may have been rooted in upper-middle-class associativity, this was appropriated and repurposed accordingly as football became embedded within workplaces, churches, and pubs. To emphasise the phenomenon of football embodying local identity Collins contrasts the itinerant travelling nature of Victorian cricket teams with how football clubs "were symbols of locality, vehicles for civic pride, that placed huge importance of having a home ground of which other clubs would be envious".[59] Localising the game through the proliferation of clubs allowed football to generate deeper participation and identification among the masses. The scale of club formation, described in 1894 as a "mushroom-like growth", even led to an appeal by both of Blackburn's Conservative MPs for a halt in "further applications for assistance to football clubs, having already received over 170".[60] Within a few decades football had spread across the regions and classes of Britain, a transformation which would extend beyond the British Isles as clubs and competitions also took root across the European continent.

The emergence of football clubs across continental Europe reflected an intricate interaction between British influences, local associational cultures, and the diverse social structures of European life around the turn of the twentieth century. Like some British clubs, continental football teams sometimes emerged as offshoots of existing sporting organisations, with such institutions providing existing frameworks into which football could be incorporated. For example, Italy's oldest football club, Genoa CFC, was founded in 1893 primarily as a cricket

[57] Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew, "The Pub, the Drinks Trade and the Early Years of Modern Football," *Sports Historian* 20 no. 1 (2000), 7.
[58] Ibid., 6.
[59] Tony Collins. *Sport in Capitalist Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 50.
[60] "M.P.'s and Football Clubs", *Manchester Evening News,* 5 October 1894, 2.

and athletics club, with its football team of lesser initial significance.[61] Likewise, though officially formed in 1860, TSV 1860 Munich only created a football team in 1899, and continues as a multi-sport club today.[62] Such institutional hybridity illustrates how football was, and continues to be, just one sport among many on the continent, each shaping and influencing the practice and culture of the others.

Continued debates over the founding of the first continental football clubs highlight the undefinable nature of football's early growth. Le Havre Athletic Club is often cited as the first continental club, with claims it was created in 1872 by British Oxbridge graduates who had settled on the Normandy coast. Le Havre still wear a light blue and dark blue kit, reflecting such origins, a colourway they share with Bishop Auckland for the same reason.[63] However, recent studies have indicated Le Havre was actually founded twelve years later, in 1884. Alan Baker's research on amateur sporting and cultural institutions across France until the First World War indicates that "the development of football showed it to have been initially a product of influential English communities", with golf and tennis clubs also formed by expatriates, with the proliferation of French football clubs increasing considerably in the early twentieth century.[64]

However, evidence from *The Boulogne Gazette* indicates that British residents of Boulogne organised a football game there as early as December 1862. Contemporary reports describe how "a football club in Boulogne was organised", with the new club's Chairman, a J. Dixon Brazill, announcing that the club would play matches according to both Rugby and Eton rules at the local cricket ground, with twenty-five players signing up at the inaugural meeting. One such founding member, John Harvey, remarked that "foot ball was really a national game in England, and might be said to be interwoven with the very history of the country".[65]

In the years that followed, other British expatriates continued to establish football clubs across continental Europe, particularly in port cities and commercial centres closely connected to Britain. Late Victorian and Edwardian newspapers reported on the growth of games overseas, particularly conscious of how locals perceived the sports. In 1886, the *Pall Mall Gazette* published a short article titled "How the English Amuse themselves", which detailed how "the

[61] Robert Hastings, "Juve is magic: The anglicisms of Italian football graffiti," *Italian Studies* 39, no. 1 (1984), 91.
[62] Ulrich Hesse-Lichtenberger, *Tor!: the story of German football* (London: WSC Books Limited, 2003), 15.
[63] Charles Parrish, Hongxin Li, and John Nauright, "Association Football," in *Routledge Handbook of Global Sport* ed. John Nauright and Sarah Zipp (London: Routledge, 2020), 20.
[64] Alan Baker. *Amateur Musical Societies and Sports Clubs in Provincial France, 1848-1914: Harmony and Hostility* (London: Springer, 2017), 167.
[65] "The Boulogne Foot Ball Club," *Boulogne Gazette*, 10 December 1862, 3.

English colony in Brussels has lately established a football club, and one of the papers gives the following account of a recent match… many passers-by, noticing the pitiable condition of the players, inquired if there had been an accident. 'No; it is only the English amusing themselves'".[66]

Whether the game was played with Association or Rugby rules is unclear, yet the episode confirms Victorian interest in the spread of sport abroad, framing such confused cross-cultural interactions with humour. The story circulated widely across the British press over the following decades, under headlines such as "Outdoor Sports", "As Others See Us", "The English Amusement", and "The English Amusing Themselves".[67]

By the turn of the twentieth century, football had moved beyond expatriate circles, with clubs formed across the continent through schools, universities, workplaces, military units, and a plethora of other social institutions. In 1955, Willy Meisl reflected upon the growth of football beyond Britain across the previous century:

> "Development followed practically the same pattern everywhere. A few Britons working, sailing, travelling abroad began to play their game. If there were not enough of them, a few local friends were invited and encouraged. In a very short time a considerable number of local lads were bitten by the soccer bug. It was the most logical development that the British founders of sports clubs abroad quickly became an ever more dwindling minority. The greater the success of their rapidly expanding clubs, the less could they and their offspring hope to supply their needs, both as players and new talent and as finances were concerned. Nearly all of them proved proper sports, delighted with the marvellous success of their ideas and far too devoted to their ideal to withdraw, because no longer were room for all of them in the club's first eleven. Many of them carried on in an administrative capacity, as referees, officials, committee members or simply as fans."[68]

Meisl captured the initial but declining significance of the British abroad as football grew in popularity among native communities. Regional case studies of football's emergence and growth reveal both the diversities and communalities of football club formation across the continent. The development of football clubs in France further underlines the diversity of club

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[66] "How the English Amuse themselves", *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 May 1886, 14.
[67] "Outdoor Sports," *Boston Guardian*, 15 May 1886; "As Others See Us," *Perthshire Advertiser*, 26 November 1900, 4; "An English Amusement," *Millom Gazette*, 9 September 1904, 4; "The English Amusing Themselves," *Pearson's Weekly*, 6 January 1919, 6.
[68] Willy Meisl, *Soccer Revolution* (London: Sportsman's Book Club, 1956), 55.

foundations, with French clubs emerging variously through industrialisation, education, religious institutions, and political organisation.[69]

Holt's analysis of early French sport indicates that "rural traditions were either marginalised or modernised, German gymnastics declined from its fin-de-siècle peak, whilst football and rugby clubs spread according to regional preference across the country", with association football preferred to rugby in the industrial north.[70] Such processes indicate how the spread of football across France was shaped by local, regional, social and political priorities, rather than a direct one-dimensional adoption from British settlers.

Early Spanish clubs were formed in the late nineteenth century by British incomers and Spaniards who had studied in Britain, though the elite associations of the sport faded as it became increasingly popular and institutionalised via teaching in Spanish schools as part of the regenerationist movement.[71] This evolution of football from a pastime of the privileged to a practice of the masses can be traced elsewhere.

Also in the late nineteenth century, football clubs were created across Germany, particularly in industrialised regions where the traditions of student associations shaped their form. Christiane Eisenberg outlines how some of Germany's first football clubs adopted student uniforms, traditions, and even names of exclusive student societies, with the prefixes 'Borussia' or 'Alemannia' originating from such groups.[72] The rate of growth of German club formation was rapid, increasing from two hundred registered clubs in 1904 to over two thousand by 1914, with such propagation shaping the social composition and significance of the sport.[73] Similar patterns can be observed across Central and Eastern Europe, with football's early institutional base formed from urban middle classes around industrial centres. Such composition was also shaped by ethnic and religious diversities and geographies, with distinct Jewish clubs emerging, often associated with political and Zionist causes.[74]

Though the patterns of football's early continental growth were varied, some trends can be identified. Early clubs were well connected in terms of both their membership and geography,

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[69] Baker. *Amateur Musical Societies,* 183.
[70] Richard Holt, "Sport, the French, and the Third Republic," *Modern & Contemporary France,* 6, no. 3 (1998), 297.
[71] Xavier Torrebadella-Flix, Javier Olivera-Betrán and Mireia M. Bou, "The Origins of Football in Spain: From the First Press Appearance to the Constitution of the First Clubs," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 7-8 (2017), 487.
[72] Christiane Eisenberg, "Football in Germany: beginnings, 1890–1914," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 8, no. 2 (1991), 210.
[73] Ibid., 205.
[74] Emanuel Józefacki, "The Origin of Football in Poland's Lublin Province, 1903–1922," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 38, no. 6 (2021), 639.

composed of middle-class men located in urban industrialised centres. Over time, increased participation in the sport shifted the game from elite recreational activity to mass spectator sport, just as had occurred in Britain. The founding and growth of these clubs was inseparable from broader cultural processes, be they growing associativity, widening education, and revolutions in transportation. By the beginning of the twentieth century, football clubs existed across the European continent. The widespread presence of the sport demanded new sporting institutional innovations, the creation of national and supranational associations and competitions.

Institutionalism

The institutionalisation of football may have begun with the establishment of the FA in 1863, but this was only the commencement of an ongoing process of organisational consolidation within Britain and beyond. Over the following decades, governance structures extended across the British Isles. The Scottish Football Association was founded in 1873, with the Football Association of Wales following in 1876, and the Irish Football Association in 1880.

The structures allowed for the arrangement of fixtures between the four nations, which increased in regularity following the first official encounter between Scotland and England in November 1872. Yet even before this point, football had been played across the two nations, intersecting with their political elite. In 1870, an unofficial England versus Scotland representative match featured two Liberal MPs, John Wingfield Malcolm and William Henry Gladstone, both playing for the Scottish side.[75] Such parliamentary participation signalled the interests of the governing classes in such encounters, with new political meanings prescribed to international football as it developed into a mass spectacle across Britain and Europe.

The British Home Championship began in 1884, bringing together the four home nations into an annual tournament, grounded in competitive cooperation. International matches were not limited to the men's game. During the Victorian period, a series of matches between English and Scottish women were arranged, the first taking place in Edinburgh in 1881.[76] Women's football developed outside the structures of official governance, so such fixtures were not recognised by the football associations. It was not until 1972, when England faced Scotland in Ravenscraig, that the first official England women's international match was played.[77]

[75] Paul Brown, *The Victorian Football Miscellany* (London: Goal-post, 2013), 47.
[76] Jessica Macbeth, "Women's football in Scotland: an historical overview," in *Women, Football and Europe: Histories, Equity and Experiences* ed. Sheila Scranton and Jonathan Magee (Oxford: Meyer & Meyer, 2007), 17.
[77] Ibid.

At a Manchester meeting of the home nations' football associations in 1882, it was agreed to form the International Football Association Board (IFAB) to standardise rules between the associations, with IFAB first meeting in 1886. Since then, IFAB has met annually, except for wartime interruptions, to discuss and decide rule changes, governing the laws of the game while it spread across the world.

The founding of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in Paris on 21 May 1904, marked the emergence of a different international institutional logic. Whereas IFAB represented the legitimacy of origin, FIFA would assert the legitimacy of wider international coordination. FIFA's founding members were all from Western Europe: France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Though not officially a founding member, Germany joined later that day. The home nations refused to join FIFA initially, though each did become a member by 1911.

Robert Guérin, a French football administrator, became the organisation's inaugural president. Though Guérin successfully established a unified framework for international football competition, his tenure as president was short-lived.[78] In 1906, Englishman Daniel Burley Woolfall, former FA Secretary, succeeded Guérin to become the second president of FIFA upon England's joining of the organisation. Woolfall's ascension to the presidency was a marker of England's desire to assert its influence within world football, and a sign that FIFA was understood to be the most appropriate vehicle for such influence. Paul Dietschy articulates how football administrators from across Europe held different preferences regarding the holding of international competition, though it was French Anglophiles, in the form of Jules Rimet and Henri Delaunay, who proved most successful in building lasting co-operation and competition.[79] French sporting administrators and networks would prove crucial to the international institutionalism of sport, also supporting the creation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and UEFA.[80] Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson argue that the international fixtures and competition encouraged by FIFA enabled a "particularisation of universalism", with national identities and rivalries expressed within new global frameworks.[81]

[78] Alan Tomlinson, "FIFA and the men who made it," *Soccer & Society* 1, no. 1 (2000), 55.
[79] Paul Dietschy. "French Sport: Caught Between Universalism and Exceptionalism," *European Review* 19, no. 4 (2011), 513.
[80] Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young "Culture, politics, and spectacle in the global sports event: An introduction," *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, politics, and spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 4.
[81] Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, "The Globalization of Football: a Study in the Glocalization of the 'Serious Life'," *The British Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 4 (2004), 547.

Matthew Taylor asserts that “the growth of FIFA, the world governing body, and its World Cup competition both reflected and stimulated the global spread of football”.[82] The inclusion of football in the 1908 London Olympics marked the sport's first major international competition that FIFA recognised. According to Paul Dietschy, FIFA’s Olympic football tournaments helped popularise the sport globally, allowing nations to compete on a level playing field and providing a platform for smaller countries to achieve international recognition.[83] The creation of the FIFA World Cup in 1930 marked a further shift in authority away from British control and toward global governance, a theme explored in Chapter Five.

By 1914, FIFA’s membership had expanded to include fourteen continental associations, along with all four home nations, and five more from the rest of the world: Argentina, Chile, the United States, Canada, and South Africa, reflecting the formal globalisation of the sport by the outbreak of the First World War.

FIFA was admitted to IFAB in 1913, underlining the changing balance of footballing power, with the expanding international community ascending to the role of collaborative partner in rule-making. However, FIFA was initially just an observing member of IFAB, only granted a vote on rule changes in 1920, with relations remaining uneasy between the FA and FIFA. Beck outlines these fluctuating tensions, with the FA having joined FIFA late in 1906, then leaving in 1920 through post-war antagonisms, rejoining in 1924, leaving in 1928 over an amateurism dispute, and finally rejoining for good in 1946.[84]

By the early twentieth century, football was governed within and across Britain and the continent, with clubs, national associations, FIFA, and IFAB ordering participation in the game. These structures would become increasingly tested as football grew, and encountered further forces of change, be they commercialisation, war, or political upheaval.

Commercialisation

By the early twentieth century, British football had emerged as a central institution of modern mass society. Urbanisation, the expansion of leisure time, new media technologies, and increased discretionary income had ushered in a new era of consumer culture, with football a commercial spectacle embedded within the economic fabric of popular entertainment. As

[82] Taylor, “The Global Spread,” 192.
[83] Paul Dietschy, “Making Football Global? FIFA, Europe, and the non-European football world, 1912–74”, *Journal of Global History* 8, no. 2 (2013), 284.
[84] Peter Beck, “Going to war, peaceful co-existence or virtual membership? British football and FIFA, 1928–46,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17, no. 1 (2000), 113.

F.M.L. Thompson observes, the late nineteenth century witnessed the "commercialisation of popular entertainment and leisure", with football forming part of this transformation.[85]

Collins notes that within a generation of the FA's founding, the sport would "transmogrify into a commercial juggernaut that commanded the attention of millions. And just when people thought it could not become any more popular, its appeal expanded yet further. Like the railways in the 1830s or the internet in the 2000s, the normally slow alchemy of historical change was compressed into a few short years, transforming the rocks of public school football into the diamonds of mass spectator sport".[86]

The professional English Football League (EFL), founded in 1888 with twelve clubs from the industrial north-west and midlands, saw substantial growth by the early 20th century. The Second Division of the EFL had been created in 1892, with the introduction of a Third Division coming in 1920 and its subsequent division into North and South sections in 1921, reflecting the expanding interest in football beyond its initial heartlands. The financial and emotional investment of the public intensified as spectatorship grew. The development of supporter culture is evidenced in a comical line from a 1902 *Labour Leader* article claiming that "a medical man has noticed that September is always productive of a large number of cases of insanity, and this he connects with the opening of the football season".[87]

The increased enthusiasm and obsession with football were enabled and sustained through a growing mass media. Increasing literacy and cheap print culture saw reporting on football become a staple feature of British newspapers. David Vincent's study of Victorian print culture illustrates how football "exploited and in turn sustained popular sporting journalism in the form of supplements to Saturday papers, extensive coverage in the cheap Sundays, and nationally circulating weeklies… What brought them together was the enlarged reading public, attuned to the discipline and regularity of organised sport, and prepared to participate in it through the medium of the printed word".[88] Newspaper coverage of football expanded further in the Edwardian period, becoming a fixture of column inches, with football sitting alongside crime, gossip, fashion, and gardening advice, as a facet of everyday modernity.[89] Such mediation of sporting events helped entrench football customs within British culture. Erika Rappaport outlines how, despite Edwardian concerns over the importation of consumer culture from

[85] F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: a Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 288.
[86] Collins, *How Football Began*, 39.
[87] "Here and There," *Labour Leader*, 4 October 1902, 8.
[88] David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 190.
[89] José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870-1914* (London: Penguin, 1994), 246.

France and America, such apprehensions were softened when it came to the consumption of sport, with football particularly able to represent and promote national and British identities.[90]

The gradual emergence of radio broadcasting in the 1920s reformed how football was consumed by the public, enabling fans to follow matches live without being physically present.[91] The first televised football match came in 1937, a friendly between Arsenal's first team and their reserves, broadcast by the BBC using just two cameras, yet signalling the direction of travel for broadcast football.[92] By the interwar period, football existed simultaneously as a gate-based entertainment economy and a mediated product.

The commercialisation of British football was not only visible in increased media coverage but also in the changing landscapes and geographies of the game. Though the football clubs of London had been slow to professionalise, by 1921 eleven clubs from the capital were competing in the English Football League, with the construction of Wembley Stadium in 1923 underlining the significance of football in London and national culture.[93] Other new grand stadiums across Britain helped to transform football matches into events capable of accommodating and profiting from expanding crowds.

Such growth of the football industry was not the result of a deregulated open market. Controls over the labour of football were initiated to ensure stability and competitive balance, with the maximum wage introduced in 1901, and the retain-and-transfer system limiting player mobility. Professional football players formed the Players' Union, later the PFA, in 1907, demonstrating how industrial forces and tensions of the period were part of the game. The first decade of the twentieth century also saw the founding of the Referees' Association, created in 1908, and the formation of early supporters' clubs, both indicating how different participants of the game were seeking to assert and protect their influence over the sport.

Commercial success was uneven, often driven by disparities in club leadership, and the increased occurrence of scandals, with the Billy Meredith bribery case of 1905 revealing the complications of an increasingly commercial game which required policing.[94] Other social fault lines of football became exposed, with crowd violence and sectarianism emerging in Glasgow

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[90] Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 149.
[91] Mike Huggins, "BBC radio and sport 1922–39," *Contemporary British History* 21, no. 4 (2007), 504.
[92] Richard Haynes, "A pageant of sound and vision: football's relationship with television, 1936–60," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 15, no. 1 (1998), 213.
[93] Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and its People* (London: Bodley Head, 2016), 218.
[94] Gary James, *The Emergence of Footballing Cultures: Manchester, 1840-1919* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 206.

and Belfast, as sport intersected with entrenched religious and political divides. The introduction of the football pools in the 1920s saw gambling and football build what would become a long and powerful association. Indeed, by the 1930s, gambling on football became significantly more popular than watching it in person, with bettors reportedly outnumbering spectators by sixteen to one.[95]

J.B. Priestley's 1934 travel account, *English Journey,* offers insight into the paradoxes of British football between the wars. The text, which has been described as "a study of England and the English character", includes no mention of rugby, only two references to cricket, but frequently addresses communities fixated on football.[96] In Bristol Priestley describes how "twenty-five thousand members of his class, here in the city, attend a football match and pay their shilling each".[97] In County Durham Priestley listens to men "boast about beer, women, football, whippets, fighting, and various other things".[98] In Middlesbrough, Priestley described the "inhabitants, whose chief passions, we were always told, were for beer and football. It is a dismal town, even with beer and football".[99]

Yet Priestley reserves his sharpest critique of football for this visit to Nottingham. While attending the Nottingham Forest versus Notts County derby at the City Ground, Priestley opines on the past, present and future of the game:

> "Nearly everything possible has been done to spoil this game: the heavy financial interests; the absurd transfer and player selling system; the lack of any birth or residential qualification for the players; the betting and coupon competitions; the absurd publicity given to every feature of it by the Press; the monstrous partisanship of the crowds (with their idiotic cries of "Play the game, Ref." when any decision against their side has been given); but the fact remains that it is not yet spoilt, and it has gone out and conquered the world… It has yet to be proved to me that these men out of the dingy side-streets ever did anything better with their free time and their shillings. I never see them at a match without disliking their stupid partisanship, their dogmatism that has no foundation in knowledge of the game, the whole catcalling idiocy"[100]

[95] Harold James Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989), 281.
[96] John Baxendale, *Priestley's England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 53
[97] J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 30.
[98] Ibid., 329.
[99] Ibid., 340.
[100] Ibid., 144.

Priestley's analysis underscores the complex relationship between football and its followers, with deep emotional meanings prescribed to games despite the social problems they created. While Priestley castigated the 'stupid partisanship' and 'catcalling idiocy' of crowds, he did recognise football's capacity to elicit joy, despair, and triumph in those immersed in its drama. This conception of football as such a spectacle, both commercially successful and emotionally authentic, would resonate across generations and nations, as the game stretched across the world and into the future.

The commercialisation and professionalisation of football across continental Europe followed a far less uniform trajectory than Britain, with political and social traditions overseas shaping how new football economies developed. Wray Vamplew notes that European sporting cultures developed within distinct regional frameworks, with British sport relying on private organisations and limited state intervention, whereas German sporting culture was informed by militaristic physical culture, in Scandinavia models emphasised individual movement and aesthetics, and Soviet sport evolved around a powerful state apparatus.[101] These contrasting traditions helped football adapt to local conditions, facilitating its economic transformations.

Football's success on the continent lay in its embedding within diverse communities. Alan Baker's research on provincial French football highlights that "manual workers comprised 26% of the committees of football clubs in the arrondissements of Rouen and Le Havre between 1894 and 1939, white-collar workers 23% and retailers (including café owners) 16%".[102] Such figures indicate that, though football was initially shaped by the influence of British expatriates and upper-middle-class communities, the practice of football broadened socially, reflecting the widespread adoption of football in continental Europe.

The interwar period in Europe witnessed the beginning of football's professionalisation on the continent, with several countries taking decisive steps towards establishing fully professional leagues and national teams. This occurred first in Austria in 1924, with Czechoslovakia following in 1925, and Hungary in 1926.[103] Italy adopted the Charter of Viareggio in 1926, reorganising Italian football and beginning the transition to professionalism.[104] Similarly, in Spain and France, football became professional in 1926 and 1932, respectively, further

[101] Wray Vamplew, "Industrialisation and Sport", in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 133.
[102] Baker, *Amateur Musical Societies,* 221.
[103] Gyozo Molnar, "Hungarian football: a socio-historical overview," *Sport in History* 27, no. 2 (2007), 300.
[104] Philippe Vonnard and Grégory Quin, "Jules Rimet: FIFA's Missionary President," in *Global Sport Leaders: A Biographical Analysis of International Sport Management*, ed. Emmanuel Bayle and Patrick Claystres (London: Palgrave, 2018), 94.

solidifying the trend towards professionalism across Europe.[105] These developments reflected the growing appeal of football as commercial entertainment, capable of drawing large crowds and media attention.

This change would alter the practice of football, reshaping labour patterns and club identities. Prior to professionalisation, French club Racing Club Lens drew its players from local French men, British expatriates, and Polish miners working in the area; however, professionalisation brought in migrant professional players from Hungary and Austria, evidence of a burgeoning international labour market of footballers.[106] Antonio Missiroli's history of European football integration emphasises the professionalisation of football coaches, who were also part of a growing international labour market, with Central European coaches spreading their 'Danubian' methods across the continent, at a time when British footballing institutions were wary of professional management and tactical methods.[107]

David Goldblatt summarises this development, outlining how "in the 1920s and 1930s, in its leading zones, European football industrialized, either in the form of commercialization and professionalization, or it had been taken over by an authoritarian state".[108] Prior to the Second World War, football in both the Soviet Union and Germany remained amateur due to ideological motivations. Soviet society deemed professional sport incompatible with socialist ideology, so football there was organised around workplaces, trade unions, and state institutions, emphasising collective participation instead of individual financial return. How British football engaged with Soviet football will be examined further within Chapter Six.

In fascist Germany, longstanding strong amateur traditions and a militarising state saw football recognised as a tool of social mobilisation rather than an industry. Furthermore, the decentralised nature of German football, characterised by numerous regional associations and leagues, hindered the establishment of professional national competitions. The experience of British teams touring Nazi Germany explores these tensions in Chapter Seven.

From Britain's industrial towns and Central European cities, to the ideologically framed systems of fascist Germany and the Soviet Union, football's commercial transformation was never linear or uniform, but reflected competing national and ideological models operating

[105] Andrew McFarland, "La Furia of '29: International Friendlies and Triumph During Historical Transition in Spain," *Soccer & Society* 23, no. 8 (2022), 1131.
[106] Marion Fontaine, "Football, Migration, and Coalmining in Northern France, 1920s-1980s," *International Review of Social History* 60, no. S23 (2015), 263.
[107] Antonio Missiroli, "European Football Cultures and their Integration: The 'Short' Twentieth Century," *Sport in Society* 5, no. 1 (2002), 8.
[108] Goldblatt, *The Ball*, 24

under the pressures of modern mass society. By the interwar period, the game existed as simultaneous forms, part industry, part spectacle, part ritual. The growth of the game exposed tensions over class, commerce, and control, while also consolidating national and international cultural forms. These dynamics shaped how British and continental footballing actors understood themselves and one another, framing their subsequent encounters within the increasingly connected European sporting landscape.

Conclusion

By the outbreak of the Second World War, football was widely played across Britain and the continent under shared regulatory frameworks, yet the sport propagated within varied social and political forms. Clubs, leagues, and associations organised participation under a common rule book, but the meanings of the game diverged according to both the traditions of British origin, and the varied patterns of continental innovation.

Chapter Two: Tours 1890-1914

Introduction

"The actual populations of these different countries carried on without clash or hatred an international life of commerce, industry, and intellectual interchange in social ideas in literature, science, education, and even sport, which was beyond comparison more vivid and intimate than the national life in any country of Europe one hundred years ago. There never has been, within a shorter period than a century, so highly organised an intra-national life and consciousness in any country of the Western world as the international life of Europe before the first of last August."

George Herbert Mead, "The Psychological Bases for Internationalism," 1915.[1]

George Herbert Mead's wartime reflections upon the 'international life' of Europe offer a useful starting point for the consideration of football tours prior to the First World War. During the decades building up to the war, commodities, ideas, and people increasingly moved across borders, with sport a particularly visible demonstration of this cultural exchange. As explored in the previous chapter, new networks of commerce, communications, and voluntary associations had been formed by the late nineteenth century, with European societies increasingly bound by such dynamics. Glenda Sluga has shown how the 1890s witnessed a swift propagation of international organisations, from communications unions and public health associations to humanitarian institutions and sporting organisations.[2] The formation and growth of such societies helped embed transnational cooperation within everyday social experience, be that work or leisure, with football tours emerging among this expanding associational world. The trips undertaken by British clubs and representative teams to the European continent were part of this developing culture of international mobility, connecting associations and communities through public encounters.

Such journeys unfolded amid wider transformations of international travel, changing how Europeans experienced distance and time. Marjorie Morgan has detailed how Queen Victoria's reign coincided with a profound reconfiguration of international mobility, with the era becoming a 'travelling age', in which the "democratization of travel" made continental trips

[1] George Herbert Mead, "The Psychological Bases for Internationalism," *Survey* 33, no. 1 (1915), 605.
[2] Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 13.

"*passé* and taken for granted among the aristocracy and middle class".[3] Expanding opportunities for mobility came through improved railways, steamship routes, and new tourist services, all increasing the convenience of travel.[4] Stephen Kern argues that the decades leading to 1914 saw a reconfiguration of temporal and spatial consciousness, as such modernisations "brought the voyage to the masses as a denatured experience, stripped of the possibility of discovery… the modern tourist was locked into a collective consciousness of the group and saw everything passively, according to a preconceived itinerary that excluded the possibility of error and adventure".[5] Such analysis applies acutely to football tours, with these visits dependent upon the technological transformations which altered travel from elite individual voyage to organised form of collective tourism, structured around fixed itineraries and shared experience.

This expansion of mobility alone does not explain why sport became a feature of such journeys. As John Lowerson shows, late-Victorian and Edwardian middle-class culture increasingly treated organised sport as a marker of national character, while also worrying that cross-border competition and commercial entanglement would corrode the very "Englishness" that sport was supposed to display.[6] Lowerson notes that, "because sport was increasingly tied up with business… it was felt to lack risk and to have departed from its essential Englishness," and that international competition was often suspected as a source of "impurity," not least because it exposed conflicts over amateur status and the harmonisation of rules across national contexts.[7]

The material and ideological conditions of football tours developed in tandem, with expanding travel networks creating the physical routes for travel, while middle-class sporting discourse furnished the language through which these journeys were made intelligible, as recreation, civic representation, and, at times, cultural mission. Ambitious infrastructure schemes registered this tightening relationship between Britain and the continent in especially concrete form. The proposed Channel Tunnel of the 1880s, notably pursued more enthusiastically by French advocates than British authorities wary of continental entanglement, exemplified how far the nations could be brought together through technological progress and commercial

[3] Marjorie Morgan. *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001), 13.
[4] James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 79.
[5] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 352.
[6] John Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes, 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 157.
[7] Ibid.

interest.[8] Though the tunnel was unrealised, the fact it was attempted signalled growing assumptions that the channel was shifting from protective barrier to a corridor of exchange. From matches in stadiums to sightseeing excursions and speeches of goodwill, both the competition and sociability of football tours can be understood as new forms of this managed mobility, that rendered Europe progressively accessible, interconnected, and socially legible. Mead recognised the significance of cross-cultural exchanges, emphasising that international business, research, and 'even sport', had become dimensions of a newly interconnected continent. Modern sports became woven into modern international life, with international football tours a pertinent case for the study of the new networks which linked people and communities across Europe's borders.

The touring of British football clubs between 1890 and 1914 was thus a new and evolving phenomenon. Though tours were initially undertaken as visibly elite and amateur excursions, imbued with the practices of gentlemanly travel culture, across a quarter of a century, they began to feature increasingly commercialised features as a 'football industry' emerged.[9] As Matthew Taylor has observed, sporting tours habitually trailed similar circuits of travel as theatrical companies and travelling entertainers, all drawing upon established commercial and promotional networks.[10] Broader shifts from elite cultural practice to mass leisure consumption were visible in the international entertainment economy of the late Victorian and Edwardian world. Indeed, Taylor emphasises that "athletic tours were invariably business ventures as much as (and often more than) they were missionary expeditions; the circuits often built upon prior trading routes and traced established migratory paths".[11]

Recent scholarship has begun to reframe the significance of touring within the structural history of British football. Peter Beck has outlined how the growth of touring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was contingent upon the FA's approving of clubs playing during the 'close season'.[12] Amateur clubs had been able to travel during the Easter period, within the permitted football calendar, whereas professional Football League clubs were unable to venture overseas as their league and cup commitments occupied the season window. The relaxation of travel during the close season following an FA rule change in 1903

[8] Richard Mullen and James Munson. *The Smell of the Continent: the British discover Europe 1814-1914* (London: Macmillan, 2009), 161.
[9] John Hutchinson, *Football Industry: The Early Years of the Professional Game* (Glasgow: Richard Drew, 1981), 20.
[10] Taylor, *World of Sport, 71.*
[11] Ibid.
[12] Peter Beck, "'Chapter 3: The winter game', the close season, and foreign tours, the 1890s," *Soccer & Society* 26, no. 7 (2025), 1105.

enabled a slow but steady rise in the number of professional clubs touring, transforming the process of football travel.[13]

However, institutional regulation does not solely explain the geography, character, and importance of these early journeys. Football clubs, both amateur and professional, exercised agency in deciding where to travel, who to play, and how to balance sporting, leisure, and commercial concerns. McDowell's research on Scottish football clubs' early tours explores both the logistical intricacies of tours, as well as their diplomatic and political dimensions, and thus is a valuable template for examining teams from throughout the British Isles across a longer period.[14] Extending this perspective over a broader body of evidence reveals touring to have been a key mechanism and manifestation of football's commercial transformation, tracing a shift from amateur holiday to profit-seeking circuits, with politics gradually permeating their practice.

The emergence of football tours as initial informal encounters, and their development into regulated international relationships, was enabled by improved travel infrastructure, though, while becoming more accessible, continental travel was continually stratified according to class.[15] With regard to sport, such stratification intersected with contestations over amateurism and professionalism. Matthew Llewellyn and John Gleaves's study of amateurism's contradictions highlights that "there was never a clearcut and homogenous definition or universal comprehension of an amateur; it meant different things to different people in various local, regional, national, and international contexts".[16] Duncan Stone's work likewise addresses the confused meanings of both amateurism and professionalism, with travel a particular area of ambiguity over the receipt of hospitality and expenses, blurring the boundaries between moral virtue and commercial practice.[17] Football tours are illuminating cases to examine the tensions between elite leisure culture, amateur ideology, and the evolving football industry, as issues of gate receipts, guarantees, and institutional oversight had to be negotiated.

[13] Peter Beck, "Chapter 4: The Football Association changes direction on foreign tours, the 1900s," *Soccer & Society* 26, no. 7 (2025), 1129.
[14] McDowell, "To Cross the Skager," 245.
[15] Buzard, *The Beaten Track,* 79.
[16] Matthew P. Llewellyn and John Gleaves, "A Universal Dilemma: The British Sporting Life and the Complex, Contested, and Contradictory State of Amateurism," *Journal of Sport History* 41, No. 1 (2014), 96.
[17] Duncan Stone, "Deconstructing the Gentleman Amateur," *Cultural and Social History* 18, no. 3 (2021), 327.

Studies of sporting tours prior to World War One have tended to focus on the United States and American sports, particularly baseball.[18] The limited research on British contexts has examined imperial sporting circuits, investigating cricket and rugby tours to South Africa and Australasia, with such travel explicitly shaped by colonial relations.[19] Association football tours of the continent naturally followed different contours and contexts, unfolding within nations and spaces less characterised by imperial hierarchies than by emergent mass nationalisms and the commercialisation of leisure culture.

Beck's recent intervention relocates touring within football's organisational history, illustrating how governing bodies shaped, and were themselves shaped by, overseas travel.[20] Yet, understanding of this process is incomplete, leaving the history of continental touring comparatively under-theorised. Investigating the beginnings of touring as a practice, therefore, illuminates how football's early internationalisation unfolded and set the foundations for a global sporting culture which continues to evolve today. The research compiled in this chapter considers football tours as much more than a series of uncompetitive fixtures, but instead as examples of modern mobility, embedded within the cultural transformations of the Belle Époque. As well as discussing the matches played on tours, attention is also given to the social rituals surrounding them: the crowds, banquets, royal patronage, press coverage, and the language used to describe and define tours.

The structure of this chapter reflects the transformation under investigation, beginning with amateur tours of the 1890s, when overseas travel was embedded in elite social networks. The beginnings of representative national team tours are then explored, with football's diplomatic dimensions increasingly apparent. Subsequent sections consider the rise of professional touring in the early twentieth century, examining both commercial and regulatory interests which enabled these journeys. The chapter ends with a focus on the challenge of institutional authority exemplified by the National Football Agency's unsuccessful 1905 tour, before situating the surge of touring between 1912 and 1914 against the abrupt rupture of war.

Football tours were a central mechanism of football's early internationalisation. Across a quarter of a century, football travel shifted from gentlemanly amateur activity to commercialised circuits, with British sporting sovereignty increasingly uneasy, amidst an

[18] Daniel Bloyce, "'Glorious Rounders': The American Baseball Invasion of England in Two World Wars - Unappealing American Exceptionalism," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 4 (2008), 387; Daniel Bloyce, "'Just not cricket': baseball in England, 1874–1900," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 14, no. 2 (1997), 207.
[19] Nicolas Lewis and Gordon Winder, "Sporting narratives and globalization: Making links between the All Black tours of 1905 and 2005," *New Zealand Geographer* 63, no. 3 (2007), 202.
[20] Peter Beck, "Chapter 3," 1106-1107.

evolving landscape of continental rivals that challenged the authority and supremacy of the game's founders.

Amateur Tours

Beck situates foreign tours within a longer tradition of domestic mobility, noting how the "1870s and 1880s saw a substantial increase in the number of 'wandering clubs' touring across Britain," while even into the 1890s, London amateur sides "scattered themselves over all parts of the country".[21] These early British Isles tours followed many of the logistical and cultural practices that would characterise later continental tours, using railway travel and steamships, hosted by local civic officials and bringing together contrasting forms of play. Continental touring thus can be considered an extension and alteration of earlier sporting exchange across Britain's own archipelago.

The earliest excursions of British football teams to continental Europe remain somewhat shrouded by uncertain records, indicating the informal character of nascent international sporting contact. In the 1930s, FA Secretary Frederick Wall claimed that the University of Oxford's football team was the first to venture overseas, supposedly playing in Germany in 1875.[22] Beck has questioned this assertion, suggesting it stems from confusion with Oxford University's better-documented tour of 1899, illustrating the difficulties historians face when reconstructing football's earliest transnational encounters.[23]

However, some reports from 1875 indicate that a football match was played in Germany that year. In November 1875, the English magazine *Field* described a "Germany vs The World" match in the Prussian city of Lüneburg, with the 'World' side, reportedly comprised of English, Russian, and Australian players, claiming victory.[24] The game was depicted as "hard-contested" and well attended despite the freezing conditions: "though the thermometer was only one degree above freezing point, many ladies came to look on".[25] Such evidence hints at an embryonic period of international football, when informal, cross-border matches prefigured the organised tours that British clubs would later undertake. These scattered matches, likely involving groups of students, workers, and ad hoc teams, reflect the early, unstructured nature

[21] Peter Beck, "Chapter 2: Raising serious questions about the close season," *Soccer & Society* 26, no. 7 (2025), 1089.
[22] Frederick Wall, *Fifty Years of Football: 1884-1934* (Cleethorpes: Soccer Books, 2006), 183.
[23] Beck, "Chapter 2," 1089.
[24] "Football in Germany," *Field*, 6 November 1875, 35.
[25] Ibid.

of football's international exchange. Yet without further corroborating archival material, these remain speculative notes in the sport's early history.

Given such paucity of further reliable evidence of the 1875 encounter, a more certain starting point for continental tours is Clapton F.C.'s visit to Antwerp in 1890.[26] Clapton's emphatic 8-1 victory against an unnamed Belgian side showed the pronounced disparity between nineteenth-century British teams and their continental counterparts, a dynamic that would define these pioneering encounters.[27]

There is no apparent evidence of British clubs travelling abroad in 1891, with the next recorded match being between Harwich and Parkeston FC and Antwerp FC in November 1892.[28] Antwerp then visited England to play Harwich and Parkeston a month later, a match today described as "the first-ever meeting of an English team and a continental European team on English soil", helping establish a pattern of reciprocal exchange that would become central to early international football.[29] Buoyed by a 14-0 aggregate scoreline across the two matches, Harwich and Parkeston returned to the continent to play Sparta Rotterdam in the spring of 1893, and for a rematch against Antwerp FC in December that year, winning these matches 8-0 and 9-0 respectively.[30] These fixtures indicate how amateur clubs began to transform isolated encounters into repeatable circuits of travel, embedding football within emerging transnational sporting networks and calendars.

In 2017, to mark the club's 140th anniversary and the 125th anniversary of their pioneering continental trip, Harwich and Parkeston organised a rematch against Antwerp, now called Royal Antwerp Pioneers. In promoting the event, the club reiterated its claim to another early milestone, asserting that its 1893 steamship journey to face Sparta Rotterdam constituted the first match between an English and a Dutch side.[31] A modern rematch with Sparta did not materialise, reflecting the divergent trajectories of the two clubs, with Harwich and Parkeston an English non-League side while Sparta Rotterdam now compete at the professional elite level. Nevertheless, the very act of commemoration illustrates how such encounters have

[26] Beck, "Chapter Two," 1089.
[27] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[28] Ibid.
[29] Harwich and Parkeston, "History", *Harwich and Parkeston*, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.harwichandparkeston.com/a/history-9207.html
[30] Harwich and Manningtree Standard, "Re-match marks 140th anniversary of club," *Harwich and Manningtree Standard*, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.harwichandmanningtreestandard.co.uk/news/15448628.re-match-marks-140th-anniversary-of-club/
[31] Ibid.

been retrospectively framed as foundational moments within football's international history, revealing the enduring symbolic value attached to early touring narratives.

In the wider context of sporting travel, football tours were far from exceptional. By the late nineteenth-century, there were numerous cases of athletes travelling along imperial and commercial lines through new circuits of leisure. In addition to cricket and rugby tours throughout the British Empire, there are other observable cases of British sportsmen travelling to the continent, though to a more limited extent. Anne Marie Waser's study of tennis in France notes how the sport was introduced by vacationing English upper classes across the French Riviera and Norman coast, establishing courts and clubs in France during the 1880s.[32]

Further examples illustrate how some British sportsmen travelled to the continent specifically to enter new sporting events. English rowers competed at the Paris Regatta of 1859, winning all three events, reportedly making a "strong, even John Bullish" appearance.[33] These competitors were amateurs, personally funding their travels, though they could win prizes for achieving success.

The case of British ice skaters travelling to the Netherlands in the 1880s further reveals the fluid boundaries between amateur and professional early sports travel. In 1885, professional English skater James 'Fish' Smart competed alongside amateur British skaters in a Dutch competition.[34] Reports of the visit reveal that one of the amateur skaters, Charles Goodman Tebbutt, had refused to accept the fifty-pound prize if he won, in order to maintain his amateur status.[35] In the years that followed, more British skaters returned to the Netherlands to compete in further events, demonstrating some of the earliest forms of sporting internationalism between Britain and the continent.[36] These journeys established practical and cultural precedents: athletes travelled along established railway corridors and steamship routes, relying upon the same leisure networks that football clubs would soon adopt.

By the early 1890s, association football began to occupy these routes with increasing frequency. 1893 saw an evident increase in clubs touring. Clapton and Harwich & Parkeston returned to Antwerp, with Marylebone FC and the University of Cambridge F.C. also playing in Belgium that year.[37] In 1894, at least nine English clubs toured, with these teams arranging

[32] Anne Marie Waser, "Tennis in France, 1880–1930," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 13, no. 2 (1996), 166.
[33] "The Paris Regatta," *Western Daily Press*, 13 June 1859, 3.
[34] Enid Porter, "Fen Skating," *Folk Life* 7, no. 1 (1969), 54.
[35] "English Skaters in Holland," *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 1885, 3.
[36] "Departure of the English Skaters," *Sporting Life*, 19 January 1888, 3.
[37] García, "British and Irish Clubs".

multiple fixtures abroad rather than single exhibition matches.[38] These itineraries reflect the growing organisational confidence of amateur teams and the increasing willingness of continental hosts to stage extended programmes of football entertainment.

Early results generally favoured the visitors. Old Westminster's 1894 tour of Belgium yielded four victories, the closest scoreline being a 4-1 victory over FC Liegois, though a match report of this game noted that it was "vigorously contested", suggesting some closing of the competitive gap.[39] Likewise, the London Polytechnic Club also played in Belgium that month, with over two thousand spectators in attendance, and positive press commentary about the quality of play.[40] Such accounts reveal a shift in perception of continental teams, increasingly seen as capable rivals, lending tours more sporting credibility.

Occasional defeats sharpened this reassessment. Maidstone's losses to RAP Amsterdam and an unofficial Dutch national side in 1894 were widely reported in Britain, undermining assumptions of effortless British sporting superiority.[41] These setbacks appear to have encouraged a more serious approach to continental opposition, as when Maidstone revisited the continent a year later, they defeated all six of their Dutch and Belgian opponents, including the unofficial Dutch national side, scoring twenty goals and conceding just two.[42]

In 1898, the English Wanderers returned to the Netherlands, beginning their tour with a seven-nil defeat to Vitesse Arnhem, the first of seven losses on what was a disastrous tour in which they conceded thirty-one goals.[43] Reporting on the English Wanderers' fourth tour of the Netherlands in 1899, *Sporting Life* magazine disparaged the Dutch for their "rough methods", describing their play as "forcible rather than skilful", and even complaining that "the Dutch footballers have a fancy for long intervals… time is allowed sufficient for tea, and several minutes elapsed before play was resumed" after half-time.[44] The accounts of this tour highlight how touring brought British teams into contact with alternative football cultures, revealing that the sport was already evolving along distinct national lines.

As the 1890s progressed, clubs expanded their travels beyond the Low Countries, touring France, and then Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria-Hungary.[45] This expansion

[38] Ibid.
[39] "Football in Belgium," *St James's Gazette*, 14 April 1894, 7.
[40] "International Football in Belgium," *Sporting Life*, 26 March 1894, 1.
[41] "Football on the Continent," *Shields Daily News*, 10 April 1894, 4.
[42] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[43] Ibid.
[44] "The English Wanderers in Holland," *Sporting Life*, 8 April 1899, 3.
[45] García, "British and Irish Clubs".

reflected the spread of association football across urban Europe, with new football clubs seeking instruction and prestige from encounters with British opponents.

This process was not limited to the involvement of English clubs. Queens Park became the first Scottish team to tour abroad, visiting Denmark in 1898 in an encounter which reveals the contradictory layers of early football tours. McDowell demonstrates how this visit was rooted in amateur solidarity between the middle classes of both nations, yet also incorporated commercial dimensions, with the Danish organisers relying on gate money to offset the costs of their wider sports festival.[46] Here, even ostensibly amateur exchanges were shaped by the economic necessities of modern sporting spectacle.

English provincial sides also joined the expanding tour circuit. The Old Xaverians, a team of graduates of St Francis Xavier school in Liverpool, travelled to the Netherlands in 1902. [47] The *Liverpool Daily Post* reported the team departing for the trip at Liverpool Lime Street Station, amid cheering crowds, expressing the hope that the party would have a "right good time".[48] Such reporting indicates that tours were part competitive encounter, part holiday travel, and increasingly a matter of local civic interest.

Documented Irish and Welsh participation in continental touring soon followed. The Freebooters of Dublin travelled to Belgium in 1903, winning all six games they played, with their activities documented in *The Tatler*, an indication of the players' social background.[49] Indeed, their tour was also publicised in the *Windsor and Eton Express,* owing to the fact that several of the squad, including Irish international Harry O'Reilly, had attended Beaumont College, a Catholic public school in Berkshire.[50] The Freebooters' tour was also recorded in the Irish press, with the *Evening Irish Times* providing a detailed match report of their win against Liege, claiming that the eight hundred match attendance was a record in Liege, with some Belgians watching the "rattling good display" from their cars parked next to the pitch.[51] The touring of Welsh teams appears to have occurred slightly later. In 1909, amateur side Cardiff United travelled to play a match in Bordeaux.[52] The details about this match are limited, but it is notable that the visit came just months after a Cardiff Rugby team had also played in

[46] McDowell, "To Cross the Skager," 247.
[47] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[48] "Old Xaverians' Tour in Holland," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 March 1902, 3.
[49] "Irish Footballers in Belgium," *The Tatler*, 1 April 1903, 11.
[50] "Football," *Windsor and Eton Express*, 21 March 1903, 7.
[51] "The Freebooters Tour in Belgium," *Evening Irish Times*, 14 March 1903, 5.
[52] García, "British and Irish Clubs".

Bordeaux, demonstrating how football tours followed pre-existing patterns of sporting travel rather than developing in isolation.[53]

Throughout these early tours, amateurism remained central to how these journeys were understood. The philosophy of gentlemanly sport bestowed teams with quasi-diplomatic significance, with them perceived to embody British discipline and moral example as well as athletic performance.

Contemporary commentary reveals how these journeys were understood within broader cultural frameworks. In 1897, Herbert John Gladstone, son of the former Liberal Prime Minister and whose brother had played football for Scotland in 1870, wrote a lengthy article expressing the status and role of the amateur athlete within late Victorian society:

> "British sportsmen are to be found all over the world, hunting, shooting, yachting, and mountaineering. That all our chief sports and games should have taken firm root in America and the British Colonies is but natural. But sportsmen may accept with pride the growing popularity on the Continent of cricket, football, rowing, and other distinctly British pursuits as a tribute to the excellence of our national pastimes. Surely it is all to the good. Modern society has its grave evils. We are overcrowded, over worried, over strained, and too loosely strung. In a great measure the corrective is to be found in our sports and recreations."[54]

For Gladstone, the development of 'British pursuits' overseas apparently represented an antidote for the ills of modern, industrial society, with virtuous amateur activity a restorative force for both individuals and society.

The growing visibility of amateur sport in Britain is evident in the coverage of two Eastbourne football players who undertook an around-the-world trip between 1901 and 1902. Eastbourne newspapers published regular updates on the travels of brothers Herbert and Willie Martin, always foregrounding their identities as footballers, despite the absence of any sporting activity in the accounts themselves.[55] Such descriptors indicate how even local amateur footballers possessed a recognisable social identity and were presented as figures of public interest. By the end of the Victorian period, footballers were not simply members of their club, but representatives of community and character, whose movements and activities were followed

[53] "Personal and General," *The Sportsman*, 22 February 1909, 4.
[54] Herbert John Gladstone, "The Victorian Era: The Sixty Years' Sports and Pastimes," *Cheshire Observer*, 29 May 1897, 2.
[55] "Eastbourne Footballers' Tour Round the World," *Eastbourne Chronicle*, 30 March 1901, 2.
"Eastbourne Footballers' Tour," *Eastbourne Chronicle*, 20 April 1901, 2.
"Tour Round the World: Eastbourne Footballers' Travels," *Eastbourne Gazette*, 23 November 1901, 8.

by the press. This standing would develop further in the Edwardian era as football and football tours expanded into new commercial dimensions.

The early touring of the continent by amateur British football teams was not rooted in a grand strategy for the expansion of the game but was a logical extension of the technological developments and cultural transmission underway across this period. These journeys normalised the notion of travelling abroad to play football, and saw footballers adopt status and recognition beyond their own community and nation. By the turn of the twentieth century, amateur football tours had become a feature of international sport, laying the logistical foundations for more regulated and commercial forms of touring to develop.

In April 1902, the *Manchester Evening News* reported that a team of Liverpool and Blackburn amateurs had achieved great success in Belgium, playing in "the National Competition", winning the "King of Belgian's cup".[56] The awarding of a trophy indicates that such amateur tours were competitive and celebrated, with teams keen to defend the prestige of British football abroad, and to receive praise in the press back home. As foreign touring increasingly became embedded within the football calendar, some tour fixtures became enmeshed into organised international competition, a development that will be explored further in Chapter Five.

The social dimension of touring remained central to its appeal. Reports frequently emphasised post-match banquets, sightseeing, and hospitality as much as results on the pitch, reinforcing the perception of football as a vehicle for cultural exchange. In 1910, *The Football News and Athletic Journal* reported that:

> "As is usually the case during the Easter recess, many of England's leading amateur clubs have gone on tour in foreign countries… these tours and matches are a great factor in strengthening the bonds of friendship and good feeling between England and other countries. The inevitable dinner afterwards, and its speeches and expressions of goodwill, the sights to be shown, and a hundred other things, all engender a feeling of real good fellowship which is hardly realised…It is extraordinary what a grip football is taking on the world at large. There is of course no country which can at present put into the field a side capable of making an even fight with our best eleven but they are making huge strides".[57]

Such rhetoric echoed broader Edwardian beliefs in sport as a civilising and unifying force, even as competitive realities increasingly challenged British assumptions of superiority. As C.

[56] "English Footballers on the Continent," *Manchester Evening News*, 3 April 1902, 4.
[57] "Football on the Continent," *Football News*, 26 March 1910, 4.

A. Bayly has argued, the global spread of organised sport during this period reflected the emergence of new urban sociability and transnational networks, with football clubs part of a wider pattern of social exchange.[58]

The popularity of touring British sides among their host European communities would cause tensions surrounding the expenses and privileges provided to travelling amateur players. A 1904 column critiqued a "serious laxity of sporting morality on the part of so-called gentleman amateurs", citing a University of Cambridge player's claim that "the bigger the gate-money, the bigger the spree to be got out of the tour".[59] Such commentary reveals the contestations over amateur status during this period, signifying how amateurism was never a fixed category but a flexible and often contradictory ideology shaped by class, economics, and national context.[60] Tours, which often involved subsidised travel, generous entertainment, and some informal payments, blurred the boundary between moral ideal and commercial practice.

As Beck outlines, the timing and practice of overseas tours were shaped strictly by FA regulation.[61] However, another factor which influenced touring was the breakaway of the Amateur Football Association from the FA in 1907, a rift which lasted until reconciliation in 1914. Dilwyn Porter's study of the FA/AFA split notes that international governance structures complicated amateur touring, with FIFA remaining allied to the FA, and therefore its members were reluctant to allow AFA clubs to play against their clubs.[62] Porter suggests that continental touring for AFA clubs declined following the split, explaining that the "Corinthians took to visiting countries such as South Africa and Brazil that were beyond FIFA's reach but recreational excursions to Belgium, France, Holland and Germany were curtailed".[63] However, closer examination of the Corinthians' history of touring indicates that they actually visited France in 1908, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland in 1909, Spain in 1911, and Austria-Hungary again in 1912.[64] These tours appear to have been hosted by clubs and associations allied to the amateur cause, including the Sporting Union of Athletic Societies of France.[65]

Other amateur footballers remained loyal to the FA, including those associated with the later incarnation of the English Wanderers, a touring side distinct from the earlier club of the same name and composed of amateur internationals. A 1912 *Sporting Life* column spotlighted the

[58] Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 196.
[59] "Amateur Footballers' Expenses," *Truth*, 14 January 1904, 38.
[60] Llewellyn and Gleaves, "A Universal Dilemma," 96.
[61] Beck, "Chapter 4," 1129-1130
[62] Dilwyn Porter, "Revenge of the Crouch End Vampires: The AFA, the FA and English Football's 'Great Split', 1907–14," *Sport in History* 26, no. 3 (2006), 423.
[63] Ibid.
[64] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[65] "Corinthians Visit Paris," *Western Daily Press*, 18 April 1908, 8.

pioneering travels of the English Wanderers, who, it claimed, are "doing valuable missionary work. Last autumn they broke fresh ground in Finland and Russia, so far as English teams are concerned, and arrangements have now been completed for a tour in Italy at Easter."[66] The article emphasised the role of the Football Association in promoting football abroad, reminding readers of the "large sums" invested by the FA in continental "missionary work", also arguing that revenue from international matches on the continent ought to be shared between the host nation and the Football Association, stressing that "there cannot be success in sport without a due regard to business methods in its control and administration".[67] Such commentary reiterates how touring intersected with debates around the governance and finance of football.

The proliferation of tours during this period of domestic dispute was widely noted in contemporary press coverage. In the spring of 1912, the *London Evening Standard* observed that "each year more and more amateur clubs go touring on the Continent, the immediate effect being that just now England is almost barren of competition games or matches in which "senior" teams are engaged".[68] This comment reflected the scale of amateur mobility and the growing culture of football on the continent. The column also detailed several defeats of English teams, including a 6-1 loss for Ilford in Brussels, emphasising that "the need for our full strength against continental teams has been brought home to us".[69] These defeats did not signal the failure of touring, but demonstrated its success in broadening perceptions of the international game. Observers of British football were increasingly understanding that foreign opponents had developed the tactics and organisation to compete against previously dominant British sides. This awareness helped encourage more formal encounters between nationally selected representative elevens, with the home nations cautiously engaging with continental opposition in encounters which carried greater sporting and symbolic weight.

England National Team

As well as British clubs touring at this time, the FA also arranged for England representative teams to visit the continent, thereby transforming sporting exchange into a more explicit expression of national identity. In 1899, the FA sent a team of predominantly amateur footballers to Germany and Austria-Hungary, its first trip overseas. The tour offered an early opportunity to understand how British football administrators saw continental football. English

[66] "Continental Tours," *Sporting Life*, 22 February 1912, 4.
[67] Ibid.
[68] "Amateur Football: Continental Tours at Easter," *London Evening Standard*, 8 April 1912, 5.
[69] Ibid.

Football League founder William McGregor wrote an article for the *London Evening News* to coincide with the tour. Accompanied by a cartoon of an Anglo-German-inspired beer stein, McGregor explained that:

> "The game is making headway both in Germany and Switzerland, and some of the Dutch and Austrian teams have a fair knowledge of the game… Association football is a game calculated to do well on the continent. At one time it seemed quite on the cards that Germany would favour the Rugby code, but that code does not seem to be making headway anywhere save in Australia and South Africa. The visit of a really representative English team to Germany should give a great fillip to the pastime in the Fatherland. The Germans want a good game. You do not see young men playing so joyously there as you do in this country, and the Kaiser is just the man to favour the institution of a good healthy game."[70]

McGregor's belief in the potential success of association football on the continent reflects the early recognition of the sport's universal appeal; his optimism about the game on the continent highlights the significance of England's visit as a catalyst for promoting and popularising football in new territories. England won all four games, including an eight-nil win against a combined German-Austrian team, further cementing McGregor's narrative of assumed dominance.[71]

British reports of the match emphasised Germany's "excellent" defending, though noted that the English forwards were "too clever for their opponents, and quite outclassed them".[72] Organised at a time when continental football remained institutionally fragmented, and FIFA did not yet exist, the FA's decision to send a team demonstrated an emerging awareness of the sport's significance overseas in the realms of physicality and politics.

England reciprocated their welcome by hosting Germany in 1901. The English Amateur XI won 12-0, with *The Times* reporting that:

> "Association football is in its infancy in Germany, so that it can be readily realised that the German eleven were easily worsted in their match with the splendid band of amateurs which the Football Association put into the field against them on the much-improved ground of the Tottenham Hotspur club on Saturday. The result was a victory for England by 12 goals to none, and the scoring might have been easily more decisive had not the Englishmen played

[70] William McGregor, "My Football Impressions," *Evening News*, 21 October 1899, 5.
[71] John Bignell and Greg Stock, "British FA XI Tours," *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*, accessed 7 January 2026, https://www.rsssf.org/tablesb/britishfatours.html#1899ENG
[72] "The English Football Team on the Continent," *Sporting Life*, 27 November 1899, 7.

a nice leisurely game that spelt no exertion... There were 6,000 spectators on a bad day, and the German eleven were very heartily welcomed. In these days of leagues it was a luxury to see a match played in such a splendid spirit of sportsmanship."[73]

The report portrays German football culture as embryonic, in need of Britain for instruction. By contrasting amateurism with "these days of leagues", the commentary also positions such fixtures as a refreshing corrective to the projected excesses and immoralities of growing domestic professionalism. The attendance of several thousand spectators indicates the interest in early international fixtures, although whether this interest stemmed primarily from hostility toward professionalism or from curiosity about foreign opponents remains uncertain.

In 1908 the F.A. agreed to the request of Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary to send a representative team composed of England's best players, whether professional or amateur, in June, to coincide with the Fifth F.I.F.A. Congress meeting at Vienna, though the tour made a financial loss, England would return to Budapest and Vienna the following year.[74]

England's first defeat on the continent was in 1910 against Denmark, with the Danes winning 2-1 in Copenhagen. *Sporting Life* indicated that "Denmark's success is not surprising, as it will be noted the Danes gave England quite a close game in the Olympic Tournament two years ago and have doubtless improved since then".[75] A rematch was planned months later, but would be delayed till the following year, with England winning 3-0 in London. The *Daily Express* described the England performance as "such an extraordinarily poor exhibition of football", as "the forwards could not have been more disappointing, their dilly-dallying and meaningless methods practically throughout the game fairly astounding the spectators, who expected that Denmark would be given a lesson in the higher arts of Association football".[76] In June 1914, Denmark won three-nil on Danish soil, with the English press impressed by the Danish success, though also indicating that the English squad was far from its strongest possible eleven, with three of their best players having had to decline the trip.[77] England's matches against Denmark illustrate the gradual shift in the balance of footballing power, a subtle sign that the era when British teams could rely solely on their foundational status to claim dominance was waning. The seeds of competition were taking root, signalling that the game was offering new challengers the opportunity to defeat the sport's founders and pioneers.

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[73] "Football. Association Rules. England v. Germany," *The Times*, 23 September 1901, 10.
[74] Beck, "Chapter 4," 1143.
[75] "English Team in Denmark," *Sporting Life*, 6 May 1910, 7.
[76] "Forwards Show Poor Form Against Denmark," *Daily Express*, 23 October 1911, 6.
[77] "England Beaten," *Daily News*, 6 June 1914, 8.

The early engagements of Britain within international football were dominated by England, with the other home nations entirely confined within the boundaries of the British Isles. Though clubs from these nations travelled, none of their national teams, either amateur or professional, embarked on tours overseas, or hosted overseas rivals. This insularity persisted even after they became members of FIFA, with Scotland and Wales joining in 1910, with Ireland following a year later in 1911.

In 1912, there were murmurs of Welsh participation in the Stockholm Olympics, though this was not realised, with England instead representing Great Britain, and winning gold.[78] Despite these aspirations, it would not be until the interwar years that Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland would begin playing against continental opposition.

Alongside official internationals existed another, often overlooked, form of quasi-national representation: military and naval football. Operating through imperial routes and diplomatic port networks, British service teams functioned as informal ambassadors of both sport and state, carrying association football into foreign harbours and cities where official clubs and national teams seldom travelled. J.D. Campbell's study of sport and the transformation of the British military, 1860-1914, observes that "the Army was one of the many British agencies that carried football and cricket to imperial outposts all over the world," a remark that extends equally to naval forces.[79]

Such "outposts" were not restricted to territories under the Union Jack; the reach of the British military extended football's influence into European ports and cities outside the Empire's formal borders. The Royal Navy, mooring in harbours from the Iberian Peninsula to the Mediterranean, and across the Americas and Asia, played local teams since the 1890s. An example of this can be seen in Barcelona in 1901, where FC Barcelona inaugurated their new ground with a match against sailors from HMS *Calliope*. This event, facilitated by brothers Arthur and Ernest Witty, who were connected both to FC Barcelona and the Barcelona Ships Agent Association, underscored how football functioned as a conduit of British culture through naval presence.[80]

[78] "Continental Tours," *Sporting Life*, 22 February 1912, 4.
[79] J.D. Campbell, "Training for sport is training for war': Sport and the Transformation of the British Army, 1860–1914," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17, no. 4 (2000), 33.
[80] Tomàs Fernández-de-Sevilla, "The Creation of the FC Barcelona Early Competitive Advantage from a New Entrepreneurial History Approach, 1899–1922," *Management & Organizational History* 19, no. 2. (2024), 90.

These tours reveal how early international football could function as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, with British authorities attempting to assert their cultural and sporting supremacy. Yet the gradual improvement of continental sides and the growing role of professionals would expose the fragility of this hierarchy, foreshadowing the more competitive and politically charged international game that would emerge after 1914.

Professional Tours

Professional touring arose not simply from sporting curiosity but from the structural transformation of football into a commercial entertainment industry. Regulatory change, foreign demand, and the pressures of the league calendar converged after 1903 to produce a new geography of football mobility dominated by professional clubs. Beck argues that the FA's December 1903 reinterpretation of Rule 26 effectively transformed the close season into an overseas touring window.[81] This was a turning point in touring, permitting overseas travel for professional football clubs playing in the Football League and Southern League.

The regulatory shift coincided with football's transition into a fully articulated commercial industry. According to John Hutchinson's study of the early British football industry:

> "By about 1900, football had been transformed from a haphazard collection of scratch amateur teams playing games whenever they could, to a highly complex network of about two hundred mutually dependent business organisations, supported by thousands of smaller amateur clubs, much as it is today. The professional clubs were, on the whole, limited liability companies, with many thousands of pounds invested in their grounds and facilities, a chairman and a board of directors, a salaried secretary/manager, with a paid staff of players, trainers and groundsmen, all playing together in a league and cup system which was efficiently administered at a national level."[82]

Within this newly commercialised structure, overseas touring can be understood as a sensible extension of professional football's economic and competitive logic, as clubs sought new markets, new audiences, and new forms of prestige beyond the domestic game.

The idea of professional clubs touring was not new. During the 1890s, several professional English clubs explored the possibility of profitable international trips, though such proposals centred on America rather than continental Europe. In 1898, the *Southern Echo* reported that

[81] Beck, "Chapter 3," 1132.
[82] Hutchinson, *Football Industry*, 20.

Everton and Celtic "have been approached by an English syndicate to visit America next season and play a series of exhibition games. The guarantees are said to be promising and are likely to be accepted".[83] The identity of the syndicate and its precise motivations are unclear, but the offer was not approved, and it would be another six years before either club left the British Isles.

Southampton FC, then playing in the Southern League, was the first professional club to travel abroad. In 1901, the club travelled to Austria-Hungary, and by 1903, they expanded their itinerary to include Denmark and the Netherlands.[84] Southampton were able to make the trip overseas because the Southern League season had ended earlier than the Football League, offering a small but reasonable window in which they could play matches on the continent before the close season began at the end of April. Southampton returned to the continent in April 1903, playing many of the same clubs they had the year before, and again winning every match.

Following the FA's December 1903 rule change, which allowed clubs to play overseas matches outside of the close season while still preventing them from charging gate money for domestic matches during this period, a wave of professional clubs travelled in the spring and summer of 1904. In 1904 Newcastle United travelled to Copenhagen. The Tyneside club played four matches before clinching the First Division title the following season, highlighting the potential role of such tours in the preparation and development of teams.[85] In Denmark, Newcastle played Southampton with members of the Danish Royal family in attendance, indicating the status of the fixture for the hosts.[86] Southampton maintained their role as prolific tourists, with Pascal Delwit's analysis of early Belgian football suggesting that Southampton's 1906 visit to Brussels boosted crowds, helping grow interest in the domestic Belgian game and demonstrating the impact of performances by professionals.[87]

Glasgow duo Rangers and Celtic both made their mark in central Europe in 1904. As Matthew McDowell notes, these tours not only spread footballing knowledge but also proved profitable for both the hosting and visiting teams.[88] Though both Glasgow clubs won all their games, the suggestion that Rangers conceded goals out of courtesy reflects how early professional tours remained embedded in civic diplomatic sporting etiquette, even as financial motives

[83] "A Football Team to go Touring," *Southern Echo*, 17 March 1898, 3.
[84] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[85] Ibid.
[86] "Royalty and Football," *Bournemouth Daily Echo*, 28 April 1904, 2.
[87] Pascal Delwit, "Kicking off passion: the birth and rise of football in Belgium (1880-1914)," *Soccer & Society* 25, no. 8 (2024), 1030.
[88] McDowell, "To Cross the Skager," 261.

intensified.[89] These tours demonstrate a two-way exchange of footballing knowledge and culture, with the Scottish passing style influencing Austrian tactics and Rangers attempting to sign goalkeeper Karl Pekarna.[90] Austrian historian Alexander Jeraske has described "the visit of foreign teams as very important for the sport's development. The Austrian clubs became better and better. Further, foreign players joined Viennese clubs and the typical Austrian playing style derived from the "Scottish combination game".[91] These tours thus embodied a two-way transfer of knowledge and expertise, with British techniques influencing continental play and British clubs absorbing experience and income from their matches on tour.

Tottenham Hotspur and Everton, playing in the Southern League and Football League respectively, embarked on an extensive tour together in 1905, playing several matches in central Europe. The 1905 tour included seven games in Vienna, Prague, and Budapest, including a match between the two English sides. Two years earlier, the Everton board had discussed whether Everton should consider undertaking an overseas tour, with the board requesting that longstanding director William Clayton ascertain the probable costs of such a continental tour.[92] In January of 1905, the board agreed to play a series of matches in Vienna, Prague, and Budapest.[93] Three months later, fourteen players, four directors, and the club secretary travelled to Central Europe, with the team playing seven matches over the course of a fortnight.[94] Upon their return, the *Liverpool Daily Post* reported that "the Everton Football Club tour abroad has been attended with every success", and despite some complaints regarding the quality of playing surface and officiating, suggested, "the game is getting a good hold on the people of Europe, and it will be the most popular sport in time".[95]

The 1905 trip was reportedly inspired by Bohemian football coach, referee, and pioneering tactician Hugo Meisl, who worked with the FA to secure a visit from strong English teams. Meisl observed the games closely, recording the difference between the sides, writing that "Everton have ball technicians of the first order, they always know how to control it and direct it to get where they want it to go. But the action of every single player moves within measured limits", whilst "Tottenham, on the other hand, are primarily runners… their ability to calculate

[89] Chris Lee, *Origin Stories* (Chichester: Pitch, 2021), 241.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 13 January 1903*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f4&p=257
[93] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 24 January 1905*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f5&p=173
[94] "Return of Everton Football Club from Vienna," *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury,* 20 May 1905, 12.
[95] Ibid.

is fabulously developed".[96] The games between Everton and Spurs attracted much local attention. A special train was organised from Budapest to Vienna for those Hungarians keen to see the contest, possibly the continent's first 'football train', and the trophy was publicly placed in a shop window, revealing the emergence of football as a mass spectacle, integrated into urban consumer culture.[97]

Everton waited three years until they travelled abroad again in 1908, despite making frequent tour enquiries in the intervening years. Towards the beginning of the 1906/07 season, the club set aside £170 as a "reserve for tour".[98] However, by March 1907, the Everton directors had "resolved that the proposed Continental Tour be not proceeded", with no explanation for the decision recorded.[99] That same spring, the club did explore the possibility of touring France or Switzerland, communicating with the French Football Association and the Thomas Cook travel agency.[100] The reason for these tours not going ahead was not obviously a financial one, as the directors had received generous offers to play games in Geneva and La Chaux-de-Fonds. Enquiries regarding the French tour ended when it was resolved that "in the event of a French Tour being arranged that the players' wives be invited".[101] In regard to the Swiss tour, the primary factor in its cancellation was "that several of the players for whom the tour had been intended had expressed their unwillingness to go whilst others were indifferent," so "the proposed tour be cancelled & that in lieu thereof the players be taken away for special training during the first 10 days in August".[102]

On 1 May 1908, the *Liverpool Echo* reported that "Everton Football Club have for the second time in their history gone on tour… they are only playing one match, this against Chelsea on Sunday next. The men will visit Haarlem, Brussels and Paris and return on Saturday week".[103] FA Secretary Frederick Wall had asked Everton to visit the Netherlands, with the club directors agreeing "if reasonable expenses were paid".[104] The tour coincided with a period in which

[96] Tottenham Hotspur, "Touring trailblazers - Austria, 1905," *Tottenham Hotspur*, 24 February 2021, accessed 22 August 2025, https://www.tottenhamhotspur.com/news/2021/february/touring-trailblazers-austria-1905/
[97] Ibid.
[98] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 9 October 1906*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f6&p=166
[99] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 11 March 1907*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f6&p=226
[100] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 29 April 1907*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f6&p=260
[101] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 26 March 1907,* available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f6&p=234
[102] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 26 April 1907*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f6&p=258
[103] "Everton F.C. on Tour," *Liverpool Echo,* 1 May 1908, 4
[104] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 9 April 1908*, available at:

Dutch football was increasingly shaped by British technical expertise. The Netherlands had won bronze in the men's football competition at the 1908 London Olympics, one of only two medals the country won, coached by former Everton inside left Edgar Chadwick, who had moved to the Netherlands in 1908 to coach the national side as well as clubs in the Hague and Haarlem.[105] Chadwick's appointment reflected a broader pattern in which British players and coaches exported tactical knowledge, training methods, and organisational practices across Europe, reinforcing Britain's perceived authority within the developing international game. Despite the growth of Dutch football and its British connections, Everton did not play any Dutch sides while there, though Everton had corresponded with HFC Haarlem, but negotiations broke down over expenses and logistics, indicating how financial and administrative concerns shaped professional clubs.[106]

Everton beat Chelsea four-nil in Haarlem, the match recorded by the English referee who was invited to the Netherlands to officiate the event, and a match between Holland and Belgium. He detailed the game for the *Cricket and Football Field*, explaining how "Mr Hijlkema, secretary of the Holland Football Association, who told me they had a great deal to thank Mr Wall, secretary of the English Association, for, in their endeavours to popularise football on the continent".[107] Reflecting on the journey, the referee remarked that "even the much maligned referee has his happy times occasionally," describing the visit as one of his most enjoyable experiences in football, yet his prediction that continental teams could soon "leave us behind" hinted at a growing awareness that British technical and organisational leadership was no longer unchallenged.[108] Encounters such as Everton and Chelsea's 1908 Dutch match therefore embodied the export of British expertise, as well as the emerging proficiency of continental football cultures.

By the years immediately preceding the First World War, such tours had become a familiar feature of the football calendar. A columnist for the *West Sussex Gazette* reported in April 1914 that "never have I known such a rush of teams to the Continent as this Easter. For some time, it has been common for the big league teams and some prominent amateur teams to visit the various countries of Europe to play what are practically exhibition games, and recently amateur teams of lesser calibre have paid flying visits… All these visits must tend towards a better relationship being established between the countries. It makes one feel somewhat

http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f7&p=162
[105] "Football in Holland," *Cricket and Football Field*, 8 August 1908, 12.
[106] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 27 April 1908*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f7&p=186
[107] "Impressions of Continental Football," *Cricket and Football Field,* 20 June 1908, 3.
[108] Ibid.

proud that our national game has found such favour everywhere".[109] Football had indeed found favour, just as Europe was becoming engulfed in political and military turmoil that would put a halt to teams travelling.

Professional touring crystallised the contradictions of Edwardian football: publicly framed as cultural diplomacy yet organised through commercial guarantees, negotiated contracts, and competitive calculation. They exemplified the contradictions of modern sport, with some administrators espousing friendship and goodwill, while club directors pursued profits, publicity, and competitive advantage. Tours may have begun as forms of amateur sociability, but they were reshaped by the powerful forces of capitalism and mass spectatorship.

The National Football Agency

Amid the burgeoning trend of professional teams touring, opportunities emerged for others who hoped to profit from these ventures. The National Football Agency was established by John Campbell Tagg in Birmingham in 1905, aiming to recruit unemployed footballers to tour and help them find new clubs.[110] The agency's most publicised initiative came in 1905, when they organised a tour of Germany and Austria, under the name of the English Ramblers. Composed of both amateur and professional players, the team left without having gained the FA's approval. Tagg was optimistic on his departure from Birmingham, claiming that he had received a deposit to cover expenses and that the German Crown Prince would be in attendance for their game.[111] When questioned as to whether the FA had given permission for the tour, Tagg responded "No… but I have written for it".[112]

The following day, the FA released the following statement:

> "The Football Association have refused their approval to the proposed tour on the ground that it is being arranged by an agency which has been acting in disregard of their rules, and they have no information as to financial managements. It is against the policy of the football Association to allow the game to be exploited by individuals for their private profit"[113]

In an era when professional clubs were becoming increasingly commercialised, Tagg's project exposed the uneasy boundary between organised sport and speculative business.

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[109] "Football Tours on the Continent," *West Sussex Gazette*, 9 April 1914, 3.
[110] "Unemployed Footballers," *Daily Record*, 27 September 1905, 6.
[111] "Mr. Tagg and his Continental Tour", *Manchester Courier*, 27 September 1905, 2.
[112] Ibid.
[113] "Mr. Tagg's Tour on the Continent," *Manchester Evening News*, 28 September 1905, 2.

The tour did indeed proceed, though with limited success. The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* detailed the "sorry story of Mr Tagg's Football tour", which included problems with translation, transport, and poor weather.[114] The Ramblers performed poorly on the pitch, the Crown Prince did not attend, agreed payments were not paid, and one of their matches was cancelled after an FA telegram reached their German opponents advising them not to participate.[115] Thus, Tagg's ambitions to commercialise football tours and create a rival to the FA would not be realised.

The failure of the continental tour, coupled with growing legal troubles, marked the decline of the National Football Agency and Tagg himself. Tagg's career took a turn for the worse when he was arrested in 1906 for conspiracy to defraud in Dublin.[116] The arrest, coupled with the disastrous football tour, effectively ended Tagg's involvement in the sport. His reputation was irreparably damaged, and the National Football Agency collapsed soon after. The FA's refusal to recognise the tour, combined with the practical failures encountered abroad, reinforced the governing body's authority and discouraged similar future ventures.

The saga of the National Football Agency indicates some of the tensions between sport and commercialisation during the Belle Époque, conflicts which persist within discourse around football tours today. Indeed, the National Football Agency's ill-fated journey stands as both an anomaly and a harbinger: a failed experiment in private football enterprise that nevertheless anticipated the increasingly commercialised and globally mediated nature of touring that would emerge in later decades.

Conclusion

Commencing with amateur teams in the 1890s, football tours surged in popularity, with accounts detailing the intimate knowledge and enthusiastic reception of the game across the continent. Across this period, the organisation of tours hardened, as early contacts turned into regularised routes and itineraries, repeated and reciprocal fixtures, and beginnings of international competitions. With this growth, the social and economic character of tours shifted, from journeys for amateurs to ventures incorporating hospitality and gate money, exposing the unstable boundaries between amateur virtue and commercial practice. From 1903, tours were reinterpreted as professional clubs adopted tours as a function of business, planned by directors, negotiated through guarantees, and designed to deliver some profit and competitive preparation. While early tours had highlighted British technical and moral superiority, as

[114] "Sorry State of Mr. Tagg's Football Tour," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 17 October 1905, 8.
[115] Ibid.
[116] "J. C. Tagg Arrested," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 28 May 1906, 6.

continental sides improved, with increasingly tight scorelines and occasional defeats fixated upon by the British press, British primacy was decidedly less secure.

In those early, uncertain months of 1914, *The Sphere* reflected on the development of football on the continent, observing that the "remarkable progress... in Association football... is but faintly understood and appreciated in this country."[117] By the year's end, however, many British men would find themselves on European soil under circumstances far removed from the camaraderie of sport. Most would not have the chance to test continental football prowess; some, despite the odds, would try, as recounted in the following chapter.

As Europe stood on the brink of war, dozens of British clubs travelled to the continent over the spring and summer of 1914. The *South London Observer* detailed Dulwich Hamlet's spring 1914 tour to Germany, in which the English outfit won all three of their matches in Duisburg, Elberfeld, and München-Gladbach. The report noted an incident that now appears tragically ironic: "Lawrence had the misfortune to sustain an injury during the match". [118] Such setbacks, insignificant at the time, would soon pale into absurdity when juxtaposed with the catastrophe to come. Walter Lawrence, who limped off the field that spring, would be Dulwich Hamlet's first wartime casualty, dead by December 1914 at the age of twenty-two.[119]

The railways and ships which had provided the models of modern mobilisation to enable football tours would soon be repurposed for war. Football tours may have been some of the earliest expressions of Europe's 'international life', yet they developed in a context of national rivalry and commercial competition that would lead to international crises and the loss of millions of lives. The following chapter follows the wartime configuration of football, with the architecture of the sport altered by the demands of total conflict.

[117] "The Popularity of Football on the Continent," *The Sphere*, 21 February 1914, 20.
[118] "Soccer on the Continent," *South London Observer*, 18 April 1914, 2.
[119] "Hamlet's Firm Resolve," *Sporting Life*, 15 December 1914, 1.

Chapter Three: Touring During the First World War

Introduction

In 2023, conservators at the Imperial War Museum announced the restoration of the most popular artwork in their collection, John Singer Sargent's *Gassed*, a painting showing lines of mustard gas victims, being led towards a dressing station as dead and wounded men lay scattered on the battlefield. The Museum's Head of Art, Rebecca Newell, explained that removing the layer of varnish from the six-metre-wide painting exposed the yellow sky to be pink, as well as the details of a football match being played in the background. Newell suggested "it may actually be much more of a pointed attempt to say something about the routine ubiquity of gas by this point, and the fact that life goes on, even though there is immense suffering".[1]

Gassed may be the most famous painting depicting British people playing football on the continent. Yet the presence of the game within the artwork is so subtle that this aspect is often forgotten, obscured by the killed and wounded soldiers depicted in the foreground and, until recent restorations, a layer of varnish. Iain Adams and John Hughson's analysis of the artwork concludes that "for Sargent, the playing of football was indicative of the importance of routine life in proximity to the front carrying on and calm prevailing in the face of chaos".[2] Indeed, football was played by soldiers and civilians throughout the conflict, though the war shaped how all participated in and understood the sport.

The outbreak of the First World War instantly curtailed the pre-1914 circuits through which football teams had toured the continent. By November 1914, *The Football Echo* reported that "there is not much doubt that there will be a slump in football touring on the Continent after the close of the season; indeed, it is safe to say there will be none".[3] In practice, formal overseas tours disappeared until 1919, and those that resumed in the immediate post-war years were limited in scale and shaped by the political and diplomatic aftershocks of the conflict.

1 Esther Addley, "'It glows': restorer removes queasy look from first world war painting Gassed," *The Guardian*, 12 October 2023, accessed 24 February 2025 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/oct/12/it-glows-restorer-removes-queasy-look-from-first-world-war-painting-gassed

2 Iain Adams and John Hughson, "'The first ever anti-football painting'? A consideration of the soccer match in John Singer Sargent's Gassed," *Soccer & Society* 14, no. 4 (2013), 511.

3 "Play and Players," *The Football Echo*, 7 November 1914, 1.

However, the war did not end the transnational movement of football, but rather redirected it through new wartime infrastructures, from recruitment campaigns and the mobilisation of sporting venues to the playing of football behind the lines and in prisoner-of-war (POW) camps. While constraining civilian internationalism, the appearance of total war also intensified other forms of cross-border cultural engagement. Many British footballers travelled to Europe, serving during the war, and played football throughout varied theatres of the conflict. This change was described by *Sporting Life* in April 1915, which pronounced that "today a great proportion of the men who made up those continental touring teams are across the channel on a more serious errand, but they can still find spare moments to think of their sports".[4]

The war itself was often likened to a football match by its participants, who sought to reimagine battles and leaders as moments and members of a game.[5] In a 1915 article, H.G. Wells used football as a metaphor to articulate how British men should assume responsibility to fight and lead the world. Wells states that "the average Englishman of 1916 will be consciously in the process of humanity, he will be a conscious part of the Empire, he will be as much in the game as a half-back at football and as keen that the goalkeeper and forwards should play their keenest and best".[6] In Wells's imagination, football operated as a cultural script through which Britons could interpret their position in society and the structures of modern warfare.

The FA's decision to continue the football season after August 1914 exposed the moral and cultural contestation over sport. Rugby union immediately suspended its competitions, thereby aligning itself with an ethos of amateur sacrifice and public duty, whereas association football and rugby league, both featuring strong working-class and professional constituencies, proceeded with their 1914-15 season.[7]

The FA responded to criticism from politicians and the press by offering its own organisational machinery and stadiums to the War Office and supporting recruitment activities at football matches.[8] Brandon Luedtke considers this process of re-purposing of football spaces as beginning "the transformation of the football pitch from a playing field into a battlefield".[9] The

[4] "What our Post Free Scheme Offers," *Sporting Life*, Tuesday 06 April 1915, 6.
[5] Tony Collins, "English Rugby Union and the First World War," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002), 797.
[6] H.G Wells, "Will the War Change England?," *The War Illustrated*, 27 February 1915, 608.
[7] Simon John. "A different kind of test match': Cricket, English society and the First World War," *Sport in History* 33, no. 1 (2013), 26.
[8] Colin Veitch. "Play up! Play up! and Win the War!' Football, the Nation and the First World War 1914-15," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 3 (1985), 370.
[9] Brandon Luedtke, "Playing Fields and Battlefields: The Football Pitch, England and the First World War," *Britain and the World* 5, no. 1 (2012),100.

contestation over the meaning and purpose of football during wartime went beyond the scheduling of fixtures, with the varied responses of different sporting bodies reflecting deeper tensions over professionalisation, class identities, and the role of sport within total war.

Although professional football clubs faced intense scrutiny at home during the early months of the war, association football nevertheless emerged as the dominant sport among serving British forces. Its pre-war popularity carried seamlessly into military environments, with Tony Collins arguing that this predominance was partly practical, football required minimal space and equipment, but it also reflected the game's social character, with football played across ranks and thus functioning as a more socially cohesive activity within the armed forces.[10]

This chapter begins with an outline of how wartime conditions reshaped international football, then traces football's position within military life, finally examining captivity as a site of football's transnational circulation. Existing scholarship has illuminated football at the front and the exceptional cases of football played during the 1914 Christmas Truce and within Ruhleben prison camp. Far less attention has been paid to the wider POW camp system as a sporting environment, despite the scale of mass captivity during the First World War, and the breadth of archival evidence indicating that British prisoners continued to play football across the continent. By focussing on this topic, this chapter repositions football in captivity as systemic rather than anomalous. Though civilian touring ceased during the First World War, the game did not stop moving; instead, it circulated through new webs of military and carceral arrangements. The sending of boots, balls, and letters, via charities and diplomats, sustained the mobility of football within the architectures of total war.

Plumstead FC

The apparent exception to British clubs' cessation of travel during the First World War appears to be amateur South London side Plumstead FC, who are noted to have played in Barcelona in December 1914.[11] On Christmas Day, FC Barcelona defeated Plumstead 4–0, repeating the scoreline in a rematch two days later.[12] The Barcelona match programmes and Catalan press reports presented the games as international fixtures between Barcelona and "Plumstead de Londres"; however, other evidence indicates that the visiting side was not the genuine Plumstead FC.[13]

[10] Collins, "English Rugby Union," 805.
[11] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[12] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[13] FC Barcelona, *Match Programme, FC Barcelona vs Plumstead de Londres*, 25 December 1914, 3.

The Plumstead squad appears to have been composed of British expatriates living in Barcelona, led by Franck Allack, a former Plumstead player who had settled in Catalonia after touring there with Plumstead in 1911 and 1912.[14] Allack first played RCD Espanyol before joining FC Barcelona in 1913.[15] The other named Plumstead players also cannot be traced to the actual London club's squad that season, with reports in the local newspaper *El Diluvio* assigning them to other club affiliations. These two matches ought therefore not be considered fixtures of a continental tour but do indicate the continuation of football between British settlers and locals in regions beyond the theatres of war.

Meanwhile, the original Plumstead FC continued domestic competition, playing Hampstead Town in the London Senior Cup over Christmas 1914.[16] Though formal international tours stopped, domestic football continued, but was increasingly shaped by growing military mobilisation. The entanglement of football and war was particularly visible near Plumstead, in Woolwich. On Christmas Day 1914, soldiers from the Woolwich Arsenal Battery played those of the Newcastle Battery R.F.A., with a "large crowd" gathering to watch the Tyneside team win 5-2.[17] A month earlier, George Skinner, a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery, sustained a fatal head injury while taking part in a football game on Woolwich Common.[18] Skinner's death underscores how football was embedded into the space and routines of war, with the sport's rituals and risks forming part of the lived environment of war.

Football's place within the armed forces was reinforced through support from the home front. In December 1914, residents of Woolwich launched a fundraising effort to send footballs to the serving soldiers.[19] Within weeks, the campaign had raised 16s. 3d. to fund the distribution of balls to "brave soldiers who wanted a football to kick about during the time they are not in the firing line or asleep", describing such games as a "fine exercise after many hours in cramped positions in the trenches or stiff through exposure and damp".[20]

Similar initiatives appeared across the country. In May 1915, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported that "whilst football is now suspended absolutely as an organised game in this country, the pastime continues to be extremely popular with our army in France, where competitions and cups are fought out" before encouraging readers to support the sending of

[14] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[15] FC Barcelona, "Allack", *FC Barcelona*, accessed 10 February 2026 https://players.fcbarcelona.com/en/player/25-allack-frank-albert-allack
[16] "London Amateur Football," *Sporting Life*, 28 December 1914, 5.
[17] "Holiday Football," *Western Chronicle*, 1 January 1915, 7.
[18] "Soldier's Sad End," *Woolwich Gazette*, 19 January 1915, 3.
[19] "Patriotic Footballers," *Woolwich Gazette*, 1 December 1914, 3.
[20] "For the Front," *Woolwich Gazette*, 8 December 1914, 3.

balls to troops stationed at the front.[21] Clubs also participated in these efforts. Everton responded to requests from army chaplains by organising collections at matches and donating equipment for use on the continent.[22] The infrastructure of the peacetime game was thus redirected to help sustain football's play across new military contexts.

By 1917, a reporter for the *Derbyshire Courier* even suggested that the army ought to issue "a ration of footballs", arguing that it "is one of the problems of war that I have returned from the front without solving. Football is almost as real a necessity to the well-being and morale of the soldier when he gets his periodical respite from service in the line as the bath, the change of under-clothing, and those other reminders that he still belongs to the order of civilised beings".[23] The elevation of football to a civilisational necessity reflected the strengths of feeling towards maintaining ordered sports practice amidst the chaos and horror of war. Wartime football was sustained not only by soldiers' enthusiasm, but by the cooperation of military networks with civilian society, linking press and public to platoons across the Western Front. The pre-war tours of old may have ceased, but through parcels and press appeals, the playing of football on the continent continued.

Football at the Front

The pervasiveness of football within the British army owed much to its structural suitability for mass mobilisation. According to David Goldblatt, "football appeared in the embarkation centres, drill squares, training grounds and prisoner-of-war camps, where the simplicity and elasticity of the game were its greatest virtues".[24] Likewise, Tony Collins emphasises that football was "a sport which men of all ranks could play, and which helped to cement esprit de corps among the troops".[25] Unlike other more equipment-heavy sports, football required little beyond some open space and a ball, and thus could become embedded within the environments and routines of military men.

The playing of football behind the frontline was regularly reported on back in Britain, with such play often perceived as evidence of national character. In the early months of the war, *The Illustrated London News* described how "in spite of their cruel losses and the heavy claims on their bravery and endurance, our gallant Tommies continue to be in the best of spirits—so

[21] "Football at the Front", *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1915, 9.
[22] Jake Madgwick Lawton and Emily Liles, "Football, Charity and Tradition: The Socio-Historical Context of Everton FC and Everton in the Community," In *Football, Community and Social Responsibility*, ed. Chris Stone (2025), 65.
[23] "Our Territorials in France," *Derbyshire Courier*, 24 November 1917, 1.
[24] Goldblatt, *The Ball,* 76.
[25] Collins, "English Rugby Union", 797.

much so that, when enjoying a little spell of relief from service in the trenches, they form themselves into football teams and score goals against each other with bursts of rousing cheers".[26] Football could be framed as a reconstruction of the safety and normality of home, playing and spectating the sport amidst nearby death and destruction, turning the ravaged landscape of war into a playable field.

Beyond symbolic value, football at the front often assumed institutional forms of military organisation, with divisions facing each other in matches reflecting the army's rivalries and solidarities. In June 1918, the final of a Divisional Championship was played between the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment and the Cameron Highlanders, the latter winning 3-2. Despite the fact that the match was played "within sound of the guns", it featured proper organisation, officiated by former Sheffield United and England player, Lieutenant Robert Ernest Evans.[27] Many of the instigators of other such games were former prominent touring players. For example, a 1915 *Football Post* article noted that Lieutenants G. W. Brewitt and S. Farr, former Notts Magdala FC players, who had repeatedly toured France before the war, were now organising matches there within the Royal Field Artillery.[28]

Letters from the front offer further insight into how football games translated into the lived experience of troops. A message sent home from E. W. Bratchell described how he "had a game of football about two weeks ago with R.G.A. Battery, the pitch being a serious drawback. I think it was a cabbage patch. Still, we managed to get a good game in and most important of all, won."[29]

Despite the makeshift conditions, soldiers appear to have approached such matches with enthusiasm and a sense of serious competition, helping distract them from the horrors around. An anonymous letter from a soldier to his mother expressed his thoughts and experiences on the frontline:

> "Dear Mother, I received your kind and ever welcomed letter glad to see by it you're still in the best of health as it leaves me alive and kicking. I am out for a rest just now and having

[26] "The Great War," *The Illustrated London News*, 10 October 1914, 3.
[27] "Overseas Football," *Northern Chronicle and General Advertiser for the North of Scotland*, 26 June 1918, 3.
[28] "Athletics in the New Army," *Football Post*, 10 April 1915, 3.
[29] National Archives, "Trenches: had a game of football," *National Archives*, accessed 2 March 2025, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/letters-first-world-war-1915/trenches-game-football/

miserable weather but not altogether a bad time of it. We have plenty of Footballs and have some champion games…"[30]

Such mentions of football demonstrate how it acted as a form of continuity and contact to home, with the playing of sport an affirmation of survival. Amid mechanised destruction, men continued to mark out goals, debate fouls, and record victories, as the football pitch became a recognisable feature of the frontline.

An International Sport

Behind the front, football was not only played by British troops; British soldiers encountered football cultures of allied nations throughout the war. A September 1915 issue of *The Illustrated London News* depicted Belgian soldiers playing football, noting with some surprise that "the Belgian soldiers have taken to playing football behind their lines, like our own men".[31] On occasion, allied troops would play together. One soldier described how "our Allies occasionally join the game with great zest, and it is not an uncommon sight to see a crowd of French and British soldiers struggling madly round two sticks representing a goal, not so very far from the firing-line".[32] Such games may have been improvised, informal affairs, but they were a form of active vernacular co-operation.

Arnaud Waquet and Joris Vincent outline how football and rugby matches between French and British troops developed during the war, ultimately improving France's sporting prowess, and confirming its "status as a sports nation".[33] The war thus accelerated processes of sporting exchange which had begun before 1914, with British troops building on pre-existing transnational sporting cultures and environments.

Matches were not only played between members of the armed forces but also involved some local civilians. In January 1915, the *Dundee Courier* recounted a match between some British Territorials and "the first team of a local club" in France, as "wounded officers rode down from their quarters in pouring rain to watch the play, which was very fast and effective throughout. The young Frenchmen put some pretty work in dribbling and passing but were outmatched by

[30] IWM, "Letter from soldier with references to playing football, First World War," Document.23766.
[31] "Football Match at the Front," *The Illustrated London News*, 4 September 1915, 25.
[32] "Not So Very Far From The Firing Line," *Illustrated War News*, 10 February 1915, 46.
[33] Arnaud Waquet and Joris Vincent, "Wartime Rugby and Football: Sports Elites, French Military Teams and International Meets During the First World War," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 3 (2011), 28.

the heavier onslaught of the British team".[34] Such matches showed that alliance could be built and reinforced not only through treaties and fighting but also with acts of shared play.

Played on scarred grounds and makeshift fields, football became embedded in the lives of many British and Allied troops. The playing of these games shows how the outbreak of war did not suspend transnational sporting exchange but certainly reconfigured its practice. Where pre-war tours had shown signs of nascent sports diplomacy, football on the continent during the war enacted solidarity within landscapes of crisis.

Christmas Truce

If football facilitated alliance, it also provided one of the few cultural forms capable of traversing enemy lines. One anecdote tells of a German sentry shouting across no man's land, "It is I, Fritz the bunmaker of London. What is the football news?" before claiming they were a Chelsea supporter.[35] The story is difficult to substantiate, yet its retelling reinforced the representation and remembrance of football as a unifying language of the war.

The playing of football during the 1914 Christmas Truce has become the most potent expression of this possibility. Within weeks of the Christmas Day truce, stories about it appeared across the British press describing the fraternisation on no man's land. In a letter to his father, which was published in the *Belfast News-Letter,* Lieutenant Davis Williamson described the scene:

"There was a sort of truce arranged to-day between some of our fellows and the Germans. Although the regiments to right and left kept firing spasmodically all day, the others went across, and they and the Germans exchanged tobacco and talked and sauntered about between the two lines of trenches. It was the queerest sight the world to see two lots of men who a few hours before were intent on killing each other (and will again tomorrow) talking together as if they were the greatest friends in the world. They even arranged a football match, and since I started writing this letter a telephone message has come through to say that the Germans had won three goals to two"[36]

Williamson appears to embellish his reflection by incorporating a football match to deepen the image of extraordinary conviviality, though other soldiers claimed to have played in truce games themselves.

[34] "Men and Matters," *Dundee Courier*, 9 January 1915, 6.
[35] Richard Holmes, *The Western Front* (London: BBC Books, 1999), 12.
[36] "Football Between the Trenches," *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 January 1915, 6.

Ernie Williams of the Cheshire Regiment recalls football being played, describing how “it was a proper football. But we didn't form a team, it wasn't a team game in any sense of the word. You know it was a kickabout. Everybody was having a go. It came from their side; it wasn't from our side where the ball came”.[37] Williams claims that a couple of hundred men took part in the game, suggesting that the play was unstructured and disorganised with no officiating or goals, unlike that described by Williamson.

It is crucial to interrogate the nature of these narratives. While popular memory and contemporary media have latched onto the football story as emblematic of a profound shared humanity, the historical record emphasises the rarity of such meetings. Iain Adams’ study of the playing of football within the truce finds that despite several accounts of truce matches, indisputable evidence of specific games is lacking, though “with so many young men milling around, kickabout games of football with tin cans, paper wrapped with string, straw stuffed balaclavas, or perhaps with a real ball, inevitably occurred, the players cheered on by their brother soldiers”.[38] The tentativeness of such stories is reflected in an *Illustrated London News* report of the truce which accompanied an illustration of British and German soldiers with the description that “some of the British, it is said, visited the German trenches, and an Anglo-German football match was even played”.[39] The conditional phrasing revealed doubt over such play, though the story circulated and became an entrenched impression of trench warfare.

Despite the apparent rarity of sporting encounters during the truce, over the century since the First World War, the story has been elevated into folklore, offering a vision of peaceful humanity and fair play amidst mechanised impersonal violence. By presenting German soldiers as sporting rivals, the image also rendered the enemy as understandable equals rather than mysterious adversaries, a narrative which would become amplified according to evolving national experience and memory.

During the Second World War, the 1914 truce became a point of comparison. On December 27, 1939, the *Daily News* noted that while the guns had remained silent that Christmas, there was no evidence of a truce akin to 1914’s, “when German and British went out and played a game of football together” stating that “this war has a grimmer background than the last and the men who are now here know well for what they are fighting”.[40] The comparison casts the

[37] IWM, “The Real Story of the Christmas Truce,” *Imperial War Museum*, accessed 8 March 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-real-story-of-the-christmas-truce
[38] Iain Adams, “Game for Christmas? The Argylls, Saxons and Football on the Western Front, December 1914,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 11-12 (2015), 1410.
[39] “British and German Soldiers,” *The Illustrated London News*, 9 January 1915, 14.
[40] “Guns Silent But Patrols Go On,” *Daily News*, 27 December 1939, 10.

First World War as relatively innocent in contrast with the ideological totality of the Second World War, with football a moral yardstick for the existence of a morally unified Europe.

A century after the 1914 truce, the event became central to the process of organised commemoration. Ahead of the centenary, Andrew Murrison MP, the British government minister responsible for overseeing the commemorations, claimed that football "has a particular part to play because of the totemic significance of the Christmas truce in 1914".[41] In 2014, UEFA President Michel Platini unveiled a memorial to the truce in Belgium, with local mayor Gilbert Deleu declaring that "by putting the seal of UEFA, and of this popular sport that is football, on these commemorations, Michel Platini has in one stroke called up all those who love the 'round ball' to take possession of this truce and propagate its spirit and the hope that it has provoked".[42] Despite its indistinct factual basis, and seeming to be a localised wartime anomaly, the story of the truce football game was presented as a shared European inheritance, with the growth of football as a mass sport after the war offering a durable narrative of shared humanity. In collective European memory, the image of the no man's land pitch has come to embody hopes of reconciliation.

Prisoner of War Football

The outbreak of war disrupted the lives of British nationals living in Germany, who were now subjects of an enemy state. Among those affected were some men involved in German football, players and coaches working overseas, helping to grow the continental game. British coaches on the continent scrambled to return home to safety. In August 1914, the *Lancashire Evening Post* reported how "luckier than some of his fellow coaches on the Continent, Tommy Bradshaw has managed to get away safely, and is now back in Preston, his knowledge of German enabled him to get through".[43] The article also referred to Bob Holmes, who had returned from Budapest to coach Cliftonville, and England international Steve Bloomer, who remained in Germany, where he would be interned at Ruhleben civilian internment camp near Berlin for the remainder of the war.[44]

The experiences of Bloomer and his fellow prisoners at Ruhleben have attracted attention in recent years. Journalistic histories by Rory Smith and Jonathan Wilson, and Paul Brown's study on the Ruhleben Football Association, have foregrounded the camp as a site where

[41] Nick Hopkins and Richard Norton Taylor, "Kickabout that captured futility of first world war to be replayed for centenary," *The Guardian*, 8 February 2013, accessed 8 March 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/08/first-world-war-kickabout-replayed-centenary
[42] Adams, "Game for Christmas?," 1140.
[43] "Football Topics," *Lancashire Evening Post,* 22 August 1914, 4.
[44] Ibid.

organised football flourished in captivity and produced new football tactics.[45] Such analyses risk presenting football in Ruhleben as exceptional, rather than a common feature of many POW camps. Just as the previous chapter showed how football tours of the pre-1914 period involved many clubs other than the famous Corinthians, POW football was much more than the story of a few dozen men in one camp.

Mass captivity was itself a defining feature of the First World War, with the conflict seeing the first mass-scale POW camps since the signing of the first Geneva Convention of 1864 and the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions.[46] These contributed to the development of a set of basic rights for POWs being protected in international law. While the Geneva Convention and Hague Conventions share many principles, they also diverge slightly. In particular, the Geneva Convention is more narrowly focused on the rights of wounded prisoners, while the Hague Conventions are more broadly about the rights of all prisoners.[47] Article 4 of the 1899 Hague Convention states that "prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not in that of the individuals or corps who captured them. They must be humanely treated".[48] This supposed guarantee of humane treatment combined with supportive efforts from growing organisations such as the Red Cross enabled some prisoners to engage in cultural and recreational activities including sports.

Over the course of the First World War, more than eight million soldiers were taken prisoner, representing over ten per cent of all men in uniform, a figure close to the estimated total of ten million soldiers killed during the war.[49] Though their experiences varied depending on national, class, and individual distinctions, the years and months spent in captivity forced them to adapt to deprivation and isolation, in conditions that posed further challenges from the front lines in which they had fought. Heather Jones notes that despite some breaches of the principles on all sides, particularly in terms of forcing POWs to work in very dangerous situations, "none of

[45] Rory Smith. *Mister: The Men Who Gave The World The Game* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 51.
Jonathan Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid: The History of Football Tactics* (London: Orion, 2014), 94.
Paul Brown. *The Ruhleben Football Association* (London: Goal Post, 2020), 5.
[46] Betsy Baker, "Hague Peace Conferences (1899 and 1907)" *The Max Planck Encyclopaedia of Public International Law,* 4.2 (2009), 689-698.
[47] Heather Jones, "International law and Western Front prisoners of war in the First World War," *Wartime captivity in the Twentieth Century: archives, stories, memories* ed. A.M. Pathé and F. Théofilakis (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 30.
[48] Joseph Richardson Baker and Henry Graham Crocker, *The Laws of Land Warfare: Concerning the Rights and Duties of Belligerents* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 39.
[49] Heather Jones, "A Missing Paradigm? Military Captivity and the Prisoner of War, 1914–18," *Immigrants & Minorities* 26 (2008), 20.

these breaches of the Hague Conventions can be considered catastrophic", and highlights that most POWs survived captivity.[50]

More than 171,000 British POWs were captured by Germany and its allies during the war, with many thousands more Commonwealth servicemen also imprisoned.[51] These men were held in camps across Germany, as well as in the Ottoman Empire, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. What many of these young soldiers and sailors had expected would be a brief expedition to the continent became years of imprisonment. Hundreds of miles behind the front lines, thousands of men from Britain and its Empire and allies played, watched, and reminisced about sport. Through sport, these men bonded with other nations, resisted the control of their guards and considered the fate of their lives and the path of the war.

Across the POW system, football functioned first as reconstruction, with British prisoners seeking to reproduce the institutional and cultural form of the game. In 1915, The *War Illustrated* also published photographs of British POWs playing football in the Netherlands, explaining that "football has been the outstanding recreation of our fighting men during the war. Even the interned naval men do not neglect it".[52] Former POW Geoffrey Harding's memoir corroborates the frequency of football at Groningen, where he was held, recalling matches between the British naval division and Dutch civilian teams.[53] Unable to fight, football provided an outlet to express authority and ingenuity, traits encouraged in soldiers.

The importance of football was also visible in its absence. Alluding to the lack of stimulation during camp life, former POW Albert Baker recalled that "there was no football or anything like that, you couldn't do anything".[54] The blunt remark affirms the lack of football as a condition in which monotony inevitably prevailed. Indeed, leisure was one of the few domains in which prisoners could exercise agency and construct their own familiar organisation and competition within a custodial environment they could not otherwise regulate. Joe Mercer, the former Nottingham Forest centre-half, was held in Giessen POW camp for much of the war. Upon his return home, Mercer recalled to a local newspaper how "five-a-side football contests were arranged. We had to buy wood from the Germans to make goalposts and nets were string taken from parcels from England".[55] The improvisation of equipment, and its purchase from

[50] Jones, "International Law", 38.
[51] John Lewis-Stempel. *The War Behind the Wire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), xv.
[52] "Interned in Hospitable Holland," *The War Illustrated* 1 (1915), 258.
[53] Harding, G. *Escape Fever* (London: John Hamilton, 1935) 200.
[54] IWM, "Voices of the First World War: Prisoners of War," *Imperial War Museum,* 6 June 2018, accessed 15 November 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/voices-of-the-first-world-war-prisoners-of-war
[55] "Prominent Footballer's Experiences," *The Chester Observer,* 4 January 1919, 4.

their captors, is indicative of the commitment to reproduce the game in as authentic and recognisable a form as possible.

Mercer also recounted that "an amusing feature of the contests was that the Germans would not allow the referee to use his whistle because it excited the guard. He had to use a little bell and even at times a mouth organ. To enable the British to have their usual 'flutter', a book was made on the matches".[56] Despite some restrictions, games appear to have maintained elements of formality, featuring a match official and even some betting on results. Institutional habits endured, albeit in modified form.

The adaptation of football to the varied environments of captivity is further explored in the memoirs of Captain Harry Bishop, who was imprisoned by Ottoman forces in the Turkish city of Kastamonu. Before escaping and travelling across the Black Sea to freedom, Bishop occupied himself with football, as conditions were more lenient for prisoners in Turkey. He explains that "we soon managed to hire a field for football. It was very stony and by no means level, but, nevertheless, was a great acquisition".[57] However, the equipment available limited play, with Bishop recalling that "to start with, we only had a soccer case and no bladder. We stuffed the case with grass and played a very modified form of Rugger, where collaring was disallowed on account of the stones, and punting and place kicking forbidden in order to preserve the life of the ball".[58] Football was adjusted according to the necessity of circumstance, with rules modified, physicality of play limited, and technique adapted.

When proper balls arrived "from Constantinople, and others came eventually from home", the organisation of matches improved, with games played between "Regulars v. Irregulars", and "Soccer Sixes causing much excitement and a local firm of bookmakers, who came into existence for the occasion, did a large business".[59] Again, the familiar apparatus of competition appeared, distinct teams, recurring fixtures, spectatorship, and wagering, all structuring the practice of football while imprisoned.

Other prisoner testimonies underscore the symbolic centrality of football. Evelyn Waugh's elder brother, fellow novelist Alec, was taken prisoner near Arras, and reflected that "as a nation I do not think we shall ever show much enthusiasm for Swedish drill, the various devices of the gymnasium, which leave so little room for individuality".[60] Instead, Waugh argued that

[56] Ibid.
[57] Bishop, H. *A Kut Prisoner* (London: John Lane, 1920), 94.
[58] Ibid., 95.
[59] Ibid., 96.
[60] Alec Waugh, *Prisoners of Mainz* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1919), 194.

British prisoners' "allegiance to a green field and a leather ball, small or as big as the season demands, will not be shaken."[61] In Waugh's formulation, football was an expression of national temperament, presented as a marker of British identity even in captivity.

Regulation of Play

British prisoners' pursuit of play was noted by guards, as well as prisoners of other nations. An example of both is found within an account by William Hegeler, a German writer, who described his experiences as a guard in a POW camp to an American magazine in 1916. Hegeler recalled sharing amusement with a Canadian prisoner at the "Englishmen playing football", with the activity demonstrating the comfortable living arrangements in the camp, at odds with the supposed brutality and seriousness of war.[62]

Yet football in captivity was never wholly autonomous, operating within structures of permission and display. Captain Douglas Lyall Grant's diary entry for 12 July 1916, in Gutersloh POW camp explains that "we have now been forbidden to shout at football matches, which is sad as half the fun is in barracking".[63] The expressive dimensions of football were repressed, with sporting activity evidently subject to control by camp guards.

Private Wash of the Durham Light Infantry was held in Munster II POW camp from 1915 until his escape in 1917, where he recalls being allowed to play "football once a week", though also describes how a camp inspection by a neutral Ambassador resulted in "orders that football was to be played that day".[64] In such moments football could be staged to satisfy inspection, transforming prisoner initiative into ordered practice.

One such neutral inspector was American Doctor Daniel McCarthy, who visited dozens of camps on behalf of the US State Department. His observations reveal the frequent displays of football he witnessed by prisoners, mainly the British. McCarthy described how British prisoners generally lived in camps, spending their "afternoons playing football or other simple field games".[65] McCarthy mentions British prisoners playing football in his reports of Minden

[61] Ibid.
[62] Wilhelm Hegeler, "A Day in a German War Prison," *Current History* 4 (1916), 889.
[63] Michael Moynihan, *Black Bread and Barbed Wire: Prisoners in the First World War* (London: Cooper, 1978), 88.
[64] TNA, "Private W G Wash, 8th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry, on conditions at Münster II. (23 January 1918)", FO 383/387
[65] Daniel Joseph McCarthy, *The Prisoner of War in Germany: The Care and Treatment of the Prisoner of War with a History of the Development of the Principle of Neutral Inspection and Control* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1918), 60.

POW Camp where he depicts the British barracks as having a court of "hard yellow clay without any grass or other evidence of vegetation. In the space in this court, which is not taken up with the kitchen, latrines, etc., the men play football".[66]

McCarthy's reports regularly discussed the provision of space for play. In one statement, he compared two different camps where prisoners were employed as miners. In the first, "men are not allowed to go outside of the small compound, which is not large enough for football or other forms of relaxation. There is plenty of open space in the country surrounding the mine. There is no other form of recreation or amusement present here save for a small phonograph which the men have in their barrack".[67] By contrast, in the second camp, "the men have the use of a yard for exercise. They requested a large place for football. A large field next to the works will be assigned to the men in a short time, when the grain has been harvested".[68] The distinctions McCarthy makes between the two camps go beyond references to football, also highlighting differences in the qualities of food and sanitation.

However, both of these mining camps fall short of McCarthy's observations of the officer camp at Fort Torgau, where there were "tennis courts and also some field sports on in another portion of the field, or it may be that football or even cricket may be on".[69] The gradation between the camps is clear, and apparently corresponded to broader distinctions of class and status of different prisoners. McCarthy's observations indicate his perception that prisoners initiated the playing, though he does add that in most camps, it was only "at stated periods of the day the men were permitted to play football".[70]

If pre-war football had travelled through private touring clubs and the migration of players and coaches, POWs' access to the sport depended upon nation states and humanitarian organisations. The transnational movement of the game was supported by the bureaucratic arteries of total war, with reports of investigators, such as McCarthy, leading discussions of football by the government bodies responsible for supporting POWs. Prior to the United States entering the war in April 1917, American embassies throughout Europe played a critical role in providing football equipment to POWs. In January of 1917, the United States Embassy in London informed the British government that in Osnabrück POW camp, "it has now been advised by the Prussian Ministry of War that a football field has been included within bounds

[66] Ibid., 77.
[67] Ibid., 151.
[68] Ibid., 161.
[69] Ibid., 196.
[70] Ibid., 57.

of that camp and made available for the use of the officer prisoners".[71] A month later, the United States Embassy in Berlin informed the United States Embassy in London that "the footballs sent by the Embassy a few weeks ago had been received and were issued to the British prisoners" at Wittenberg POW camp.[72] Football equipment thus moved not via commercial exchange or sporting invitation, but by diplomatic correspondence.

Such communications were not isolated, with a range of institutions of various nations becoming involved in the provision of sporting equipment for prisoners. A 1916 letter from a British Foreign Office official to the United States Embassy in London illustrates this facilitation, recalling how it was necessary to work with the Spanish Ambassador, the Russian Government, the Rockefeller Foundation, and then head of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, Herbert Hoover, to guarantee the safety and comfort of POWs.[73] Within this network of governments and agencies, football was just one of many items discussed, yet it was a recurrent topic, with its provision positioned within a broader campaign to sustain morale and ensure humane treatment.

In 1917, the Red Cross wrote to the British Prisoners of War Department seeking permission for the American Express Company to send football boots to Captain Pritchard, held at Groningen POW Camp.[74] The reply stated that "the secretary of the Prisoners of War Department presents his compliments… and is directed by Lord Newton to state that he is in consultation with the Lords Commissioners of the admiralty with regard to a consignment of boots for Captain Pritchard".[75] Framed within the vast administration of total war this communication is but a minor matter of coordination, but the cooperation of a humanitarian body, a private American company, and Whitehall departments speaks to the ways in which football moved through complex official channels.

International Play

POW camps were not nationally homogeneous spaces but reflected the diversity of Britain and its Empire. POW camps contained Canadians, Australians, Frenchmen, Russians, Italians, Gurkhas, and North African troops, as well as all manner of British men who would

[71] TNA, "Provision of a football pitch for officer prisoners at Osnabrück (20th January 1917)," FO 383/263
[72] TNA, "'Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War and corroboration of statements by Major Priestley and Captain Vidal and Captain Lauder (26th February 1916)," FO 383/152
[73] TNA, "Consignment of football boots sent to Captain Pritchard interned at Gröningen, Holland, (18th December 1917)," FO 383/325
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 27 December 1917.

likely never have met in civilian life. Within such compressed international environments, football could act at times as a language through which difference could be negotiated.

While living in Darmstadt POW camp, Private Green had his personal account published in *The Morning Post*. Green outlined how "the boys made a rag ball and play footer on a little piece of ground" a performance which "the Ruskies use to laugh to see them bump into one another and fall down".[76] The scene is evidence of both the improvised character of camp football and of how prisoners of different nationalities were engaged in their performance.

Reports from a Swiss internment site described a game of football involving "Highlanders, Canadians, Anzacs, and London's own" who "yelled like madmen as the ball went towards one goal and another".[77] Such a group of differing nationalities playing together is also evidenced by a photograph from Dulmen POW camp, showing a football team consisting of "five Australians, two Canadians, four Englishmen and two Frenchmen" and "in the background are two Russians and one Italian".[78] In this team, British POWs form only a minority of the team, with players from six different nationalities taking part, illustrating football's broad appeal within camps, beyond British prisoners.

Conrad Hoffman observed camps for the YMCA during the war and published his in-depth observations after the war. In an unnamed camp, Hoffman describes how some "Russians learned games taught to them by their American tutors", and "after a few weeks of tutorage, the Russian soccer football team challenged the Americans to a game and proved they were a match for them".[79] According to such observation, POW camps were sites of football's spread, with sporting knowledge shared and rehearsed across national communities within the enforced proximity of global war.

Fraternisation

If captivity revealed football's role in reconstruction and regulation, it also exposed its capacity to blur the boundaries of enmity. Lieutenant Dobson, who worked in a tannery near Parchim POW camp, recalls how "on Sundays, they used to take us for a walk and we played football. The director's son at the tannery got the ball for us. He liked football, and we used to have a

[76] TNA, "*The Morning Post* of 13-21 March 1916,' (20th March 1916)", FO 383/152
[77] Thomas Scidmore, "Stories of the Internees: in Hospitable Switzerland," *Outlook,* 5 December 1917, 556.
[78] Australian War Memorial, "Group portrait of an allied Prisoner of War (POW) football team," *Australian War Memorial,* accessed 9 January 2026, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C397221
[79] Conrad Hoffman, *In the Prison Camps of Germany: a Narrative of "Y" Service among Prisoners of War* (New York: Association Press, 1920), 257.

kick-about at lunchtime. After the football games on Sunday the guards used to take us to the pub and we'd all have a drink. That happened every Sunday".[80] Within the structured hierarchy of captivity, football created intervals in which captor and captive briefly occupied roles shaped less by war than by shared leisure.

Such moments of fraternisation through football could also be shaped by political calculation. In Halbmondslager POW camp, Robert Monteith was appointed as leader of the Irish Brigade, a group of Irish POWs recruited by Roger Casement to fight against Britain. During Casement's visit to the camp in December 1915, Monteith recorded the occasion of a "football match, the Irish team beat the Germans 4 goals to 1".[81] While the match itself cannot be taken as direct evidence that football reoriented allegiance, it does suggest that sport could provide a staged setting in which new affiliations were performed and observed within the camp. Sporting interactions between captor and captive during the First World War were rare, but the fact that football could operate as a medium through which identity and loyalty were mediated is significant, and would continue to resonate after the war, a topic discussed throughout the following chapter.

Conclusion

The First World War disrupted traditional football tours, yet amid the tumult, British troops turned to football to maintain morale and a sense of normality during their time on the continent. Football became a fixture of soldiers' spare time, whether they were fighting at the front or facing years of incarceration as POWs. Football provided a recognisable practice that men used to manage boredom, fear, and dislocation. Soldiers from different nationalities played together, reflecting the pre-war growth of the game and the intensification of cross-cultural sporting contact during the conflict.

Football would relieve another group of travellers during the war, far beyond the European continent. Harry Shaw, a member of Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expedition, recalled how "to break the monotony we played football and cricket on the ice. At least we tried to play. They were funny games".[82] In 2015 photos emerged of Shackleton's men playing football, which, much like narratives of the Christmas truce, help Britons today relate to the experiences of men a century ago.[83] In the harshest of conditions, be they the battlefields of Flanders,

[80] Lewis-Stempel, *War*, 149.
[81] Robert Monteith. "Monteith's Diary in Germany", *Irish Brigade*, accessed 29 November 2025 https://www.irishbrigade.eu/recruits/monteith/monteith-germany-diary.html
[82] "With Shackleton in the Antarctic," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 2 April 1917, 1.
[83] BBC News, "Stark images of Shackleton's struggle," *BBC News*, 20 November 2015, accessed 3 November 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34856379

Turkish prison camps, or the Antarctic desert, football appeared as a form of self-expression, agency, and fun.

The war also exposed the limits and contradictions of football's internationalism. More commonly, the war sharpened existing rivalries and produced retrospective moral accounts of pre-war touring. In June 1916, the *Oxford Chronicle* reflected on Oxford City's 1910 tour of Germany, recounting the warm hospitality with which they were received, before claiming that "even then the German nation was preparing for the present war with boundless energy, skilfully cloaking its designs beneath professions of friendship until, at the bidding of the All Highest six years later, the mask was finally removed!".[84] Such narratives retrospectively recast peaceful sporting exchange as evidence of deceitful premeditated betrayal. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* went further, claiming that "the reception which some of the English teams received in Germany some two years ago only showed the deep hatred of this country", though offering no evidence of such animosity.[85]

Such nationalism was also evident in the experience of Max Seeburg, the first continental footballer to play in the English Football League. Seeburg had moved from Germany to England at the age of two and would play for Chelsea, Tottenham, Leyton, Burnley, Grimsby, and Reading before the First World War. In October 1914, Seeburg was arrested following an order to detain German and Austrian men of fighting age.[86] Though Seeburg would be released within a week, the ordeal reportedly led him to lose his job managing a Reading pub.[87] The experience of Seeburg is a testament that transnational sporting actors were subject to the authority of the nation-state during wartime.

Emily Rosenberg's account of global exchange notes that "sports projected the hegemonies found in other internationalist arrangements. Both the Olympics and football (soccer) claimed to symbolize a global community united in sport, but the organizing bodies reflected not only national loyalties but also imperial and gender allegiances".[88] The case of football during the First World War reflects this duality, with the game an emblem of an internationalism that could bridge borders and divides, yet which was also a cultural form that could reinforce divisions for national purposes. While the game brought relief for many, football throughout the war was constrained by the harsh realities of total war. With the war over and peace resurfacing across

[84] "An Oxford City F.C. Team in Germany," *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette*, 9 June 1916, 11.
[85] "Sports and Pastimes," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1915, 9.
[86] "Well-known Footballer Arrested", *Birmingham Mail*, 22 October 1914, 3.
[87] Nick Harris, *England, their England* (Hove: Pitch, 2003), 37.
[88] Emily S. Rosenberg, "Transnational Currents in Shrinking World," in *A World Connecting: 1870–1945* ed. Emily S. Rosenberg (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012), 833.

the continent, civilian football tours could resume and now carried greater meaning, shaped by the fault lines of war and the hopes of using sport for a better, more peaceful world.

Chapter Four: Touring Commemoration and Reconciliation

Introduction

"'The taste for visiting foreign lands is so deeply rooted in the minds of Britons that it cannot be eradicated,' wrote a simple trustworthy historian in the time of Charlemagne. Griminess, perspiration, fatigue, petty imposition, extra expense. Ticket collectors, unable to understand the book of railway vouchers, demanding excess which they will never get, gesticulate and shout as they may. Yet Continental travel is well worth while if it furnishes one of those innumerable bare corridors of the mind with a hundred new mental images."[1]

Stephen Edge. 'Is It Peace?' *Hertfordshire Express*. 20 August 1927

Stephen Edge's reflections upon the difficulties and benefits of interwar overseas journeys portrayed a British vision of continental travel that was awkward and exhausting, yet capable of producing 'new mental images'. In the decade following the First World War, European travel was rarely a neutral act, with routes running through battlefields and military cemeteries to damaged towns and cities. Crossing national borders in the 1920s involved moving through spaces and communities still fresh with the memory of war.

Among this post-war travel were touring football teams, who traversed these scarred landscapes both as competitors and participants, willingly or otherwise, in wider efforts of reconstruction. Football tours in the aftermath of war were not formal diplomatic endeavours, or unambiguously pacifist by nature, but they could be forms of performed peace. Through matches and their surrounding commemorative rituals, football teams engaged with continental sides in exercises that resembled diplomacy in practice, even if they lacked a government mandate.

The devastation brought by war left Europe seeking new stable settlements amid the trauma and grief from the war's mass casualties. As Annette Becker has affirmed, the years after the war were shaped by the processes of both "memory and forgetting", with each operating "simultaneously in a continuity of the past and in a selection from it".[2] The peoples of Britain and the continent emerged in what Becker has termed "bereaved communities", with mourning structuring much of public life and personal interaction.[3] Within this context, it is natural that

[1] Stephen Edge, "Is it Peace?," *Hertfordshire Express,* 20 August 1927, 9.
[2] Annette Becker, "Remembering and Forgetting the First World War in Western Europe," in *Ideas of Europe since 1914* ed. Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 90.
[3] Ibid.

the football played at this time intersected with commemoration, as varied private and civic institutions participated in representations of loss.

Scholars have repeatedly looked to the interwar years as a formative period for examining the processes and practices of modern cultural diplomacy. Benjamin Martin and Elisabeth Piller describe the interwar period as Europe's "Twenty Years' Crisis", an era in which the continent "saw a rapid expansion of cultural diplomatic activity… including student exchanges and systematic language promotion, as well as lower-brow concerns like sports, tourism and popular festivals".[4] Cultural diplomacy emerged at a moment when conventional political settlements and strategies appeared insufficient and failing, with stability understood as requiring cooperation between peoples as well as governments.

Interwar diplomacy was not limited to embassy meetings or the carefully drafted correspondence of foreign ministries. Europe's reconstruction required methods of contact which stretched far beyond the government buildings of London, Paris, and Berlin. Simon Rofe's analysis of the development of sports diplomacy asserts that "practitioners of sport diplomacy come from every sector of society and every socio-economic group. It is diplomacy of the people, by the people; what has been termed 'people-to-people' diplomacy".[5] As with other forms of cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy can be understood as layers of practice operating beyond recognised state actors, encompassing peoples and practices previously marginal to conventional diplomacy.

Football tours and their constituent fixtures, as structured cultural encounters, required negotiations to organise. Though their diplomatic significance ought not be overstated, their facilitating the interaction of voluntary associations, civic institutions, and general publics inevitably produced occasions in which nations could meet peacefully where only recently they had been engaged in brutal war.

The growing field of the history of sports diplomacy has focussed particularly on state intervention and organised peace activism. Emily Calcraft has highlighted the interwar efforts of the League of Nations' Union and the Peace Pledge Union to mobilise sport within their campaigns, explicitly deploying international sport as a means of fostering a "world citizen" ethos.[6] The football tours under investigation throughout this chapter were rarely as overt self-

[4] Benjamin Martin and Elisabeth Marie Piller, "Cultural Diplomacy and Europe's Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: Introduction," *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 2 (2021), 159.
[5] J. Simon Rofe, "Sport Diplomacy and Sport for Development SfD: A Discourse of Challenges and Opportunity," *Journal of Global Sport Management* 9, no. 4 (2024), 697.
[6] Emily Calcraft. "Playing Fields not Battlefields': Pacifism, Non-violence and Sport in Inter-war Britain," *Sport in History* 45, no. 2 (2025), 187.

conscious efforts to deploy sport for pacifist causes. Both amateur and professional clubs did not represent organisations of peace or coordinated Foreign Office policy, but primarily represented the interests of their directors, whose motives were generally commercial, reputational, and sporting rather than ideological.

As Martin Polley has stressed, "traditionally, governments working within liberal democratic traditions have been wary of intervening in sport", with the British government tending only to do so when it was confronted by ideological adversaries, as occurred in the 1930s.[7] The international engagements of British football clubs in the 1920s were rarely the outcome of centralised policy, instead reflecting the initiative of individual clubs and the resumption of continental sporting circuits after their wartime rupture.

Tour itineraries were shaped by the evolving status of the post-war order, with fresh memories of war and the pressures of its settlement shaping the sport's contours. Peter Beck has established how the resumption of Football League clubs touring Germany in 1924 accorded with the diplomatic thawing between Britain and Germany, otherwise evidenced by the enactment of the Dawes Plan that year.[8] Beck emphasises that German hosts used "tours to check and improve the quality of their football teams", however, some British observers interpreted warm German hospitality with suspicion and were concerned that such receptions were contrived to help normalise Germany's position within the international community.[9]

To claim that football tours built or maintained peace would be an overstatement of their power and a misrepresentation of the nature of sport in interwar Europe. Sport's relationship to peace was conflicting, at once humanising opponents and reinforcing national rivalries. Peter Donnelly describes sport's historical relationship to peace as "Janus-Faced", concluding that "employing sport in reconciliation initiatives is like playing with fire, and requires careful planning and a great deal of caution. It is possible, under carefully controlled circumstances, to accomplish a great deal of "good" with sport, but the more destructive potential is always there".[10]

Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong further emphasise the inseparability of sport and politics, noting sport to have functioned historically as "an important socio-cultural field for

[7] Martin Polley, "The Amateur Ideal and British Sports Diplomacy, 1900–1945," *Sport in History* 26, no. 3 (2006), 450.
[8] Beck, "Chapter 6," 1188.
[9] Beck. *International Football as Cultural.*
[10] Peter Donnelly. "From War without Weapons to Sport for Development and Peace: The Janus-Face of Sport," *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2011), 74.

reproducing highly divisive or violent forms of social stratification and exclusion".[11] This chapter proceeds from that caution, not to argue that football tours resolved tensions or dissolved hostilities, but that football offered a visible arena within which Europe could exercise gestures of peace.

Armstrong and Mitchell's study of interwar Malta finds that football "became much more important than a game, if not perhaps more important than life or death, as it signalled attachment to an understanding of national identity and national destiny".[12] This dynamic can be examined across Europe after the First World War, with tours highlighting sport's intersection with remembrance, nationalism, and informal diplomacy. Through the staging of pilgrimages to battlefields, the introduction of Anglo-French and Anglo-Belgian fixtures, and growing visits to Weimar Germany, British football contributed to the cultural reconstruction of the continent.

Throughout the following sections, three interconnected areas are explored. Firstly, the construction of inter-allied football competitions reflected and reinforced wartime alliances. Secondly, how football tours reflected routes of commemoration, as fixtures in France and Belgium embedded active memorialisation within their routines. Thirdly, the resumption of sporting contact with Germany, where tours were performed among memories of enmity, with their enactment interpreted as possessing promise of reconciliation. Through examining these politically charged encounters, the chapter situates football as a pronounced stage upon which the possibilities and limits of reconciliation were performed.

Reintegrating the Game

Just as the reintroduction of overseas football tours was bound up with the politics of the age, so was the reintegration of domestic football within British society after the First World War. The game resumed amidst a Britain transformed by bereavement, economic crisis, labour unrest, and escalating crisis in Ireland. As David McCrone has observed, "while the official dates of the Great War were 1914 to 1918, there is a strong case for saying that its fore and aftermath lasted much longer, well into the 1920s".[13] The consequences of the war stretched beyond the armistice, with its social reverberations shaping how football would re-emerge.

[11] Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong, "Sport, the Military and Peacemaking: History and Possibilities," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2011), 381.
[12] Gary Armstrong and Jon P. Mitchell, "Defence and Attack: Empire, Nation and Resistance in inter-war football in Malta," *Social Identities* 17, no. 3 (2011), 304.
[13] David McCrone, "Unmasking Britannia: the rise and fall of British national identity," *Nations and Nationalism* 3, no. 4 (1997), 588.

The Football League resumed in August 1919, and in the following years expanded with the First and Second Divisions absorbing more clubs, and new Third Divisions created, with Welsh clubs now incorporated into the English football pyramid.[14] Football did not therefore return to its previous routines, but was reorganised according to the new dynamics of post-war reconstruction.

At times, the rhetoric surrounding football's return sought to frame the sport as a mechanism of social repair. In a January 1919 article, titled 'The Revival of Sport', author E.B. Osborn asserted "sport in this country is the most democratic thing in the world", claiming that "class distinctions are simply non-existent on the cricket-field and football-field, where nobody worries about a man's origin or method of living as long as he is worth his place in his team".[15] Though this assertion undoubtedly exaggerated the egalitarianism of British sport, it reveals how some perceived its function as an instrument of national cohesion, an arena in which merit purportedly overcame origin. Osborn argued that sport was the "oil in the cogs and wheels of our social machinery", capable of reducing "the friction caused by the vast and dangerous processes of reconstruction".[16]

Adopting a similar perspective, a *Coventry Evening Telegraph* column later that year noted that:

> "The hold which football had on the public in pre-war days was a source of wonder to that section of the nation which did not find its recreation and its pleasure on the playing fields. But, resuming its normal course after four or five years of makeshift competitions, what a tremendously larger sway has the game than ever in its history".[17]

These commentaries elevated football beyond a form of popular entertainment, casting the sport as a stabilising ritual. Reflecting upon the early post-war atmosphere, Percy Young characterised the "briefly euphoric state of the country after the cessation of hostilities, crowds flocked to football grounds to reassert the primacy of traditional values".[18] The revival of domestic football was itself an early performance of peace, with regular, regulated competition restored and developed within a Britain no longer consumed by war.

Football was particularly visible within public commemorations at the end of the war. The peace celebrations of July 1919, held in towns and villages across Britain, often included

[14] Beck, "Chapter 6," 1168.
[15] E.B. Osborn, "The Revival of Sport", *The Illustrated London News*, 11 January 1919, 5.
[16] Ibid.
[17] "Topics of the Week," *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 6 September 1919, 2.
[18] Percy Young, *A History of British Football* (London: Stanley Paul, 1969), 167.

football tournaments. Festivities in Lichfield featured a six-a-side football tournament alongside tug-of-war, a ham-cutting competition, and a greasy pig chase.[19] Likewise, in Kirkcaldy, events celebrating the peace featured juvenile sports and a football contest.[20] Football was ingrained in routines and across communities, so it was naturally incorporated into public celebrations, with the appeal of the sport cutting across class and regional divisions at a moment of national unity.

At the national level, the integration of football with commemoration took on more official forms. In 1919, Victory Cups were competed for in both Scotland and England. While somewhat commemorative in context, the naming of these competitions framed them more as celebrations of triumph than acts of dutiful mourning. In Scotland, the Victory Cup effectively replaced the Scottish Cup for that year, with St. Mirren defeating Hearts 3-0 in a final played at Hampden Park.[21] Meanwhile, in England, the London Victory Cup was restricted to clubs from the capital, with Chelsea beating Fulham in the final.[22] The alliance of football with commemorative culture represented a conscious effort to affirm the power and responsibility of the football community to the nation, re-establishing football's role in public life after years of wartime disruption and controversy.

Football was also organised for troops on the continent awaiting demobilisation and their return home. In December 1918, British troops stationed in Greece arranged a *Grand International Charity Football Match*, a combined Scotland and Ireland team playing a team of English and Welsh men.[23] Men who had played for major professional sides, including Manchester United, Sheffield Wednesday, Celtic, Rangers, and Linfield played in the match, their club identities listed in a match programme printed for the occasion.[24]

England did not play any football matches against continental nations until 1921, when they faced Belgium in Brussels. In the summer of 1920, the Football Association instead dispatched a representative side on a twenty-five-match tour of South Africa. Before England renewed sporting relations with the continent, it seemingly sought to reaffirm its role within its imperial sphere.

The trip was apparently perceived by FA officials as an affirmation of imperial relations and British values. Speaking at Poplar Town Hall, FA Vice-President John Lewis framed the tour

[19] "Peace Celebrations," *Lichfield Mercury*, 25 July 1919, 3.
[20] "Kirkaldy Peace Celebrations," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 1 August 1919, 3.
[21] "Saints win Victory Cup," *Dundee Courier*, 28 April 1919, 4.
[22] "Chelsea's Cup Victory," *Daily Mirror*, 14 October 1919, 14.
[23] IWM, *"Grand International Charity Football Match Programme"* (LBY K. 73338)
[24] Ibid.

within imperial terms, praising the team's "gentlemanly" conduct, before claiming "that their visit would prove as Empire-building as any propaganda which England might undertake".[25] Lewis' remarks reveal how football could be imagined as a projection of disciplined order and moral standard across the world, the football pitch a space on which to strengthen imperialism.

Some politicians expressed similar assumptions. At the 1923 opening of a sports ground at Hadfield's steel company in Sheffield, Conservative MP, and then Minister of Labour, Sir Montague Barlow asserted that sport "seemed bred in the bone of the Anglo Saxon, and we appeared to have to teach the rest of the world how to play games".[26] Barlow reflected on his recent tour of Eastern Europe to examine labour conditions of which he was most surprised by how "the war and the English contact with it seemed to have taught all Europe how to play football".[27]

Barlow's assertion that continental footballing prowess stemmed self-evidently from British tutelage, rather than from the independent development and agency among Europeans themselves, reflects a broader tendency to frame Britain as the natural custodian of the game. For figures such as Barlow, the post-war revival of football was less a testament to the sport's transnational evolution than a reaffirmation of Britain's enduring global influence. Yet, as Matthew Taylor has noted, British overseas influence, particularly that of amateur sides such as the Corinthians, had begun to wane by the 1920s, with local traditions and styles increasingly asserting themselves, and the "overall influence of the Anglophiles who tended to host the team declined significantly during the interwar period".[28]

The resumption of football tours to the continent was slow, and some of the game's most established touring sides never returned to the European circuits they had frequented before 1914. Richmond Association FC, who had travelled almost annually to the continent since 1900, merged with Hampstead FC in 1920, and thereafter played only a couple of overseas fixtures in the interwar period, on a visit to the Netherlands in 1922.[29] By the 1920s, Richmond had acquired a different significance, not as a space of sporting exchange, but as the site of the factory producing the poppies that would become a central emblem of national remembrance.[30]

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[25] "Football and Empire Building," *The Scotsman*, 6 December 1920, 8.
[26] "The Workers' Sports," *Westminster Gazette*, 28 May 1923, 12.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Taylor, *World of Sport,* 89
[29] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[30] Emily Bartlett. "Reassembling Disabled Identities: Employment, Ex-servicemen and the Poppy Factory," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 1 (2020), 210.

Football's re-emergence after 1918 was embedded within processes of reconstruction and commemoration. Presented by British contemporaries as intrinsically democratic, stabilising, and exemplary, football was central to public rituals of celebration and mourning. When touring resumed in the early 1920s, football teams did not travel in a political vacuum. Clubs represented communities still grieving, as they moved through places also marked by war and featuring newly created cemeteries and memorials.

Inter-Allied Football

Just as the revival of football in Britain was shaped by allied victory, so too was the resumption of international football competition, with sport slow to facilitate reconciliation with former enemies, instead functioning to perform solidarity among the victorious powers. The Inter-Allied Games were held in Paris in June and July of 1919, bringing together the triumphant nations in a celebratory sports contest, with all 1,500 athletes featured being current and former military personnel, leading to the Games also being referred to as the 'Military Olympics'.[31] As Matthew Llewellyn explains, "the defeated Central Powers (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey) were unsurprisingly excluded".[32] Such omission was indicative of the Inter-Allied Games operating as a reaffirmation of allied unity and shared mourning, rather than acting as a universal sports competition.

This arrangement continued into the 1920s, with Germany also excluded from the Olympic Games of 1920 and 1924, with aspects of interwar sport mirroring the political settlement of Versailles. However, unlike the IOC, FIFA did not formally expel the defeated powers, leading British associations to leave FIFA themselves. Beck explains that the home nations sought "peaceful coexistence, not re-entry" with their continental neighbours, seeking to preserve their own authority and independence while maintaining some contact with FIFA.[33]

Football did feature at the Inter-Allied Games, along with traditional Olympic sports such as athletics and swimming, and militaristic events including grenade throwing.[34] The Allies competed in separate national teams, with Britain's participation in the games limited to rowing and golf.[35] However, British footballing influence was not entirely absent at the Inter-Allied Games. The newly independent state of Czechoslovakia won the football competition, with a

[31] Matthew Llewellyn, "Olympic Games are an International Farce," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 5 (2011), 753.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Peter Beck. "Going to War, Peaceful Co-existence or Virtual Membership? British Football and Fifa, 1928–46," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17, no. 1 (2000), 118.
[34] Steven Pope. "An army of athletes: Playing fields, battlefields, and the American military sporting experience, 1890-1920," *The Journal of Military History* 59, no. 3 (1995), 453.
[35] *The Inter-Allied Games 1919* (Paris: Games Committee, 1919), 176b.

team coached by Scotsman John Madden, who had settled in Prague in 1905.[36] Madden's presence on the pitch side in Paris illustrated how national self-assertion was not a strictly national affair, relying upon international figures to express itself on the global stage.

As W. R. Callcott observes, Britain had been "slow and reluctant" to commit itself to the destruction of Austria-Hungary, and only in the autumn of 1918 was "a full commitment" made to the new state of Czechoslovakia.[37] The British government may have been hesitant to support Czechoslovakian nationhood, while a British football coach was actively supporting its emergent cultural identity.

Tomáš Tlustý's study of Czech participation in the Inter-Allied Games notes that the "Games had a great impact for the development of physical education and sport in interwar Czechoslovakia" and affirmed Czechoslovakian ties to other nations.[38] Thus, football at the Inter-Allied Games was a visible enactment of sovereignty, and a forum in which new political realities were staged before an international audience.

The tournament's football trophy further demonstrated the rhetoric of victorious alliance. Commissioned by French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and named *La Revanche et le Droit* (Revenge and Law), the trophy depicted a triumphant French cockerel standing over a shattered Prussian helmet and broken German sword, an image portraying unmistakable victory over Germany.[39] Though the former enemy was absent from the teams assembled in Paris, they were evidently present in the event's production.

For Britain, the decision to abstain from the football tournament reflected some reluctance to engage with the evolving post-war sporting landscape. The Inter-Allied Games Committee published a book about the games, in which they reflected that:

> "It was universally regretted that Great Britain decided to send only rowing crews and a golf team as, wherever the sport world foregathers, the Englishman is a welcome competitor and one whose chances of winning must be minutely calculated by his adversaries."[40]

British refusal to field a football team signalled a hesitance of engagement in the growing field of international football competition, a trend that would become even more evident over the

[36] Ibid., 243.
[37] W. R. Callcott, "The Last War Aim: British Opinion and the Decision for Czechoslovak Independence, 1914–1919," *The Historical Journal* 27, no. 4 (1984), 979.
[38] Tomáš Tlustý, "Czechoslovak sportsmen and their participation in Inter-Allied Games," *Studia Sportiva* 11, no. 1 (2017), 68.
[39] *Inter-Allied Games,* 145.
[40] Ibid., 176b.

course of the interwar period. British self-exclusion and the politicisation of sport at the Games pointed to the changing nature of football in the interwar period. Britain, once the unquestioned arbiter of the game, was exposed as inward-looking, while for some on the continent, football was becoming a space for the enactment of national identity.

In May 1919, a 'Triangular Contest' of 'Inter-Allied Football' was staged in London, bringing together teams representing the British, French, and Belgian armies.[41] The matches, played at Stamford Bridge, were attended by the Prince of Wales and symbolised football's capacity to reinforce the wartime alliances.[42] Reports alternately described the British side as 'England' or 'Great Britain,' highlighting the fluidity of representation in a context where military identity and national identity overlapped.[43] The British team ultimately emerged victorious, defeating Belgium on May 3rd and narrowly overcoming France 3-2 in the deciding match five days later.[44] The tournament's very existence spoke to the popularity of football across the three nations' armed forces, and the understanding that sport could act as a useful framework of allied expression.

In November 1919, representatives of the English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh Football Associations met in Derby to affirm a united position: that they would decline to join any international federation admitting clubs from the former enemy nations, "No Football With Enemies," as the *Sunderland Daily Echo* summarised it.[45] According to the British authorities, competing with the continent could resume, provided it excluded its adversaries.

These actions must be framed within broader contemporary perceptions of sport's socialisation. A *Daily Mirror* column published on 15 November 1919, claimed with bombast that:

"If Waterloo was won on the playing grounds of Eton, it is true to say that the war was won in the boxing ring and on the football field. Germany could not understand our sportsmanlike spirit and thought that we were absurd. Yet it was precisely that spirit that carried us through. It also carried France through."[46]

Sport was deployed to confirm national character and to explain the war's outcome, while also celebrating the shared cultures of allied nations.

[41] "Inter-Allied Football," *Western Mail*, 9 May 1919, 6.
[42] Ibid.
[43] "Forthcoming Football", *Daily Mirror*, 24 April 1919, 17.
[44] "England Wins Military Football Competition," *Western Daily Press*, 9 May 1919, 5.
[45] "Football," *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 17 November 1919, 5.
[46] "The French View of the Boxing Match," *Daily Mirror*, 15 November 1919, 7.

The resumption of Anglo-Belgian and Anglo-French footballing encounters in the interwar period was not only a revival of pre-war sporting tradition but an extension of football's role as a medium for diplomacy and commemoration. London Select XIs had regularly visited Belgium prior to the First World War, with annual matches held on All Saints' Day between 1909 and 1913.[47] This pattern was re-established in November 1921, months after England's first-ever official post-war overseas international against Belgium in Brussels.[48]

Practices of inter-allied footballing cooperation persisted in the years following the First World War. In 1921, the triangular football tournament involving British, French, and Belgian militaries became the Kentish Cup, named after Brigadier-General RJ Kentish, former secretary of the British Army Football Association.[49] According to the Royal Air Force FA, it was established "with the purpose of fostering relations between Armed Forces", and "is recognized by UEFA as the oldest Cup competition in Europe".[50]

The competition became an annual fixture, reinforcing military camaraderie among the participating nations. Though interrupted by the Second World War, the Kentish Cup endures to this day. In December 2025, the United Kingdom claimed its thirtieth victory in the tournament, defeating the Netherlands, which joined the competition in 1986.[51] Created as an extension of wartime alliance, the competition became fixed into the practices of peacetime commemoration, and continues as an institution of military sports diplomacy.

These encounters reflected the shifting dynamics of European football and the broader cultural interplay between Britain and the continent. Such dynamics were evident in the annual Armistice Day fixtures between Arsenal and Racing Club de Paris, beginning on 11 November 1930. As Michaël Delépine's comprehensive study of Arsenal and Racing's encounters from 1930 to 1962 recounts, the "initiative was sponsored by *Le Journal*, one of the top four popular Parisian dailies, in aid of Les Plus Grands Invalides de Guerre (seriously wounded war veterans), a charity established in 1922 by Jacques Simon, himself a veteran. Not just a football match, therefore, Racing Club vs. Arsenal represented first of all the sacrifices made by the youth of both nations".[52] The persistence of the annual Arsenal Racing fixture until the Second World War, and beyond it, demonstrates how the commemoration of the First World

[47] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[48] Ibid.
[49] Royal Air Force Football, "UK Armed Forces Football," *Royal Air Force Football*, accessed 10 November 2025, https://www.royalairforcefa.com/players/ways-to-play/uk-armed-forces-football
[50] Ibid.
[51] Erik Garin, Neil Morrison, and Mark Sensen, "Kentish Cup 1919-date", *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*, accessed 17 January 2026, https://www.rsssf.org/tablesc/challenge-kentish.html
[52] Michaël Delépine, "The Racing Club vs. Arsenal matches, 1930–1962: A Franco-British ritual, European Games or Football Lessons?," *Sport in History* 35, no. 4 (2015), 605.

War was perpetuated through enduring football fixtures. As with the other inter-allied sporting encounters, they reveal how the game operated within transnational frameworks of commemoration and competition, thus challenging notions of British interwar insularity.

Tours of Commemoration

The memorialisation of war within British football has often been treated as a late twentieth-century development. Dave Russell's study on sporting cultures of commemoration identifies a "commemorative turn" within British football taking place in the 1980s.[53] Likewise, Daniel Fitzpatrick's investigation into football memories within British military commemoration briefly discusses the emergence of poppies in the 1920s, but gives no further reference to the interwar period, focusing instead on twenty-first-century commemorations.[54] However, archival evidence demonstrates that commemoration was not a late innovation but a feature of British football culture in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.

This was especially manifest in the organised tours of the Western Front undertaken by many British people, including footballers, throughout the interwar period. The ravaged landscapes of Belgium and Northern France were visited by travellers who mediated remembrance through their own mobility, as battlefield tourism assumed formalised, collective forms.

During the 1920s, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission constructed over 1,200 cemeteries and memorials, with Anthony Seaton arguing that this helped create "an intrinsic propensity among the British for travel to pay their last respects to that "portion of a foreign land" that was forever Britain".[55] Caroline Winter outlines how touring battlefields was defined by bereavement, such trips undertaken more as obligation than leisure.[56] Within this context, the practice of battlefield visitation became formalised and organised. The creation of Michelin guides in the 1920s offered clearer guidance and structure to British battlefield visits, with the distinction between pilgrim and tourist often uncertain.[57] The emerging practice of battlefield touring has been described by Rafiq Ahmad and Anne Hertzog as a "collective response to

[53] Dave Russell, "'We All Agree, Name the Stand after Shankly': Cultures of Commemoration in Late Twentieth-century English Football Culture," *Sport in History* 26, no. 1 (2006), 3.
[54] Daniel Fitzpatrick, "'Football Remembers' - the Collective Memory of Football in the Spectacle of British Military Commemoration," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 16, no. 1 (2021), 58.
[55] Anthony Seaton, ""Another Weekend Away Looking for Dead Bodies…": Battlefield Tourism on the Somme and in Flanders," *Tourism Recreation Research* 25, no. 3 (2000), 67.
[56] Caroline Winter, "Commemoration of the Great War on the Somme: Exploring personal connections," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 10, no. 3 (2012), 248-249.
[57] Ibid., 251.

the Great War violence", functioning as an "essential therapeutic element of the 'culture of mourning'".[58]

These visits were rarely private acts, with tours coordinated by veteran associations, civic bodies, and voluntary groups.[59] Football clubs are also recorded to have visited battlefield sites and memorials across France and Belgium while touring the continent, incorporating remembrance and commemoration into the routes and rhythms of interwar sporting networks. Crossing the channel after the First World War, football teams entered newly formed landscapes of mass cemeteries and monuments, with matches often involving the laying of wreaths and minutes' silences, alongside accompanying visits to battlefields and graves.

Glasgow Celtic was among the first to make the pilgrimage. In 1921, Celtic ventured to Paris for matches against Cercle Athlétique de Paris and Newcastle United, embedding their fixtures within a broader itinerary of remembrance, visiting the battlefields around Ypres on their way from Lille to Paris.[60] The tour fused sporting competition with practices of remembrance and mourning, the trench and stadium both belonging to the same circuit of travel.

Celtic's twenty-first century identity is often perceived in relation to Irish nationalism, with the club attracting attention in recent decades for opposing the wearing of remembrance poppies on their kits.[61] However, Celtic and their players were deeply implicated in British war efforts of the past. The club's stadium was used as a site of enlistment during the First World War, and a total of seven current and former Celtic players died fighting during this conflict.[62] In this context, a journey to the battlefields of the continent was a fitting reflection of the club's own history of loss.

Across the 1920s, British clubs continued to visit battlefield sites. In 1923, Liverpool, then First Division champions, who had also lost seven players to the war, embarked on a tour of France.[63] Liverpool journeyed to the trenches of the Somme, before visiting the Arc de

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[58] Rafiq Ahmad and Anne Hertzog, "Itineraries of the Great War and the rise of the local on the Western Front: Memory, commemoration and the shifting regimes of remembrance tourism," *Memory Studies* 13, no. 6 (2020), 1167.
[59] Sandrine Virgili, Hélène Delacour, Frédéric Bornarel, and Sébastien Liarte. "'From the Flames to the Light': 100 years of the commodification of the dark tourist site around the Verdun battlefield," *Annals of Tourism Research* 68 (2018), 65.
[60] "Celtic to Tour Battlefields in France," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 18 May 1921, 11.
[61] Joseph Bradley, "British colonialism, Ireland and the 'old firm': Postcolonial Identities and Contemporary Scottish Football and Society," *Postcolonial Studies* 25, no. 4 (2022), 494.
[62] Celtic FC, "A Day of Remembrance," *Celtic FC*, 10 November 2019, accessed 8 November 2025, https://www.celticfc.com/news/15240/
[63] Liverpool FC, "Remembering Liverpool FC's Heroes of WWI," *Liverpool FC*, 6 November 2018, accessed 8 November 2025, https://www.liverpoolfc.com/news/announcements/323967-remembering-the-liverpool-fc-heroes-of-wwi

Triomphe, where they laid a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. [64] The culture of commemoration has endured within club memory. In 2018, Liverpool planted seven trees to maintain a “living legacy” for those seven players who had died in the First World War.[65]

As well as professional clubs, amateur sides incorporated commemorative pilgrimage into their itineraries. Hampstead Town travelled to Belgium in April 1925, visiting Fort de Loncin, destroyed during the Battle of Liège and left as ruins after the war as a monument to its Belgian defenders killed in the battle.[66] Hampstead then played Parisian side Stade Français in Liège, winning 6-1.[67] Before the match, the squad laid a wreath upon a memorial for Liège players killed in the war. In thanks, the Liège President offered the team a letter expressing his appreciation:

“The homage you have rendered and this manifestation of your faithful friendship to our dear departed is very greatly appreciated. Your action has touched us profoundly, and on behalf of the dear dead of our Club we give you our grateful thanks.”[68]

The interwar touring circuit also included travelling football teams representing large private companies. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a Lloyds Bank staff side undertook regular visits to Northern France, hosted by the Union Sportive de Boulogne-sur-Mer Côte d'Opale. Unlike the bank’s other rugby and hockey teams, whose sporting trips remained confined to Britain, Lloyds’ footballing contingent repeatedly crossed the Channel, their travels meticulously documented in the bank’s staff magazine *The Dark Horse*.

The first of these tours, in 1924, is illustrative of the character of these trips. The 1924 tour featured a single impromptu fixture against the National Provincial Foreign Bank in Paris after Boulogne withdrew at the last moment.[69] Though most of Lloyds’ first-choice players were unavailable, a makeshift team was assembled, and the journey was described as "a huge success," blending football with cultural excursions to the Louvre, Notre Dame, and the Eiffel Tower.[70]

Such tours were accompanied by a rhetoric of moral and social instruction, exemplified by a November 1924 *The Dark Horse* article, titled ‘Plato and Football’. The piece extolled sport as a mechanism for discipline and character-building, asserting that “football and its kindred

[64] “Liverpool in Paris,” *Liverpool Echo*, 30 May 1923, 6.
[65] Liverpool FC, “Remembering”.
[66] “Hampstead Town FC in Belgium,” *Kensington Post*, 17 April 1925, 5.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] LBG Archive, *The Dark Horse 1923-24*, 311.
[70] Ibid.

sports are based upon teamwork, where individuality is only useful when it has learnt the lesson of cooperation".[71] This ideology, reflecting broader interwar concerns with order and cohesion, placed football within the discourse of social regeneration, linking the discipline of the sports field to the value of collective responsibility.

By 1925, Lloyds had extended their continental engagements to include participation in a "triangular tournament" in Paris featuring French and Belgian opposition, their report summarising that the squad were "all the better for a brief holiday and for fraternising with good fellows of the Paris and Brussels Sports Clubs".[72] Visits to war memorials formed part of the tours, with wreath laying mentioned, and a photograph published in a 1929 edition of *The Dark Horse*, indicating how commemoration was an established, if somewhat understated, aspect of these corporate football tours.[73]

The impulse to integrate British football played on the continent into the rituals of war commemoration was not confined to the men's game. Indeed, examining the history of women's football during the interwar period exposes the limitations of interpreting the internationalisation of football through the expansion of its established institutions. Much of the international development of the men's game was organised through national associations, professional clubs and leagues, and after 1904, FIFA. Women's football developed largely outside, and increasingly in opposition to, these structures. Yet institutional exclusion did not prevent rapid expansion. As Lisa Jenkel notes, the "increasing popularity" of women's football during the First World War and its immediate aftermath produced crowds in the tens of thousands, substantial charitable receipts and as many as 150 teams across Britain.[74] Nor was this solely a British phenomenon. In France, Wendy Michallat argues, women's football "flourished domestically and abroad", supported by organisations distinct from those governing the men's game.[75]

The leading women's team of the period was Dick, Kerr Ladies, who were formed out of a Preston munitions factory during the First World War. Gail Newsham's history of the club details how their November 1920 visit to France was shaped as much by the imperative of remembrance as by the demands of sporting competition.

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[71] Ibid., 612.
[72] LBG Archive, *The Dark Horse 1924-25*, 386.
[73] LBG Archive, *The Dark Horse 1928-29*, 283
[74] Lisa Jenkel, "The FA's ban of women's football 1921 in the contemporary press–a historical discourse analysis," *Sport in History* 41, no. 2 (2021), 245.
[75] Wendy Michallat, "Terrain de lutte: Women's Football and Feminism in Les annees folles," *French Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007), 259.

Dick, Kerr's itinerary included visits to Parisian landmarks, including Notre Dame and the Arc de Triomphe, monuments that had themselves been marked by damage during the war.[76] The team's plans were formed by their desire to study and respect the war dead. After their first match, a 1-1 draw against a French women's team, the squad left Paris for another game in Roubaix, travelling through areas destroyed during the war and left a wreath, twelve feet in diameter, at the foot of the Roubaix cenotaph.[77]

The Vote, the newspaper of the Women's Freedom League, reported on Dick, Kerr's planned tour making specific reference to their planned visits of "the battlefields of Ypres, Mount Kemmell, and Armentieres", but was notably lacking on the details of the actual football matches to be played.[78] These reports suggest that the tour functioned as an extensive pilgrimage through the landscapes of sacrifice, with the team appearing to have laid more wreaths than they played matches. At Père Lachaise Cemetery, the women placed another wreath in memory of the war dead, and in Compiègne, they stood before the table on which the armistice had been signed only two years prior.[79] Newsham asserts that the team were "bitterly disappointed at being unable to lay flowers on the grave of Eddie Latheron of Blackburn Rovers, but they did discover the grave of one young Preston soldier and most were reduced to tears".[80]

The players' tears belonged to a distinctly gendered culture of mourning. As Karsten Lichau has shown, public grief in post-war Britain remained governed by ideals of restraint which bore most heavily on men, contemporary reports contrasting women's tears with men standing in "stoic silence".[81] Accounts of the men's football teams examined here visiting battlefields, cemeteries, and memorials make no comparable reference to crying. The Dick, Kerr players being "reduced to tears" therefore reflected a culture in which women enjoyed greater licence to display grief, and in which female tears had themselves become part of the recognised public language of bereavement.

As a travelling women's team, Dick, Kerr Ladies were an unusual presence on the continental touring circuit, yet their journey appears to have followed similar routes and practices as men's teams of the time, combining commemoration with competition. However, one notable

[76] Gail Newsham, *In a League of Their Own! The Dick, Kerr Ladies 1917-1965* (Trowbridge: Paragon, 2014), 63.
[77] Ibid., 67.
[78] "Women Footballers," *The Vote*, 8 October 1920, 2.
[79] Newsham, *In a League*, 67
[80] Ibid., 67-68.
[81] Karsten Lichau, "'The streaming eyes of all the many men': Revisiting male weeping in British commemoration of the First World War," *Social Science History* 48, no. 4 (2024), 678.

divergence of itineraries was Dick, Kerr Ladies' visit to Joan of Arc's prison in Rouen.[82] Though many men's sides had stayed and played in Rouen, there is no clear evidence of them visiting this site, suggesting that the women from Preston may have sought out or been guided towards the prison in recognition of the site as a space of significant women's history.[83]

Such mobility soon faced greater institutional restriction. In December 1921 the FA barred affiliated clubs from staging women's matches and prohibited registered officials from participating. However, this was not a ban on women playing football itself, and nor was it uniformly replicated elsewhere in Britain and Ireland.[84]

Women's football therefore continued to internationalise beyond the structures of the established associations. French teams continued to visit Britain. In March 1922 Olympique de Paris played Dick, Kerr Ladies in Cardiff, Preston and Liverpool, the Cardiff fixture attracting 15,000 spectators despite taking place only weeks after the Welsh association had introduced its own restrictions.[85] Dick, Kerr themselves again travelled abroad later that year, crossing the Atlantic for a North American tour and ultimately playing nine matches in the United States after the Canadian authorities refused them permission to play.[86] Rutherglen Ladies toured Ireland extensively in 1927, attracting large crowds, before Irish players travelled through Scotland and northern England, a pattern repeated the following year.[87]

These journeys were sporting contests, charitable enterprises and public spectacles, but they also exposed the limits of football's governing institutions. Associations could restrict access to grounds, officials, and legitimacy, but they could not altogether prevent women from travelling, playing, and forming connections across national boundaries. Women's football thus internationalised along a looser, less institutionalised route than the men's game, sustained by temporary networks, charitable purpose, and popular support.

The football teams of schools and some youth organisations also participated in commemorative travel to continental war sites and memorials. A Kent schoolboys tour of 1922 visited Paris and the Somme battlefields, and as they did so laid "wreaths on the grave of the

[82] Ibid., 67.
[83] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[84] Fiona Skillen, Helena Byrne, John Carrier, & Gary James. "The game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged': a comparative analysis of the 1921 English Football Association ban on women's football in Britain and Ireland," *Sport in History* 42, no. 1 (2022), 66.
[85] Jean Williams, *The History of Women's Football* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2021), 53-54.
[86] Ibid., 56.
[87] Skillen et al, "The game of football is quite unsuitable for females", 59-60.

French Unknown Warrior at the Arc de Triomphe, Paris, and on the war memorials at Roubaix and at Calais, receiving in exchange splendid bouquets on each occasion".[88]

Football tours conducted by professional, amateur, works, women's and schoolboy teams functioned as commemorative acts, binding communities in the shared rituals of memory and mourning. They provided a space where the scars of war could be acknowledged, the dead honoured, and the living inspired to seek peace, all within a unifying framework of sport.

Having resumed tours of France and the Low Countries in the aftermath of war, the next step for British football teams was to confront those sides drawn from the nations against whom they had spent four years in conflict. Yet the renewal of such encounters was far from straightforward. British-German animosities, deeply embedded in both popular consciousness and official policy, made the prospect of a return to sporting competition with German teams highly contentious. Sport, as much as politics or diplomacy, became a terrain upon which the distinctions between British and German identity were reaffirmed in the post-war world.

Touring Germany

British football tours of France and Belgium after the First World War had consolidated frameworks of commemorative fraternity among victors, though visits to former enemy Germany proved more problematic. As Beck notes, British football associations were reluctant to "accept yesterday's foes", pushing to ostracise Germany, and withdrawing from FIFA when the post-war settlement of international football offended them.[89] However, British football was present in Germany from the beginning of the interwar period, though it was initially enacted through occupation rather than reconciliation.

In 1919, members of the British occupying forces regularly staged matches in Germany. Reports in the British press documented many of these games, with accounts detailing "How our Local Boys Amuse Themselves" and "weird and wonderful football" published throughout the spring and summer of 1919.[90] Even Eton rules football made an appearance in occupied Germany. In January 1919, a match between the 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards and the 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards in Cologne was described as the first ever played under that code in Germany.[91]

[88] "Kent Schoolboys Tour," *Dover Express*, 13 January 1922, 15.
[89] Beck. *International Football as Cultural.*
[90] "Football in Germany," *Lancaster Guardian*, 3 May 1919, 3.
[91] "Eton Football Match in Germany," *Evening Mail*, 7 February 1919, 8.

These matches were played by British soldiers only, part of a broader assertion of British cultural presence in the defeated nation, with football serving both as entertainment for troops and as a symbolic reaffirmation of victory.

Reporting on football being played by British soldiers stationed in the Rhine in 1919, *The Times* described "the strenuous game of football in progress on a parade ground which but a short while ago was devoted to the cult of the goose step", explicitly framing British sporting culture as having displaced militarised German ritual.[92] Sport was deliberately encouraged by the occupying forces, with Keith Jeffery's study of soldiers in occupied Germany emphasising that "The army's traditional remedy for boredom was to step up training, encourage sport and promote "safe" recreational facilities… It created football and field hockey fields".[93]

Playing football provided British troops stationed overseas with a reminder of home, but they were denied the chance to watch home teams, with efforts by British clubs to visit Germany to play before British troops not approved. In 1920, both Celtic and Rangers considered travelling to the Rhineland, but their enquiries were rebuffed by the British Army. Explaining the refusal, the *Wishaw Press* published a letter sent to Motherwell M.P. Robert Nelson from Brigadier General CJ Fuller:

> "I am afraid your suggestion to give exhibition matches at Cologne is not practicable, as in order that football may be encouraged to the utmost, a football league has been started among the troops. This league is playing off its matches in April and May, and the while of the available football grounds around Cologne will be fully occupied by the league matches during these months."[94]

Military resistance to touring sports teams was not limited to association football. In 1925, the *Daily News* noted how Oxford University's second Rugby team, the Greyhounds, was to tour Germany despite the fact that "it was stated that the Army Rugby authorities were not in favour of the tour being made".[95]

The resumption of football tours to Germany occurred as part of a broader recalibration of post-war relations. As Beck outlines, the diplomatic relations between Britain and Germany gradually thawed, with the "Locarno spirit" producing conditions for the Home Nations to re-

[92] "Film of the Rhine Army", *The Times*, 6 May 1919, 15.
[93] Keith Jeffery, "'Hut Ab,' 'Promenade with Kamerade for Schokolade,' and the Flying Dutchman: British Soldiers in the Rhineland, 1918-1929," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 2005), 465.
[94] "Football in Germany," *Wishaw Press*, 30 April 1920, 4.
[95] "Going to Germany," *Daily News*, 28 February 1925, 11.

enter FIFA and permit clubs to visit Germany once again.[96] In that year alone, Arsenal, Bolton Wanderers, Cardiff City, Derby County, and West Ham all incorporated Germany into their continental itineraries.[97]

However, prior to this, some Scottish clubs had visited the former enemy nations, with Celtic travelling to Germany, and Aberdeen to Hungary in June 1922. Celtic's tour was described by the *Evening News* as "much criticised", explaining that the British football associations "lately agreed to lift the embargo on their clubs playing against the "Central Powers," but that the F.A. recommended that no club under their jurisdiction should do so… the S.F.A. apparently did not".[98]

Celtic received a warm welcome in Germany, greeted at the stadium in Berlin by a large Union Flag, and with crowds cheering the team throughout the duration of their match.[99] Reviewing the tour, the *Athletic News* claimed that "Celtic's Tramp Abroad" was an experience "the Celtic players and directors are not likely to forget", capturing the novelty and significance that the venture imbued in both nations.

By the late 1920s, football tours of Germany had become routine, with British newspaper reports about the trips rarely referencing the war or residual animosities. Instead, the press expressed interest in Germany's growing enthusiasm for football, with headlines of "Germany's Million Footballers", perceiving this as both confirmation of British sporting prestige, and admiration for German organisation.[100] Upon his return from Germany, economic and industrial writer Lindsay Holmes observed that "Der Fussball (i.e., football) is the passion of the hour. It is pursued for eleven months in the year", adding that "undoubtedly in many directions there is a strong tendency to copy things British".[101] In 1928, the *Daily Mirror* declared that "all Continental travellers come back with wonderful stories of 'the way Soccer has caught hold of the Germans and others. Barring the Salvation Army and the boy scouts it is the greatest British contribution in this generation to international solidarity".[102]

Within this atmosphere of cautious rapprochement, football tours of Germany became a regular dimension of sporting travel, with a host of amateur clubs also visiting. In 1927

[96] Beck. *International Football as Cultural.*
[97] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[98] "Celtic's German Opponents," *Evening News*, 5 June 1922, 2.
[99] "Football in Germany," *Halifax Evening Courier*, 2 June 1922, 3.
[100] "Germany's Million Footballers," *Shields Daily News*, 5 August 1927, 6.
[101] Lindsay Holmes, "Germany Revisited," *Hertfordshire Express*, 3 September 1927, 9.
[102] "Football in Germany," *Daily Mirror*, 20 October 1928, 9.

Hampstead Town travelled to Germany, a local newspaper wishing "the party a pleasant holiday" and hoping them to "uphold the good name of English amateur football".[103]

Yet the encounters themselves could still carry diplomatic overtones. When West Ham United toured Germany in 1928, their reception reflected the framework for understanding interwar sporting contact. Following West Ham's final match against Bayern Munich, Bayern's President Kurt Landauer declared:

> "You played the game in that scrupulously fair manner which to us is typical of Britishers, and you accepted the defeat as true sportsmen, and as true sportsmen you cannot look back upon a defeat as an unhappy event. I am sorry that it was not possible for us to place at your disposal a ground such as you are used to playing upon at home, but if you come back again, I am not going to enter into football politics here, you will find an excellent playing surface in our new stadium which will be opened in a month's time. To conclude, I hope that you will feel, while you are our guests, that you are among friends, that you are among sportsmen and that you have met us at a sport which is of the greatest international importance. That is to say it is a sport that draws countries together and binds sportsmen into friendship. Through its medium may the people of your nation and mine learn to forget, and in forgetting the bitterness of the past may we come a big step nearer to building a happy future of friendship, peace and healthy rivalry."[104]

The resumption of football tours to Germany was neither a simple return to pre-1914 processes of sporting travel, nor were they all explicit instruments of reconciliation. Football provided a setting in which the nations could resume contact, but how these encounters were played out and represented was shaped by the perspectives and practices of those involved.

Ilford

Ilford Football Club provides a revealing example of how football could be consciously invested with moral and political purpose. Unlike many touring sides motivated primarily by profit or prestige, Ilford's visits to Germany were framed by their chairman, the Labour MP Herbert Dunnico, as deliberate efforts to promote peace with Britain's former enemy.

Ilford had first played on the continent in 1905, travelling to Denmark, with tours of Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and France all following before the outbreak of the First World

[103] "Hampstead's Tour in Germany," *Hendon & Finchley Times*, 20 May 1927, 11.
[104] Capel-Kirby and Carter, *Mighty Kick*, 178.

War.[105] During their 1909 continental trip, Ilford competed for the Coupe Jean Dupuich against another English touring side, Bishop Auckland, a competition and topic examined in greater detail in Chapter Five. This illustrates that Ilford had a history of touring, partially helped by its location in East London, making trips across the channel particularly convenient. Ilford resumed overseas travel following the armistice in 1921, journeying to Barcelona, before travelling to Germany in 1924, where they would return on five separate occasions by 1932.[106]

As well as prominent Football League clubs, Ilford were among other amateur sides such as the Corinthians and the Welsh Wanderers, to embark on German tours in the spring and summer of 1924.[107] Newspaper reports from the period highlight the importance of these visits, with the *London Daily Chronicle* on 17 April 1924 describing how amateur teams were among the first to take advantage of the FA's lifting of restrictions on tours to previously prohibited continental nations.[108] Similarly, the *Eastern Counties' Times* on 18 April 1924 questioned whether Ilford might be the first English side to "renew acquaintance with German footballers" after the war, an assertion reflective of the wider curiosity and political undertones surrounding such tours.[109]

Unlike professional clubs, whose interest in touring involved financial and sporting motives, Ilford's visits were accompanied by a more explicitly moralistic mission. Dunnico, their chairman, was a committed pacifist and Labour politician whose broader career encompassed roles as an MP for Consett, Deputy Speaker of the Commons, and involvement in various peace organisations, including the Peace Society and the Peace Negotiation Committee.[110]

Dunnico's efforts to integrate football with politics and moral teaching were evident long before his involvement with Ilford. A Baptist minister by profession, Dunnico had expressed concerns over the excessive commercialisation of sport in his sermons to working-class congregations in Merseyside. In 1905, while ministering in Widnes, he lamented the "mad craze for pleasure" among young men obsessed with football, noting that vast sums were spent on the sport while many people suffered from poverty.[111] Though this critique was actually aimed at rugby league, his comments reveal a broader concern over the ethics of sporting contests.

[105] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] "Amateur Tours on the Continent," *London Daily Chronicle*, 17 April 1924, 13.
[109] "Ilford in Germany at Easter," *Eastern Counties' Times*, 18 April 1924, 4.
[110] Martin Ceadel, "The London Peace Society and Absolutist–Reformist Relations within the Peace Movement, 1816–1939," *Peace & Change* 42, no. 4 (2017), 513-514.
[111] "Rev. H. Dunnico and the Social Gospel," *Widnes Examiner*, 6 May 1905, 5.

Dunnico was reportedly a former Bolton Wanderers reserve player in his youth, and was a regular spectator at Anfield and Goodison Park.[112] In 1907, while serving as pastor of Kensington Baptist Chapel in Liverpool, Dunnico organised a "football service" attended by leading figures from Everton and Liverpool, alongside prominent referees.[113] His belief in football as a means of moral and social instruction likely influenced his leadership at Ilford, where he saw the club as a vehicle for fostering Anglo-German reconciliation in the aftermath of war.

In February 1929, ahead of their spring tour, the British newspapers addressed the topic of Ilford's upcoming tour, discussing it as an explicit effort to further peace. Dunnico claimed his intent was for the teams to "get into close touch with one another, and in a way the actual rank and file of the people meet together".[114] The *Daily Mirror* reported the news under the headline "M.P.'s Peace Plan", while the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* went with "Football and World Peace", the *Sheffield Independent* "Football Peacemaker", and *Chelsea News and General Advertiser* "Ambassadors of Peace".[115]

Dunnico articulated his conviction "that arranging games between the two countries is a far better way of promoting international goodwill and understanding than by ordinary pacifist propaganda".[116] Following the 1929 tour Dunnico was interviewed for an article in the *Athletic News* titled 'What Can We Learn From The Continent', which suggested British sides should have more training in the gymnasium, play more physically on tour, not expect fair treatment from foreign referees, and shoot from further outside the penalty box.[117] Dunnico's analysis was republished across British local newspapers, and even reached Germany, where it was published in German press, with the *Hamburger Anzeiger* printing the headline "Was Konnen Wir vom Kontinent Lernen?".[118] However, following Ilford's 1930 tour of Germany on which they lost in Hamburg and Kiel, a letter was published in the *Athletic News* from an Englishman in Hamburg highlighting their failures, joking that Dunnico's "various warnings given in your columns from time to time to English football clubs touring the Continent appear to have had little effect".[119]

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[112] "Notes and Notions," *Runcorn Examiner*, 20 April 1907, 5.
[113] Ibid.
[114] "Football Tour," *Daily News*, 22 February 1929, 13.
[115] "M.P.'s Peace Plan," *Daily Mirror*, 22 February 1929, 2.
"Football and World Peace," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 21 February 1929, 5.
"Football-Peace-Maker," *Sheffield Independent*, 22 February 1929, 11.
"Ambassadors of Peace," *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, 12 April 1929, 3.
[116] "Sunday Footballers," *Shields Daily News*, 22 February 1929, 5.
[117] "What Can We Learn From The Continent," *Athletic News*, 10 June 1929, 1.
[118] "Was Konnen Wir Vom Kontinent Lernen?," *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 12 June 1929, 9.
[119] "Ilford's Tour," *Athletic News*, 1 September 1930, 16.

The itineraries of Ilford's tours reveal that their activities were not so different to those of the many other British clubs touring during the interwar period. The players occupied their time around matches with eating and drinking with their hosts, some sightseeing, and paying respects at some memorials.[120] The distinction appears to lie solely within the language used by Dunnico and the British press in their reporting of the tours.

Following their 1932 tour of Germany, Ilford did not return to the country, nor did they travel elsewhere on the continent for the remainder of the decade. The exact reason for this absence is unclear, though the poor performances on tour itself may well have played a role. On the pitch, Ilford endured a disastrous run, losing all three of their matches against Cologne, Kiel, and Bremen. Their performance was sufficiently poor to warrant comment in *The Football Referee*, which noted their defeats as "further proof of the improvement in the standard of Continental football".[121]

Yet sporting failure alone may not fully explain Ilford's withdrawal from the international stage. The political context is equally significant. The club's final German tour coincided with the rise of the Nazi Party, which rose to power between 1932 and 1933. Many British football clubs willingly accepted invitations to play in Nazi Germany throughout the 1930s, as discussed in Chapter Seven. However, the pacifist socialist conviction of Dunnico may well have led him to believe touring Nazi Germany was unwise, even as other clubs, motivated by pragmatism, political indifference, or outright ideological sympathy, chose a different path.

Ilford's tours to Germany in the 1920s and 1930s offer an interesting case study of early football diplomacy. The club's efforts were explicitly stated and widely publicised, but the precise impact of its peace project is difficult to measure amid the enormity of the dramatic structural political change occurring in the interwar period. Ilford's tours thus reveal both the aspirations and the fragility of interwar attempts to use sport as a vehicle for reconciliation.

Conclusion

International football during the interwar years occupied a contradictory space within the broader historical forces shaping Europe, at once a tool for fostering fraternity among former adversaries and a space for contesting national rivalries, mirroring the fragile and ultimately

[120] Redbridge Heritage Centre, "Easter Tour in Cologne, Kiel and Bremen, Germany, 1932," (361/A2/E1)
[121] "Continental Tit-Bits," *The Football Referee*, June 1932, 3.

illusory stability of the period. Travelling British football traced the uneven contours of post-war reconciliation, engaging in moments of camaraderie and mutual respect but also confronting the limits of internationalism.

Contemporary commentators and participants in the game occasionally imagined that football might provide a model for international cooperation. A March 1929 *Sports Argus* column by Aston Villa forward William Henry Walker posited the "new purpose of continental tours" as being to "spread the gospel of good sportsmanship", even advocating for the creation of "a sort of football league of nations".[122]

Yet events of the late 1920s revealed how fragile such aspirations were. As Beck has shown, the question of Anglo-German fixtures became a source of diplomatic controversy in 1928 when the English Football Association again declined a German invitation, provoking "surprise," "disappointment," and "a storm of protest" in the German press, and suggestions that the decision contradicted UK Foreign Office requests.[123] The following year England's decision to tour Germany and Austria rather than France prompted criticism in French newspapers, and led to the *Daily Express* printing a front-page story titled "Football Disturbing Peace of Europe'" arguing that "a Football League of Nations is urgently needed to compose the differences, often breaking out into open warfare, which are constantly arising between the footballers of this and other countries".[124]

The episode demonstrated that football results were increasingly interpreted as reflections of national character and international standing. Even when officials insisted that the government did not intervene in sporting matters, the affair revealed how closely football had become entangled with the politics of Britain's relationship with continental Europe.

The cultural penetration of football extended beyond diplomacy into the language of popular politics. Even national leaders drew upon its imagery, as seen in a section of a 1924 speech by Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in Port Talbot:

"I saw that big football match last Saturday, and as I watched those wonderful goalkeepers standing, watching and warding and keeping back the attack, I felt that my job was the job of a goalkeeper. For the time being I am a goalkeeper, and I am doing my level best for the

[122] William Henry Walker, "In My Corner," *Sports Argus*, 23 March 1929, 1.
[123] Beck. *International Football as Cultural.*
[124] "Football Disturbing Peace of Europe," *Daily Express*, 18 October 1929, 1.

Aberavon team, the Labour team, and the British team, to see that they are not going to be worsted in the great struggles that are ahead of us".[125]

The 'big football match' to which MacDonald referred was the 1924 FA Cup final, between Aston Villa and Newcastle United. Both goalkeepers in that 1924 FA Cup final, Tommy Jackson and Bill Bradley, had served in the First World War.[126] Aston Villa's Frank Moss was still carrying a piece of shrapnel inside his knee from serving at Ypres.[127] Newcastle's Stan Seymour, who scored in that final, would later see his own son perish in another global war, a tragic testament to the unfinished business and unfulfilled hopes of the interwar years.[128]

If sport, as Barbara Keys suggests, had become a key marker of modern nationhood, then football's increasing national and international reach demonstrated both the promise and perils of this new era.[129] The game was growing in influence, forging connections across borders, yet these very connections were fraught with the tensions of a world still deeply divided. As Peter Beck observes, the wartime dimension in British football relations with Weimar Germany "never disappeared, even following the commencement of matches at full international level in 1929".[130] Football in the interwar period was not so much a harbinger of peace as it was a mirror to the broader contradictions of the age, an era of hope and hostility, remembrance, and rivalry, where the dream of a continent united in peace was balanced precariously.

[125] "Emphatic Assurance by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald," *Freeman's Journal*, 29 April 1924, 7.
[126] "Remarkable Cup Final," *Daily News*, 28 April 1924, 11.
[127] The National Archives, "Frank Moss," *The National Archives*, accessed 8 November 2025, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20s-people/20-people-of-the-20s/frank-moss/
[128] Nigel McCrery, *Season in Hell: British Footballers Killed in the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2023), 77.
[129] Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7.
[130] Beck, *International Football*, 91.

Chapter Five: Touring and Competition

Introduction

"Broadly speaking, no part of the world is now isolated either physically or morally from the rest, whether for the purposes of peaceful trade or international contention. Distance no longer spells detachment; abstention no longer secures immunity. The world has narrowed; the interests of all nations have become inextricably intertwined, and Britain, the nerve-centre of a world-wide Empire, feels and reacts to every electric disturbance, no matter how distant its source. This interdependence of the nations is a fact which must increasingly affect the whole world."

Austen Chamberlain, "Great Britain as a European Power," 1930[1]

"The first World's Soccer Championship has come and gone. As expected, it has ended in a victory for the home countries (Uruguay beat Argentine by 4-2 in the Final) and a little revolution. This was expected because the venue - Monte Video - was too far away for Europe to send her full forces, and because, in any case, Uruguay and Argentina overcame all opposition in the last Olympic Games Soccer tournament at Amsterdam."

"World's Champions", *Athletic News*, 4 August 1930[2]

On 1 May 2025, Manchester United defeated Athletic Bilbao three-nil in the semi-final of the UEFA Europa League at the Estadio de San Mamés. This result earned Manchester United a place in the final against fellow Premier League side Tottenham Hotspur, to be held in the same Bilbao stadium. For football fans today, these European fixtures are routine, embedded within the cultural and commercial rhythms of the modern game. The origins of this transnational tradition can be traced back well before the existence of the Europa League and the mid-twentieth-century creation of its predecessor, the UEFA Cup.

As early as 1913, British clubs were competing for silverware on foreign soil, when Shepherd's Bush FC, a now-defunct amateur club from West London, travelled to the Basque Country to participate in a tri-club tournament celebrating the inauguration of a new stadium, the first iteration of San Mamés in Bilbao. They faced Athletic Club and Racing de Irún, emerging

[1] Austen Chamberlain, "Great Britain as a European Power," *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 9, No. 2 (March 1930), 181.
[2] "World's Champions", *Athletic News*, 4 August 1930, 10.

victorious over both.[3] The *Wimbledon News* reported on the tournament, noting that the King and Queen of Spain were in attendance to watch the Englishmen win.[4]

The event was not an isolated anomaly. Throughout the early twentieth century, British clubs and, to a lesser extent, national teams engaged in a range of international tournaments across the continent. These encounters formed a record of comprehensive competitive football that existed beyond the boundaries of domestic leagues and cups; however, these records have been neglected by much historiography.

The participation of British sides in such tournaments demonstrates that, contrary to dominant narratives of insularity, there was a sustained, if uneven, pattern of international footballing engagement well before the formation of European-wide governing structures, which formed after the Second World War. The dynamics of British engagement with continental football competitions reflect broader attitudes and relations between Britain and the continent. In 1930, former Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain outlined the new 'interdependence of nations', though he suggested that Britain occupied a 'semi-detached position' within Europe, acting as a balanced, moderating presence on the European stage rather than a fully integrated participant. Such a formulation echoed RW Seton-Watson's 1938 designation of Britain's "hybrid, intermediate, geographical position as part of Europe, and yet detached from it, one foot in sea and one on shore".[5] Patrick Salmon's study of pre-1939 British diplomacy demonstrates how this paradoxical stance manifested in foreign policy, with Britain becoming closer to Europe, despite maintaining its strong political, economic, and cultural ties to the empire and its transatlantic connections.[6]

The interplay between nationalism and internationalism within early-twentieth-century sport is considered by Taylor, whose study of transnational sport argues that events including the Olympic Games and early football tournaments were transnational platforms of exchange and cooperation that helped construct a new international sporting society. Taylor proposes that "it might be productive to think of international competitions as viewing platforms through which the connections, exchanges, tensions and disentanglements of transnational interaction can

[3] "Day the Bush Ruled," *Liverpool Echo*, 15 October 1983, 31.
[4] "Football," *Wimbledon News*, 30 August 1913, 7.
[5] R. W. Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators: A Survey of Post-War British Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 7.
[6] Patrick Salmon, "Reluctant Engagement: Britain and Continental Europe, 1890–1939," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 8, no. 3 (1997), 140.

be carefully examined", highlighting how these contests both sharpened national identities and fostered broader international connections.[7]

Taylor's analysis is pertinent to early British involvement in continental football. The early relationship between the Home Nations and FIFA was fractious, with British national sides refusing to participate in the interwar World Cups and Coupe des Nations. As Peter Beck argues, for much of this period 'international football' was understood within Britain largely in domestic terms, centred on the Home International Championship, with many within the football establishment displaying what he describes as a "smug, paternalistic and parochial mindset" towards competitions beyond the British Isles.[8] However, many British clubs competed at other invitational tournaments, illustrating the complex and sometimes contradictory approaches to European-wide football competition.

As continental football developed in terms of organisation, professionalism, and public interest, British clubs observed and joined a broader continental footballing culture. British media coverage of tournaments on the continent fostered a growing awareness and admiration for continental football and footballers. This chapter includes an analysis of the development of British involvement in international football competitions and tournaments from the early 20th century to the eve of the Second World War. It begins with a consideration of pre-1914 participation by British teams in foreign tournaments, before examining the evolution of both club and national competitive engagements in the interwar period.

The British footballing authorities' hesitance to fully engage with international competitions continued throughout the period. Yet, by considering the active participation of many British clubs in continental competitions, one can better understand how football became an arena in which sporting prestige, national identity, and internationalism could be contested and negotiated.

The emergence of international sporting competitions at the turn of the twentieth century was born out of technological advancements, allowing cross-border travel, and emergent modern national identities, prompting demand for a platform to test national prestige through tactical and physical prowess. The British exports of football, cricket, rugby, and tennis allowed newer sporting communities to challenge British supremacy in such sports. As Christiane

[7] Taylor, *World of Sport*, 157.
[8] Beck, "Going to War," 117.

Eisenberg has noted, sport as cultural transfer offered diminishing returns for the instigator, as the 'pupils', once taught, often undermined their teachers.[9]

Rugby Union was disrupted in 1910 when France was admitted into the Four Nations tournament. Tony Collins observes how the expansion was not only geographical, but also cultural, producing new rivalries and allowing new approaches to the sport, meaning "Rugby was no longer the sole property of the Anglo-Saxon and Celt".[10] What had once been a domestic ritual of fraternity and controlled passion became a new theatre for international tension and reinvention.

International cycling competition emerged less from elite institutions than from the technological dynamism of industrial capitalism. The Tour de France, inaugurated in 1903 by the sports press, illustrates how international sporting contests could be harnessed to capitalist imperatives. Created by the newspaper *L'Auto,* the Tour was intended to help their business and celebrate athletic performance, thus an example of sport as a media-industrial complex from the outset. From its inception, the race was shaped less by federations or athletes than by the interests of profit-driven organisers, what Jean-François Mignot terms a "commercial logic" that subordinated sporting values to spectacle and market share.[11]

Boxing offers a striking illustration of the contradictory dynamics of early sporting globalisation. Matthew Taylor illustrates how, before the First World War, the sport did not function according to defined international bureaucracy, but through "provisional and constantly shifting transnational networks", with fighters, promoters, and audiences connected throughout the Imperial and Atlantic worlds.[12] These connections were sustained by the sharing of news, gossip, and results through new global press networks. Those who never left their local ringside could imagine themselves part of a wider world of competition and controversy.

Taylor's analysis suggests that though early-twentieth-century boxing ought not be considered truly global, the sport's "fluid networks and interconnections ensured that relationships that crossed nations were often as important as those within them".[13] Such insight can also apply to association football. The early cross-border tournaments did not yet amount to a unified

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[9] Christiane Eisenberg, "The Rise of Internationalism in Sport," in *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* ed. Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 389
[10] Tony Collins, *The Oval World: A Global History of Rugby*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p.49.
[11] Jean-François Mignot, "An Economic History of the Tour de France, 1903–2015," in *Sports Through the Lens of Economic History* ed. Richard Pomfret and John K. Wilson (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2016), 56.
[12] Matthew Taylor, "The Global Ring? Boxing, Mobility, and Transnational Networks in the Anglophone World, 1890–1914," *Journal of Global History* 8, no. 2 (2013), 254.
[13] Ibid., 255.

international order. Still, they created spaces where clubs, players, and spectators began to think and act beyond purely national frameworks. In this sense, these embryonic competitions foreshadowed the later bureaucratic structures of UEFA, just as they mirrored the broader processes of modern globalisation: improvised, uneven, and marked by tensions between local traditions and transnational exchange.

Likewise, the history of lawn tennis illustrates similar processes, with international tennis competitions preceding the formal governance structures which would later control them. As Kevin Jefferys notes, this globalisation exposed the "amateur problem": travel and competition costs could only be met by the wealthy, forcing national associations to subsidise *Davis Cup* players and quietly eroding amateur ideals.[14] Though Britain's Lawn Tennis Association was founded in 1888, the organisation only asserted a global function when it began to promote and organise international competitions. As Robert Lake observes, "it was only when the LTA involved itself in the promotion of international competitions that it demonstrated its potential to lead on a global scale and thus fulfil its administrative potential in a more deliberate way".[15] Tennis, like football, thus shows how international sport was expanding from below, driven by players, publics, and commercial interests, with bureaucratic order imposed only after the fact.

Prior to the First World War, sport was marked by contradictions, increasingly international in its scope and commercial in operation, yet often nationalist in spirit, and idealistic in rhetoric. International football continually exposed these tensions. Football also highlighted the role of Britons beyond British teams, with British referees frequently invited to officiate high-profile continental tournaments, and British coaches recruited by continental clubs and national associations across Europe, even winning international silverware. Their role as well as that of British teams in the landscape of pre-1939 football tournaments reveals a level of involvement and engagement reflecting the broader 'semi-detached' status of connection identified by Chamberlain.

In 1901, a commentator in *Blackwood's Magazine* imagined a future of "a Pan-European Football league, a European Cup, and real international football matches, in which the might of Britain will stand opposed to Germany and France - a better guarantee of the peace of Europe than in many rescripts".[16] This chapter traces how such imaginings evolved as they manifested into reality, with British football both within and outside such competition.

[14] Kevin Jefferys, "The Heyday of Amateurism in Modern Lawn Tennis," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 15 (2009), 2241.
[15] Robert Lake, *A Social History of Tennis in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 68.
[16] "The Football Nations," *Blackwood's Magazine*, April 1901, 492.

Pre-1914 Competitions

From the 1890s onwards, football clubs from the British Isles had begun to tour the continent, a practice discussed in Chapter 2, emerging as sporting emissaries and cultural agents of an industrial society that had pioneered the modern codification of sport. For British players, the continent was an exhibition stage. For their hosts, these visits functioned as an accelerant to the local development of the game, and a measuring rod for their own progress. By the turn of the century, signs of organised footballing competition began to emerge on the continent, with the British press taking notice.

The Challenge International du Nord was an annual football competition that began in 1898 and ran until 1914. It initially featured French and Belgian clubs, with Dutch, Swiss, and English clubs later involved.[17]

In January 1900, *The Tamworth Herald* reported on the third edition of the tournament, which it refers to as the *'International Football Challenge Cup*':

> "Those interested in the competition now wish to receive support from the British Isles, if possible, and, beginning with the season of 1900-1901, they hope to find teams from the English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh Association playing for their trophy… should the tournament receive support from our associations, it might do a great deal towards improving the play of Continental teams, and tend to popularise the sport in countries and districts where it is, as yet, practically unknown."
>
> *Tamworth Herald*, 06 January 1900. [18]

It would be another nine years until an English club participated in the Challenge International du Nord, with Eastbourne FC winning the tournament, beating RC Roubaix 5-1 in the final. In 1910, Reigate Priory claimed the title, with Cambridge Town winning in 1912, having lost the final against US Tourcoing the year before.[19]

However, before British teams were playing in continental competitions, some British players were doing so. The Coupe Vanden Abeele was contested between representative teams of Belgium and the Netherlands from 1901 until 1925. The earliest Belgian teams featured a

[17] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[18] "Football Gossip," *Tamworth Herald*, 6 January 1900, 2.
[19] García, "British and Irish Clubs".

number of British expatriates, the most notable being the Englishman Herbert Potts, a prolific centre-forward for Beerschot, who scored seven goals in an 8-0 victory during the inaugural Coupe Vanden Abeele and would score twelve of Belgium's seventeen goals in the competition's first four games.[20] Potts' impact strikingly demonstrates the role of migration within the game's early internationalism and illustrates the porousness of national boundaries while state-based sport was still emerging.

The Coupe Vanden Abeele was named after the Belgian industrialist Frédéric Vanden Abeele, a feature it shared with some other competitions of the time. Another example was the Évence Coppée Trophy, named after another Belgian businessperson with the trophy contested by France and Belgium during their first encounter in May of 1904.[21] Though that Belgian squad contained no British-born players, the game was officiated by an Englishman, John Keene.[22] The match ended in a 3-3 draw, so the cup was not awarded to either team. Twenty days later, FIFA was founded with Robert Guérin, the French official who had selected the French squad for the match, becoming the organisation's first President.[23]

Herbert Potts was also part of a team called the Pilgrims. The Pilgrims' squad contained Belgians and Englishmen, some living in Belgium, with others travelling from England to be part of the team. The Pilgrims took part in the 1902 edition of the Coupe Van der Straeten Ponthoz. This competition which had been created two years earlier by the Belgian count Carl Van der Straeten Ponthoz, and was hosted by the Brussels-based Léopold Football Club.[24] The 1900 inaugural competition brought together the Belgian, Dutch, and Swiss national champions. By 1902, six teams participated, with The Pilgrims beating Dutch side Dordrecht 4-2 in the final. However, the Pilgrims lost the final the following year against Royal Racing Club de Brussels, who had also beaten Maidstone in the first round.[25] *The Athletic News* noted the symbolic resonance of English participation and victory, claiming that it "seemed to go far to prove that the feeling of foreigners towards the English is not at all that hostile one which certain continental papers have tried to make out".[26]

[20] Ibid.
[21] Kamil Rahman-Blake, "Goal Difference: National Economic Exclusion, International Emotional Capture; has FIFA made its World Cup the Beast of 'The Beautiful Game'?," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 17, no. 4 (2025), 725.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Paul Dietschy, "French Sport: Caught between Universalism and Exceptionalism," *European Review* 19, no. 4 (2011), 513.
[24] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[25] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[26] "The Pilgrims," *Athletic News*, 7 April 1902, 1.

Over time, the Coupe Van der Straeten Ponthoz featured teams from mainland Britain, such as London sides Hampstead and Emeriti, pitting them against some of the rising powers of Continental football.[27] By 1907, Union Saint-Gilloise had won the trophy thrice in succession and claimed it permanently. A fresh trophy was commissioned for 1908, offered by Adolphe Dupuich, in memory of his son Jean, a young forward of the Léopold Club, tragically deceased aged just twenty.[28] The inaugural Jean Dupuich Cup featured eight amateur teams from five nations: Belgium sent three clubs (Léopold FC, Union Saint Gilloise, and Racing Club de Bruxelles); Germany contributed Preussen Berlin and Duisburg; the Old Xaverians represented England; France by US Tourquennoise; and the Netherlands by a select team composed mainly of HBS Craeyenhout players.[29]

Although the first two editions of the tournament began at the quarter-final stage, by 1910 the structure was simplified to only semi-finals and a final, with just four teams invited. The competition was suspended during the First World War, then revived in 1920 until the final edition in 1925. The Old Xaverians were beaten in the 1908 semi-final by Union Saint-Gillois, who beat Racing Club de Bruxelles in the final. In 1909, there was an all-English final with Bishop Auckland beating Ilford. The following year, Bishop Auckland again won the cup, beating Bromley in the final, though in 1911, Ilford beat Bishop Auckland to win the cup. The 1912, 1913, and 1914 editions were all won by Union Saint-Gilloise upon their return to the competition. The *Durham Chronicle* reported Bishop Auckland's participation in the Jean Dupuich Cup, mistakenly rendered as the "Jean Dupwich Cup", in Brussels.[30] The lure of silverware and prize money drew amateur British clubs across the Channel, combining idealist notions of sporting glory with the pragmatic realities of financial reward. These journeys foreshadowed the profound transformations that would follow the First World War, as professionalism deepened on both sides of the Channel and the era of the travelling amateur giants gave way to the modern international game.

The Coupe Vanden Abeele and the Évence Coppée Trophy were both named after Belgian industrialists, reflecting a broader trend of wealthy patrons sponsoring early football competitions. Continuing this pattern, Scottish tea magnate Sir Thomas Lipton soon established an international tournament in Italy, known as the Sir Thomas Lipton Trophy, which brought together leading European clubs. The competition included teams from Italy, Germany, and Switzerland who were to contest with an English representative. That the latter

[27] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] "Notes on Sport," *Durham Chronicle*, 17 February 1911, 9.

proved to be West Auckland, a team consisting of County Durham miners, remains one of football's more peculiar mysteries.[31] Legend attributes their selection to a mix-up with another 'WAFC', Woolwich Arsenal, though the verifiable actual reason for their selection is elusive. Whatever the case, these amateurs triumphed in Turin in 1909 and returned two years later to beat Juventus 6–1, retaining the trophy and inscribing themselves in the annals of improbable glory.[32]

The Lipton Trophy originated in the Torneo Internazionale Stampa Sportiva, held in Turin in 1908, organised by Italian magazine *La Stampa Sportiva*. The Torneo Internazionale Stampa Sportiva included clubs from Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and France, without any British representation. Thomas Lipton's intervention addressed this omission and reflected a broader pattern of engagement with international sport. Lipton's enthusiasm extended well beyond Europe: his name has appeared on football trophies in Southern Italy and South America, and he played a significant role in reviving sailing's prestigious America's Cup, emphasising the role of a new generation of industrialists within the growing global sports industry.

News of the first edition of the Lipton trophy in 1909 received limited coverage in British newspapers, mostly local to West Auckland. The *Darlington North Star* and *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* reported on "West Auckland's Italian Tour, Winners of the Sir Thos. Lipton's Challenge Cup" though it did not name their Swiss opponents in the final, FC Winterthur, describing them only as 'a representative Switzerland eleven'.[33] Reports of the final take pride in the fact that "West Auckland is the first English team that has been in Italy, and according to a team account the Italians are wild over us, and are making little 'tin gods' of us", reiterating the value of European perceptions of British football, or at least how the British liked to imagine them.[34]

Recognition of West Auckland's achievement was limited within the national footballing press. The *Football Gazette* did note their presence in Italy in a piece entitled "Football at Genoa - Ship's Team's Unbeaten Record," yet the Lipton Trophy itself went unmentioned; the report instead focussed on a separate casual encounter between British sailors and some local Italian men.[35] In contrast, the present-day landscape tells a very different story: signs on the edge of West Auckland now proclaim the village as "winners of the first World Cup." This

[31] Beck, "Chapter 4," 18.
[32] Ibid.
[33] "West Auckland's Italian Tour," *North Star*, 17 April 1909, 6.
"West Auckland's Italian Tour," *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 16 April 1909, 5.
[34] "West Auckland's Italian Tour," *North Star*, 17 April 1909, 6.
[35] "Football at Genoa," *Football Gazette*, 15 April 1911, 2.

transformation illustrates how the significance of events is rarely fixed at the moment of their occurrence but is instead reconstructed in retrospect, shaped by collective memory and the desire to claim a foundational place in sporting history.

The Lipton Trophy was not the only early football competition to share the name of a beverage business. The Dubonnet Cup, sponsored by the French aperitif company, was held annually in Paris, at the Parc des Princes, between 1910 and 1912.[36] The Dubonnet Cup featured professional English clubs, with these teams playing against each other rather than French or continental sides. Swindon Town overcame Barnsley in 1910; in 1911, Clapton Orient, later reborn as Leyton Orient, defeated Millwall; and in 1912, Fulham triumphed over Queens Park Rangers.[37] The only club that appeared to have played any French opposition during their visit to France was QPR, which played Red Star Paris two days after losing to Fulham, beating the French side 9-1, hinting at the embryonic state of French football.[38]

The format of the Dubonnet Cup was both modest and revealing: a single English fixture played on foreign soil, under the banner of French commercial patronage. This commercial character was part of a broader trend. As Alan Tomlinson observes of the 1924 Paris Olympics, “the Olympic stadium was bedecked in advertisements for Ovalmaltine, Dubonnet, Cinzano, and many other commercial product labels; and the French Organizing Committee published a 320-page guide to the Games containing advertisements on 256 of its pages”.[39]

The Dubonnet Cup demonstrated the intertwining of business and sport, showing that international football could be a vehicle for international promotion for the profit of British football clubs. Such an enterprise offers a foreshadowing of recent Premier League pre-season tours, in which English clubs face each other and continental teams across North America and Asia. What was once a tentative experiment has become a truly global spectacle, reflecting football’s transformation alongside the broader expansion of modern capitalism. Such expansion has created tensions between local loyalties and global ambitions, with Steve Menary noting that “the globalization of the pre-season friendly is the epitome of this clash and is being strived for by clubs”.[40]

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[36] García, “British and Irish Clubs”.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Alan Tomlinson, "The Commercialization of the Olympics: Cities, corporations and the Olympic Commodity,” in *Global Olympics: Historical and Sociological Studies of the Modern Games* ed. Kevin Young and Kevin Wamsley (Oxford: Elsevier, 2005), 179.
[40] Steve Menary, “Game On: The Commercialisation and Corruption of the Pre-season Friendly,” *Soccer & Society*, 19, no. 2 (2018), 307.

Though there was some British press coverage of these matches, they tended to omit mention of the Dubonnet Cup by name, seeming to regard the games as just part of the club's tour itinerary. The *Barnsley Chronicle* and *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* reported on the club's visit to Paris in May 1910 but did not reference the Dubonnet Cup explicitly.[41] [42] Such reporting likely reflects both a lack of clarity over the tournament's formal structure as well as the British press's relative indifference to these early cross-Channel experiments. Nevertheless, the Dubonnet Cup, like the Lipton Trophy before it, represents the early entanglement of international commerce and competition. This relationship would drive much of the development of modern sport.

The ties between modern international football and the age of industrial capitalism are perhaps most clearly displayed through their shared association with the great international expositions of the early twentieth century. These exhibitions, showcases of progress, technology, and imperial confidence, not only displayed machines and commodities, but also acted as theatres of modernity in a broader sense, including mass culture. Football competitions were regularly incorporated into these expositions, marking the sport as an exhibit of national character and modern organisation.

As Maurice Roche notes in his analysis of the early Olympic Games and Expos:

> "The mass popularisation of sports both in participatory and high-performance spectator forms grew rapidly at national level in the West in the early decades of the twentieth century. The development of transport and communications systems, particularly radio in the 1920s, created the potential for a new level and frequency of organisation and mass communication of dramatic international sport events… All of this fuelled both popular and elite interest in international-level sport events, in the early twentieth century."[43]

The 1906 Exposition Internationale in the French city of Tourcoing hosted a football tournament, though no British team participated.[44] A few years later, the 1910 Brussels Exposition did include English amateurs, the Northern Nomads.[45] The 1911 Torneo Expo Roma featured only Italian, Hungarian, French, and Swiss teams, with no British representation.

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[41] "Barnsley Footballers' Trip," *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 4 May 1910, 6.
[42] "Football Matters," *Barnsley Chronicle*, 11 June 1910, 2.
[43] Maurice Roche. "Mega-Events, Cities and Tourist Culture: Olympics and Expos," *Megaevents and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 108.
[44] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[45] Ibid.

Though these tournaments were modest, their significance lies in what they reveal: the insertion of football into the global economy of display. The football pitches were among the grand halls and pavilions, and likewise acted as a site for international exchange performed for the cosmopolitan public in attendance. The expositions provided an early template for what would later become the fusion of mega-events, commerce, and sport, from the modern Olympic Games to the FIFA World Cup.

Olympic Games

When the format for the modern Olympiad was being planned ahead of the 1896 Athens Games, the topic of which sports ought to be included was discussed within Britain. Newspaper columns discussing this demonstrate British attitudes towards the value and status of its sport compared with that practised abroad. An article in Dublin newspaper *Freeman's Journal* suggested that "the revival will include, in addition to those ancient feats, such distinctly modern games as lawn tennis and Rugby football" while further commentary supposed that Britain has "an advantage in the variety of our games. For physical development, nothing can be better than our cricket and our football, and our scientifically organised courses of gymnastics".[46]

The *National Observer* further attempted to separate Britain's sporting culture from that of mainland Europe, claiming that:

> "There might have been some archaic charm about a reconstitution of the classic games with museum chariot-races on the plains of Elis, oily naked wrestlers in the Stadium, and a revival of the Pancratium. But what are we to say of Frenchmen making an exhibition of themselves at le football (with an ambulance in conspicuous attendance)."[47]

Such remarks indicate some hesitance for British sports to become part of overseas events beyond the masterful control of their creators. Football was not featured in the inaugural 1896 Athens Olympics, and when it was introduced at the 1900 Paris Games, the competition bore little of the prestige later associated with the event. The final, between London amateurs Upton Park and the French side Club Français, seems not to have been identified as an Olympic gold medal match, reported in the *Morning Post* simply as a "France v England" encounter.[48] Overshadowed by the concurrent Paris World Fair, the game was instead described as having

[46] "The Olympic Games," *Freeman's Journal*, 20 March 1896, 4.
[47] "New Olympic Games," *National Observer*, 4 April 1896, 13.
[48] "Football in Paris", *Morning Post*, 21 September 1900, p.3.

been arranged by the Paris World Fair's Sports Committee, a reflection of how marginal both football and the Olympic movement still were at the dawn of the twentieth century.[49]

Britain did not attend the football tournament of the 1904 St Louis Olympic Games, which featured only three teams, two from the United States and one from Canada.[50] Football was again included at the 1906 Intercalated Athens Olympics, with four teams entering the competition.[51] The British press discussed these fixtures; however, these reports made a point of stating that "no Englishmen or Americans were engaged in these competitions", with "the football matches in which Danish, Greek, and Smyrniote teams competed, were held at New Phalerum this morning so as to avoid the heat. The teams did not do badly, but naturally, the football was by no means up to the English standard."[52] However, this does not reflect the reality of the footballers competing, with the majority of the Smyrna squad being British merchants, five belonging to the Whittall family, based in the Ottoman city.[53]

When London hosted the 1908 Olympics, the Football Association took charge of the tournament, and determined to select a British team composed entirely of Englishmen. This was despite the fact that rules permitted up to four separate teams for the home nations, as was seen in the hockey tournament. The *Westminster Gazette* discussed the performances of the teams under the headline 'Olympic Football – The Relative Strength of The Nations', detailing Danish success following Denmark's 17-1 win over France.[54] A report of the gold medal match between GB and Denmark detailed how "it was a keen struggle, and only the superior shooting of the forwards enabled England to win, as quite as many openings fell to Denmark, but they were not taken advantage of", going on to refer to standout Danish players Buchwald and Neilsen.[55]

At the tournament's end *The Referee* reported:

> "it was not expected that the Olympic Football which was played last week at the Stadium would please or satisfy the critical followers of the game in this country. But, nevertheless,

[49] "Essex Footballers at the Paris Exhibition," *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 21 September 1900, p.8.
[50] Søren Elbech and Karel Stokkermans, "Games of the III. Olympiad," *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*, accessed 13 November 2025, https://www.rsssf.org/tableso/ol1904f.html
[51] Ibid.
[52] "The Olympic Games," *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 24 April 1906, p.8.
"The Olympic Games," *The Scotsman*, 27 April 1906, p.5.
[53] Søren Elbech and Karel Stokkermans, "Intermediate Games of the IV. Olympiad," *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*, accessed 13 November 2025, https://www.rsssf.org/tableso/ol1906f.html
[54] "Olympic Football," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 25 October 1908, 16.
[55] "Olympic Final," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 25 October 1908, 26.

the careful observer must have been struck by the way in which the Continental teams shaped with regard to the technical side of the game. The foreigners played the recognised football but at about one half of the pace that it is played by our teams. Speed is always and only a question of practise, and with the theory of the game well in their minds, there is every possibility that one day there will arrive on our shores a team of footballers from the continent which will give our best a hard game.… from what was seen of this amateur soccer international Great Britain will soon be more hard put to it to hold her own at this purely British sport than was even the case yesterday."[56]

These comments suggest an underlying anxiety that British hegemony was being challenged, with continental nations developing as a threat. Britain would soon be unable to 'hold her own' at what was no longer a 'purely British sport'. The 1908 tournament was the first at which photographs of the games and squads were widely published, offering the public who could not attend the matches, their first view of foreign footballers.

Britain won gold again in Stockholm in 1912, with the *Scottish Referee* providing a detailed account of the final against Denmark, describing how the Danes "commenced with excellent passing movements which sped them on goalward, the combination and the short, sharp touches between the forwards being exceedingly dangerous" yet ultimately "the game ended with England winners by 4 goals to 2, and the King of Sweden having handed over the trophy and medals there were further scenes of remarkable enthusiasm".[57] Despite the detailed and flattering commentary, the only players mentioned by name are the British. This theme continues across many British reports of encounters with European teams.

The 1916 Berlin Olympics were cancelled due to the outbreak of World War I, delaying the return of Olympic football until the 1920 Antwerp Games, which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, prior to the war, another significant continental competition brought national teams together, a tournament that was distinctly amateur in nature, like the Olympic event.

While FIFA established itself as the central authority in international football, a rival body, the Union Internationale Amateur de Football Association (UIAFA), staged its own European Championship in 1911, the UIAFA Grand Tournoi Européen. The event was another linked to a major trade exposition, arranged during the International Exhibition of Northern France in

[56] "Football Notes," *The Referee*, 25 October 1908, 9.
[57] "Olympic Football," *Scottish Referee*, 12 July 1912, 1.

Roubaix.[58] Though unrecognised by FIFA, the tournament represented an early effort to structure international amateur football competition.[59] Participating nations included Bohemia, France, Switzerland, and England. England was represented not by the FA, but by the Amateur Football Association, which had split from the FA in 1906 in protest over professionalism. Bohemia defeated England 2-1 in the tournament's final, which took place five decades before UEFA's first European Championship in 1960.[60]

In the spring and summer of 1914, as Europe drifted toward war, footballers continued to traverse borders that would soon be obstructed and reshaped through four years of bloody conflict. Among them were the players of Glentoran, who journeyed to Vienna that May, on the Belfast club's first-ever visit to the continent. In recent years, Glentoran have hailed their 2-1 win over a Vienna team as having won them 'the first European trophy' in the Vienna Cup, in 2022 added a star above the crest on their shirt to mark the achievement, and a BBC documentary further detailed and promoted the accomplishment.[61] However, newspaper reports do not mention a tournament or cup. Instead, accounts of Glentoran's tour speak of a defeat to Hertha Berlin, and another loss to a Vienna XI.[62] No headlines were proclaiming grand continental triumph, and no trophy was paraded back in Belfast. The star recently embroidered upon Glentoran's crest seems to be a retrospective decoration, reclaiming some largely forgotten history.

Three years earlier, Blackburn Rovers had bested Oldham in the final of what was also styled the 'Vienna Cup' of 1911.[63] However, recent generations of Rovers supporters or executives have not yet resurrected this title success. Nine days before Glentoran won the Vienna Cup, Scottish Cup winners Celtic played FA Cup winners Burnley for the 'Budapest Cup' at the stadium of Ferencvaros. This match ended in a 1-1 draw, with the teams meeting again at Turf Moor four months later, with Celtic victorious in September.[64] The original trophy was lost, having been auctioned to help the Red Cross upon the outbreak of war, but in 1988, Celtic's centenary year, the chairman of Ferencvaros offered Celtic an ornate vase to commemorate

[58] Karel Stokkermans, "U.I.A.F.A. and the Grand Tournoi Européen (Roubaix) 1911," *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*, accessed 13 November 2025, https://www.rsssf.org/tablesx/xporoobeke1911.html
[59] Mathieu Delahais, "L'Union internationale amateur de football association ou les derniers feux d'une bourgeoisie sportive (1909-1912)," *Football (s) Histoire, culture, économie, société* 4 (2024), 171-174.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Glentoran FC, "Vienna Remembered," *Glentoran FC*, 1 July 2022, accessed 1 November 2025, https://www.glentoran.com/news/vienna-remembered
[62] "Association Football: Glentoran's Continental Tour," *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 June 1914, 5.
[63] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[64] "Burnley Beaten," *Scottish Referee*, 4 September 1914, 3.

their victory.[65] The blurred lines of British and European Football prior to the First World War are evident. The form, function, and significance of each match played abroad were rarely clear to those reading and hearing of them, and even for some of those playing in them.

In 1906 Richmond Town Wanderers, an English amateur side, toured northern France during Easter. Their tour included a match in Calais, where they routed a local team 8–1 in a match heralded as the 'Coupe de l'Entente Cordiale'.[66] Here, football was explicitly framed within the diplomatic context of the moment, with the language of high politics being applied to this new form of transnational popular ritual. That harmony would not endure. Within eight years, some of those players who had played under the banner of cordialité marched together into the trenches of the Western Front. The language of competition, which once served to domesticate conflict, gave way to its literal enactment. Some men who had competed for the Vienna Cup and the Budapest Cup would find themselves enlisted in another, more dangerous contest.

Across the century, the rhetoric of the entente has persisted, often adopting the language and symbolism of sport. On a state visit to the UK in July 2025 French President Emmanuel Macron echoed the conceit:

> "The times of William the Conqueror are over, happily, and the rows of charging cavalry as well. Our *Entente Cordiale*, sealed 126 years ago, has enabled our countries to bring their futures closer to protect Europe's strategic balances and to enter into an era of cooperation and competition, replacing our battlefields with football and rugby fields."[67]

The transformation of battlefields into football pitches, here celebrated as the triumph of peace over war, has always carried the shadow of its own fragility. The early twentieth century demonstrated with ruthless clarity how easily the language of sport, with its tournaments, rivalries, and rituals of collective identity, could be repurposed for the service of mass mobilisation and total war, as discussed in Chapter Three. Football did not, as some hoped, and others have since inappropriately reflected, offer an alternative to war, but reflected the tensions and fissures of conflict.

Interwar Club Competitions

[65] Celtic FC, "Trophy that took 74 years to get to Paradise," *Celtic FC*, 21 May 2014, accessed 28 August 2025, https://www.celticfc.com/news/5931
[66] "Coups de l'Entente Cordiale," *Richmond and Twickenham Times*, 21 April 1906, 6.
[67] France in the United Kingdom, "State visit to the UK by President Macron and Mrs Macron," *France in the United Kingdom*, 16 October 2025, accessed 5 November 2025, https://uk.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/state-visit-uk-president-macron-and-mrs-macron

The interwar years saw the emergence of a dense patchwork of continental club competitions, a sign both of football's growth across continental Europe, and the continent's shifting political and cultural relations. Prior to 1914, football tours had been structured primarily around friendly fixtures, whereas the 1920s and 1930s marked the beginning of more structured, cross-border contests. These developing tournaments gave institutional form to a continent in which nationalism and internationalism coexisted in uneasy but productive tension. As Philippe Vonnard observes, "the interwar period was the game's first period of democratization. The stranglehold of elites on the game's organization moderated as politicians across Europe began to see the people's game as an effective means of reinforcing national identity and showing their strength in international relations."[68] Furthermore, Xavier Breuil and Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin note how regional contests such as the Balkan Cup revealed the tensions between a supranational 'Europe of Nations', that straddled communist and democratic systems.[69] The interwar football map was itself shaped by the political landscape of the era, with connections and competitions emerging according to rivalries and conflicts.

The Mitropa Cup, founded in 1927, was the most enduring and emblematic of the interwar continental club competitions. Bringing together leading clubs from Central Europe, the Cup offered a structured, annual tournament that ran until the outbreak of the Second World War, and was resurrected after, continuing in various forms until 1992. The competition was formed in accordance with the diplomatic forces of the time, bringing together the nations of Central Europe with Italy, following the latter's rapprochement with its neighbours in the search for stability.[70]

Conceived in the wake of the post-war professionalisation of the game in Austria, Hungary, Italy and Czechoslovakia, it was, as Philippe Vonnard records, driven by the financial imperatives of the new professional clubs, whose owners sought "matches between the strongest European teams" to generate vital revenue, with its first meeting held in Venice only weeks after the signing of the Italian-Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, symbolising Mussolini's bid to extend Italian influence into Central Europe.[71] The Mitropa Cup also shaped the style of European football. It provided a stage for the Danubian School football style, a fluid, tactically sophisticated form of play originating in Vienna, Budapest, and Prague. Antonio Missiroli

[68] Philippe Vonnard. "From Mitropa Cup to UEFA Cup: the role of UEFA in the establishment of a European scale in football, 1927–1972," *Soccer & Society* 20, no. 7-8 (2019), 1026.
[69] Xavier Breuil & Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin, "The Balkan Cups as a vector of European integration, 1929–1994," *Sport in History* 35, no. 4 (2015), 592.
[70] Vonnard, "From Mitropa," 1027.
[71] Antonio Missiroli, "European Football Cultures and their Integration: The 'Short' Twentieth Century," *Sport in Society* 5, no. 1 (2002), 7.

explains how this style spread outward from Central Europe, influencing Italy, Uruguay, and Argentina, and standing in deliberate contrast to the more direct and physically oriented British game.

Despite its prominence on the continent, the Mitropa Cup barely registered in Britain. British newspapers largely ignored it, and it was not until 1933 that it received even a passing mention, when Plymouth Argyle played First Vienna, the 1931 winners, in a friendly.[72] The Cup also underlines the paradox of Britain's relationship with European football. No British clubs participated in the Mitropa Cup, a sign of both geographical and cultural separation, but British coaches and referees were part of it. Coaches John Dick and Johnny Madden, both Scots, built dynasties in Prague, sharing British sporting knowledge that was then transformed by local conditions into a distinct Central European form. Madden's Sparta won the Mitropa three times, and Dick's Slavia reached the 1930 final.[73]

This 'semi-detached' engagement extended to refereeing. For some of the more prominent matches between continental nations, English referees were summoned to adjudicate; indeed, it was the involvement of such officials which seemed to garner most attention to the Mitropa Cup by the British press. In August 1934, it was reported that "the distinction of being chosen to referee the final of the Central European Cup competition has been conferred upon a Notts referee, Mr W Walden".[74] Another Englishman, Jimmy Jewell, refereed the second leg of that final, between Bologna and Admira Wacker, with English referees again recruited for the 1935 and 1938 finals.[75] Seemingly Britain supplied the judges, but not the competitors.

By employing British officials, continental associations indicated their consideration of British football as a form of benchmark; meanwhile, the British press barely registered such contests, and when they did, they misspelt their names and misrepresented their structures. When, in 1935, a composite Slavia–Sparta side toured England, local papers mistakenly described them as "holders of the Mitiopa Cup," and inaccurately claimed the tournament was "competed for by all Continental nations".[76] Such errors reveal less about sloppy journalism than about the insularity of British sporting culture, which remained wedded to its domestic leagues and cups while much of the rest of Europe was experimenting with international forms.

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[72] "Test for Argyle," *Western Morning News*, 24 January 1933, 10.
[73] Jo Araf, *Generazione Wunderteam: The Rise and Fall of Austria's Wonder Team* (Worthing: Pitch, 2021) 35,105.
[74] "Invitation from Continent," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28 August 1934, 9.
[75] "Two to Control Their Finals," *Daily Express*, 27 August 1935, 13.
"Chosen to Officiate on the Continent," *Daily News*, 27 August 1935, 13.
[76] "Next Week's Match with Stoke City," *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 9 November 1935, 6; "Continental Stars Visit to Sheffield," *Sheffield Independent*, 8 November 1935, 8.

The 1930 Coupe des Nations in Geneva further illustrates Britain's ambivalent role in continental football. Organised by Swiss club Servette, it brought together many of Europe's leading sides, but, as with the Mitropa Cup, no British club participated. Yet British fingerprints were evident. Servette themselves were coached by an Englishman, Teddy Duckworth, while Stanley Rous refereed the final.[77] Britain thus remained practically present through figures of authority and expertise, even as its clubs stayed detached. This pattern, exporting knowledge and lending prestige while declining direct participation, again mirrored Britain's wider "semi-detached" relationship with Europe in the interwar years: engaged enough to influence the game's development, but unwilling to bind itself to the emerging structures of continental competition.

Yet this picture of isolation of British clubs was not absolute. Other competitions, like the 1937 Tournoi International de l'Exposition Universelle de Paris, did involve British clubs. When Chelsea reached the final against Bologna, British newspapers recognised that this was no ordinary friendly tour match, but a genuinely competitive tournament final.[78] Bologna's victory was appropriated by the Italian regime, used as fascist propaganda to emphasise the physical and tactical superiority of Mussolini's nation.[79] The Chelsea and Bologna encounter saw a performance of nationalisms, thereby exposing both the significance and shortcomings of international football within the turbulent interwar period.

The interwar period also saw the continuation of football tournaments at international exhibitions. At the 1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition, Wolverhampton Wanderers, a side not even in the English First Division but marooned in the Second division, though they had reached the FA Cup quarter-final the previous season, found themselves competing in a tournament among the domestic champions and runners-up of Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Switzerland and France. Wolves were eliminated in their first match, against Racing Santander, and lost again to First Vienna in an extra 'consolation match' arranged for the French public to see the Football League side.[80]

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[77] Paul Dietschy, "Did a 'Europe of Football' Exist in the 1930s," *Origins and Birth of the Europe of Football* ed. Paul Dietschy (London: Routledge, 2017) 30.
[78] "Junior Football," *The Scotsman*, 31 May 1937, 3.
"Chelsea in Rough Game," *Daily Herald*, 4 June 1937, 11.
"Chelsea Draw," *Daily News*, 31 May 1937, 18.
"Sports Items," *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 June 1937, 9.
[79] Pierre Lanfranchi. "Bologna: 'The Team That Shook the World," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 8, no. 3 (1991), 336.
[80] "Wolves' Defeat," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 15 June 1931, 12.

The *Daily Express* attributed Wolves' defeat to the superior pace and technique of their Spanish opponents, describing them as "fast and skilful".[81] The *Daily News* considered the impact of the result on British football:

> "The prestige of British football, which is not too high on the Continent following the defeats of English and Scottish national sides, was not enhanced yesterday when Wolverhampton Wanderers were defeated 3-1 by the Spanish team, Santander, in the first round of the International Football Tournament, played in connection with the Colonial Exhibition"[82]

Apparently, that performance in overseas games carried symbolic weight in challenging long-held assumptions surrounding Britain's footballing superiority. An *Aberdeen Press and Journal* article later that year addressed the topic of sport in France, suggesting that though France "has had no such tradition" in sport, the French government's investment in sport was transforming their performance, with France "seeking to achieve by rule and rote, Britain has achieved by instinct and habit".[83] This commentary reveals a growing unease within British sporting circles, as other nations embraced modern, state-supported approaches to sport, Britain faced threats in the new field of international sporting competition.

Despite some interest from clubs involved in the 1931 Paris Colonial exhibition tournament, the tournament was not repeated, but there were plans for the tournament's host Racing Club Paris to travel to Wolverhampton to play a charity game at Molineux that November.[84] This did not materialise; however, that month did see rumours within the British press about English and Scottish clubs considering moving permanently to Paris. On 19 November, the *Daily Mirror* reported "the suggestion that three leading clubs should be transferred to France".[85] The plan was supposedly arranged by France-based American sports promoter Jeff Dickson, who that year was described by *L'Auto* as 'the greatest promoter in Europe' for his work promoting boxing, cycling, and wrestling.[86]

A *Daily Express* columnist added to the story, claiming that they personally knew of three clubs, "two are English and one Scottish" considering the move, adding that "all three are, of course, famous, and it is also unfortunately true that the trio are experiencing great financial difficulties".[87] Nothing came of the plan, and within a year, French football had embraced

[81] "Wolves Lose in Paris," *Daily Express*, 8 June 1931, 13.
[82] "Wolves Lose in Paris," *Daily News*, 8 June 1931, 15.
[83] "France and Sport," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 5 November 1931, 6.
[84] "The Wolves' French Visitors," *Evening News*, 20 June 1931, 12.
[85] "Football Surprise," *Daily Mirror*, 19 November 1931, 5.
[86] Sébastien Moreau and Sylvain Ville, "Becoming the number one boss of sports shows. Promoter Jeff Dickson in interwar Europe," *Sport in History* 45, no. 1 (2025), 113.
[87] "The Daily Sportlight," *Daily Express*, 20 November 1931, 19.

professionalism without the English clubs, who remained where they were. Yet the rumours demonstrate that in 1931, long before Wimbledon's exile to Milton Keynes or the abortive schemes to remove the South West London club to Dublin, the idea of transplanting clubs across borders was contemplated. Football, now an industry, was subject to the logics of international competition, capital flow, and the restless search for new markets.

By the mid-1920s, Britain's casual approach to continental football tours was under scrutiny. In 1925, an unnamed British coach appealed through the *Athletic News* for touring sides "in this country to treat their Continental football more seriously" and "to reveal their full power and to let their opponents see that British football is still far superior," warning that poor performances damaged both prestige and employment prospects for British trainers abroad.[88] Four years later, the *Athletic News* returned to the theme, criticising clubs for treating these tours as mere "picnics" and calling on the FA to intervene to curb such "unjust and damaging" practices to safeguard Britain's standing in the increasingly competitive European game.[89]

In 1932, a *Daily Herald* article identified the range of teams travelling to participate in continental competitions; Wimbledon in a tournament in Amsterdam, Oxford City in a tournament in Dieppe, Clapton and Tufnell Park both travelling to face Guernsey and Jersey, a sign of football's widening horizons.[90] By the mid-1930s, this growing cross-border activity had sparked debate about the creation of a true pan-European championship. In 1935 Arsenal manager George Allison predicted its imminent arrival, while the FA reacted cautiously, HJ Hiband, its treasurer, conceding it was "not impossible" but warning of clashes with domestic fixtures, and Ted Robbins of the Welsh FA acknowledging its potential benefits yet insisting it must be carefully organised to avoid disrupting the league game.[91] This debate signalled a shift in outlook, with overseas matches no longer expected to be exhibitions of British footballing style, but genuine competitive events.

Thus, interwar club competitions were more than 'precursors' to the post-1955 European Cup. They were part of the continent's broader search for new forms of international connection in a period when the old order had collapsed, but the new one was yet to be born. Like other interwar institutions, the League of Nations, the international exhibitions, and the Olympic movement, they embodied a Europe suspended between nationalism and internationalism,

[88] "Teams on Tour," *Athletic News*, 20 April 1925, 4.
[89] "Are Football Tours Picnics?," *Athletic News*, 27 May 1929, 1
[90] "Leading Sides on Tour," *Daily Herald*, 24 March 1932, 15.
[91] "Football Championship of Europe," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 23 November 1935, 8.

war and peace, isolation and integration. In this sense, football was both a mirror and a laboratory of the transnational interwar world.

As Jean Williams observes: "Female teams were calling themselves world champions seventy years before there was a FIFA Women's World Cup".[92] As has been discussed in previous chapters, women's football grew during the interwar period and operated beyond the rule of the governing bodies that controlled the men's game, leading to independent and imagined contests to garner interest in women's football. An evocative example appears in the *Bradford Observer* of 11 August 1939, which advertised a forthcoming contest between Preston Ladies and the Belgian team Femina Sport. The match was proclaimed as nothing less than "The World's Championship Match: Ladies Association Football", with Preston presented as the "Champions of England," Femina as the "Champions of Europe," in the encounter at Bradford's Odsal Stadium.[93] In both the men's and women's games, these international tournaments reflected a desire for connection and challenge between Britain and the Continent. Though limited in scale and seriousness these tournaments offered a glimpse of how clubs could compete, though women's football would need to wait till the twenty-first-century creation of the UEFA Women's Cup to see this realised.

Interwar National Competitions

The interwar years saw the transformation of international sport. During this period, the Olympic Games grew into a global spectacle, with a growing number of participant nations, expanding the competition into an arena for what Matthew Llewellyn terms 'competitive national self-assertion'.[94] Yet Britain stood partly apart from this. As Llewellyn observes, "during the inter-war years, British governing bodies embraced an extreme policy of isolationism. In football, only one foreign team (Belgium) played in England during the 1920s. The other British associations 'possessed more limited geographical horizons' by viewing the annual Home Nations Championship as their sole priority".[95] Such insularity reflected both a confidence in Britain's self-sufficiency and a refusal to engage with the new structures of international competition that were emerging on the continent.

Britain continued to participate in the football competition at the Olympic Games, though it did not compete at all games, and faced some difficulties when it did. Britain faced its first-ever

[92] Jean Williams, *A Beautiful Game: International Perspectives on Women's Football* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 13.
[93] "The World's Championship Match," *Bradford Observer*, 11 August 1939, 5.
[94] Matthew P. Llewellyn. "Chariots of Discord: Great Britain, Nationalism and the 'Doomed' 1924 Paris Olympic Games," *Contemporary British History*, 24, no. 1 (2010), 69.
[95] Llewellyn, "Olympic Games," 761.

Olympic defeat at the 1920 Antwerp Games, losing in the first round to Norway. *The Daily Mirror* referred to the result as 'a rude shock', as ahead of the games, "football was considered a cakewalk".[96]

Women had competed in the Olympic Games since 1900, but their participation remained limited and would not include women's football until the 1996 Atlanta Games. As a result, in 1922, Alice Milliat helped organise the Women's World Games, campaigning for women's events to be included in the official IOC programme. As Jean Williams notes, "although these important steps had been pioneered by Alice Milliat, she increasingly chose to focus on getting women's track and field athletics into the IOC schedule of the Olympic Games" and "while track and field would remain on the schedule thereafter and expand all the time," Milliat's campaign for women's football was ultimately constrained by her "poor health and limited finance".[97]

The Women's World Games grew in scale, with the 1930 edition in Prague and the 1934 games in London attracting significant international attention. Yet football remained marginal even within this alternative sporting world. At both the 1930 and 1934 Women's World Games, it appeared only in the form of exhibition matches, symbolic gestures rather than genuine competitions.

Britain did not participate at the 1924 Paris Olympics, due to a dispute over the payment of players by the Belgian, Swiss, and Italian associations.[98] Though Britain did not enter the football competition in 1924, British football was involved, with some football clubs, including Arsenal, Aston Villa, and Chelsea donating towards the British Olympic Association's fund in the run up to the games.[99] This mix of financial support and competitive withdrawal reflected Britain's increasingly "semi-detached" role: keen to engage but only on their own terms. The results of the tournament were still covered, with an analysis of the victorious Uruguayan team's playing style, citing French newspapers *Le Matin* and *L'Auto*, but without mention of any Uruguayan players by name, instead prescribing their success as resulting from having "adopted the method of the Scottish game, to which they have added the stamp of their Latin genius, and which they have rendered more rapid, more nervous, more ardent".[100] The reporting of Uruguay's victory shows how the British press could only understand innovation by translating it into familiar categories, "Scottish method" plus "Latin ardour", a telling mix of

[96] "Our Olympic Football Reverse," *Daily Mirror*, 30 August 1920, 14.
[97] Jean Williams. *The History of Women's Football* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2021), 52.
[98] Llewellyn, "Chariots of Discord," 75.
[99] Ibid.
[100] "Olympic Football," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 10 June 1924, 8.
"Olympic Football Final," *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 June 1924, 14.

parochialism and stereotype. In this sense, Olympic football exposed both the waning of Britain's dominance as well as the persistence of its insular worldview.

In 1927, it was again announced that footballers at the Olympics would be paid, leading to Britain withdrawing from the Amsterdam Games the following year. *The Scotsman* referred to the announcement as causing "violent revulsion", as "none of the great sports associations in this country will countenance the payment of amateur players in any shape or form".[101] Despite the absence of a British team the results of the 1928 Olympic football contest were reported in Britain.[102] However, far more column inches were devoted to reporting on the immense demand for tickets to the matches in Amsterdam. Newspapers across Britain reproduced the news that the Dutch Prince Consort was unable to get tickets, along with descriptions of 'wild scenes in Amsterdam' including "riotous scenes which occurred when two queues of some seventy thousand people in all were waiting at an office in Amsterdam to purchase tickets for next Wednesday's match between Uruguay and Holland", adding that "the Olympic Committee reported that one man had been killed, his head having been smashed in by a police sword, but the police deny this".[103] The story of Amsterdam told by the British press was not the football but the theatre surrounding it. This suggests that interwar British interest in continental football was less about the game on the field and more about the spectacle it generated, consumed as a curious foreign drama rather than as part of Britain's own sporting sphere.

There was no football at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, with the creation of the FIFA World Cup two years prior leading the global football community to conclude it was unnecessary to arrange another competition with the IOC. The exclusion of football from the 1932 Games appears to have gone largely unremarked upon in the British press, or at least no significant commentary has been identified in the sources consulted.

Ahead of the 1936 Berlin Games, it had been assumed Britain would go far, with the possibility of facing hosts Germany to win gold.[104] Instead, Britain lost to Poland in the quarter-final, a result that saw headlines of 'Britain's Sorry Lesson in Olympic Games – W Formation Failure', lamenting the tactics deployed by the British amateurs.[105] The loss even led to calls for the

[101] "Olympic Football Sensation," *The Scotsman*, 17 August 1927, 8.
[102] "Olympic Soccer Final," *The Scotsman*, 14 June 1928, 15.
[103] "No Tickets for a Price," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 14 June 1928, 7.
"Olympic Football Queues," *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 May 1928, p.4.
[104] "Olympic Football," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 07 August 1936, 10.
[105] "Old Football Methods The Best," *Northern Whig*, 6 October 1936, p.2.

reorganisation of British Olympic football, such was the shock at having fallen short against the eastern Europeans.[106]

Though Britain did not make it to the final four of the 1936 tournament, the final rounds were covered back in Britain, and the political undertones of the games addressed, with reports noting the attendance of Rudolph Hess at the final between Austria and Italy.[107] That reports dwelt on the political presence of senior fascist officials in the stands, as they had two years earlier at the World Cup, shows how football was no longer to be treated as solely sporting spectacle but had become a prop in the theatre of nations. As Beck notes, FA officials felt that despite sporting failure participation in the 1936 Olympic Games had "forged invaluable links with both FIFA and affiliated associations".[108]

FIFA World Cup

Histories of interwar football often focus on the first three editions of the FIFA World Cup in 1930, 1934, and 1938, yet these tournaments barely registered in Britain. FIFA's invitations to Britain throughout the 1930s were met with a polite but firm refusal. In November 1929, the FA secretary, Sir Frederick Wall, curtly replied to the Uruguayan organisers of the inaugural tournament, simply stating: "I am instructed to express regret at our inability to accept the invitation".[109] This was not due solely to Britain's withdrawal from FIFA in 1928, but to a more fundamental insularity, with British football's sense that it had nothing to prove. Beck asserts that "for Britons, the real test remained the world's oldest international competition, the home international tournament, even if for England and Scotland the prime goal was to win their annual contest".[110] Though the details of the 1930 World Cup were scarcely reported on in Britain, the event did seem to lead to a proliferation of columns which questioned the sport's status, purpose, and potential. Around the time of the inaugural World Cup, headlines included "Football or War?", "New Problems Crop Up in World Football", "Who Leads in Soccer Football", and "Football of the Future", as fans of British football sought to understand the role of football in a rapidly changing world.[111]

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[106] "Olympic Football," *Western Morning News*, 6 October 1936, 12.
[107] "The Olympic Games Wind-Up," *Dundee Courier*, 17 August 1936, 4.
[108] Beck, "Going to War," 120.
[109] James Walvin, *The People's Game: The History of Football Revisited* (London: Mainstream, 1994), 129.
[110] Ibid., 117.
[111] "Football or War," *Athletic News*, 6 October 1930, 15; "New Problems Crop Up in World Football," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 5 November 1930, 6; "Who Leads in Soccer Football," *Athletic News*, 1 September 1930, 16; "Football of the Future," *Sheffield Independent*, 8 October 1930, 6.

Ahead of the 1930 tournament, *The Athletic News* dedicated its front page to asking the question 'Which is the World's Game?' alongside a cartoon of an indigenous American man and an East Asian man playing football together.[112] Alongside the image, footballer turned writer Ivan Sharpe asked: 'Which sport is played in the greatest number of countries and teaches the valuable lessons of the playgrounds to the greatest number of people? The true answer to the two questions is: Association football".[113] Such commentary speaks less to genuine internationalism than to a lingering imperial reflex, with Britain as the tutor, others as pupils. The 1930 tournament's only British connection, Scottish-born Robert Millar, who coached the United States, went unmentioned in the British press.[114] The first World Cup was not greeted as a rupture, but as a prompt for Britain to reaffirm its authority over a game that was already ceasing to be its own.

Hosted and won by Italy, the 1934 World Cup featured in the British press as a political spectacle as well as a sporting contest. British newspaper headlines dwelt on the 'Scenes of Enthusiasm at Fascist Stadium' and 'Mussolini Sees Italy Triumph', framing Italian success as confirmation of regime power rather than merely athletic achievement.[115] [116] Football, in this telling, had become one more theatre of fascist mass politics, where the choreography of crowds and the presence of Il Duce mattered more than the players on the field.

Yet even in their absence as competing teams, Britain was far from invisible. At the 1934 tournament, British coaches were prominent: two Englishmen, Bob Glendenning with the Netherlands and George Kimpton with France; a Scot, James McRae, managing Egypt; and Scottish-born David Gould in charge of the United States. No other nation contributed more head coaches. Refusing to send its own national team, while supplying the very men who led other nations, epitomised the "semi-detached" relationship with world football.

Days before the 1934 World Cup, Czechoslovakia's 2–1 victory over England in Prague, hailed by Czech Football Association official Karel Petrů as "perhaps the greatest success of Czechoslovak football so far", marked both a surge in national confidence and the shifting balance of European football power.[117] Though England was absent from the stage of

[112] Ivan Sharpe, "Which is the World's Game?," *Athletic News*, 5 August 1929, 1.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Andy Jasner, "Cup Connections: Robert Millar (1930)," *Philadelphia Union*, 9 June 2014, accessed 16 January 2026, www.philadelphiaunion.com/news/cup-connections-robert-millar-1930
[115] "Italy win the World Championship," *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 11 June 1934, p.3.
[116] "World Football Champions," *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 11 June 1934, 19.
[117] Martin Pelc, "The World Cup Final 1934 as a Defining Moment in Czechoslovak Football Culture," *Soccer & Society* 23, no. 2 (2022), 175.

international competition, it appears that it remained a benchmark of prestige of sorts for its continental contemporaries.

The 1938 World Cup, hosted by France, was similarly overlooked by those in Britain. British newspapers covered Hungary's defeat against Italy in the final only in brief, providing limited analysis of the match.[118] Two English coaches managed teams in the tournament, Bob Glendenning with the Netherlands and Jack Butler with Belgium.[119] Stanley Rous attended the final on behalf of the FA indicating Britain's role was to observe rather than participate.[120] Nevertheless, some British presence was felt on the side-lines.

The reports of the pre-1939 World Cups demonstrate the low level of interest Britain had in the competition. A 1939 article in *The People* described Italy as having "won the World Cup in 1934 and 1938 – the only years it has been competed for. I need not add that we did not enter it", indicating both the 1930s author and reader understood relatively little of the tournament's short history.[121]

Nevertheless, there were continued visions of possible future competition. By the mid-1930s, discussion of a European championship intensified, fuelled by continental sides' increasing quality and organisation. A *Cheltenham Chronicle* article of December 1935 anticipated that a competition was "certain to come into being" within three years, arguing that an international tournament would not only be a financial success but also "strengthen the bonds of international peace in Europe," echoing the wider interwar conception of sport as a tool of soft power.[122]

Arsenal coach George Allison's 1935 recommendation of a European-wide competition created wider debate around the proposal. According to the *Nottingham Evening Post*, FA officials were interested but had concerns around clashes with league schedules and travel costs.[123] Ted Robbins of the Welsh FA envisioned a combined Great Britain XI, while others, such as Hearts manager David Pratt, suggested a knockout format limited to a few weeks each summer.[124]

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[118] "World Soccer," *Daily Herald*, 6 June 1938, p.14.
[119] Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation, "World Cup 1938 finals," *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*, accessed 17 November 2025, https://www.rsssf.org/tables/38full.html
[120] "All-Europe Soccer XI For Wembley," *Daily Herald*, 18 June 1938, 16.
[121] "My Weekly Broadcast," *The People*, 14 May 1939, p.21.
[122] "European Football Tournament," *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 14 December 1935, 8.
[123] "European Football Championship Idea of Great Britain XI," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23 November 1935, 9.
[124] Ibid.

By October 1936, the *Gloucestershire Echo* claimed that the Home Nations Championship had now "lost its glamour," cautioning that several continental nations now "dispute Britain's claim to be leaders in the football world", and concluding that only by embracing the growing continental game could England restore its fading prestige:

> "If a European football championship is formed, then we cannot afford to play second fiddle to the foreigners; and the only way we can show we still lead the world in this great game is by participation in such a competition when it does come into being."[125]

This shift in tone reflected a growing anxiety. Britain's historic role as football's unchallenged centre was eroding, forcing the sport's originators to consider participating in the international competitions they had resisted.

Conclusion

Through the examination of extensive archival evidence, this chapter has illustrated how touring and competitions were inextricably connected in the period leading up to the Second World War. From Shepherd's Bush in Bilbao and West Auckland in Turin, to Chelsea and Wolves in Paris, early international competitions became increasingly structured and competitive across the period. As these contests developed, Britain's role was 'semi-detached', exporting referees, coaches, and some of its teams, while withholding its primary focus to domestic leagues and the Home Championship. Despite this hesitancy of participation, early competitions, including the Coupe de l'Entente Cordiale, Dubonnet Cup, and World Exhibition tournaments, established traditions and tensions that would develop further in the post-World War Two period. By the 1930s, competitions such as the Mitropa Cup, Coupe des Nations, and the World Cup had embedded football into the cultural landscape of the continent and the wider world.

British hesitance to engage in European competition persisted well into the 1950s, with no English clubs participating in the inaugural UEFA European Cup. The emergence of UEFA in the mid-1950s represented not a sudden rupture but the culmination of decades of evolving encounters. The lasting competitive structures of the 1950s and 1960s were descendants of the earlier mosaic of tours, cups, sponsors, and city festivals in which the varied football teams and cultures from across Britain and the continent met. Early European competitions were

[125] "International Football, Why Not A European Championship?," *Gloucestershire Echo*, 20 October 1936, 7.

forged from this, laying the groundwork for the pan-European consciousness that UEFA would later institutionalise. Modern tournaments, including the Champions League or the European Championship, ought not be understood as being born from a singular founding moment but rather as a step forward in a century-long process that has seen football serve both as a mirror of European politics and a tool for integration.

Somewhat ironically, it was nationalist regimes, particularly Mussolini's Italy, that helped drive efforts for international football competition, as such governments increasingly recognised the political value in embracing popular sport on the global stage. The following chapters will further explore these approaches, examining how touring was not only a vehicle for spreading the game but also for growing ideologies, as communist and fascist regimes harnessed the spectacle of football to project power, forge alliances, and spread their political message.

Chapter Six: Touring Communism

Introduction

"And therein lies our hope. Roast beef and plumb pudding and good ale are not the stuff upon which you breed revolutionaries – especially with healthy sports and recreations - cricket, football racing - thrown in. That is how the Britisher has been reared in the past - and with proper control, the treatment may still be continued."

Horatio Bottomley, *Sunday Mirror*, 1918.[1]

Horatio Bottomley's claim, made while independent MP for Hackney South, that "healthy sports and recreations" helped ensure Britain did not "breed revolutionaries" reveals a widespread sentiment of early twentieth century British opinion that sport belonged to civil society not the state, and modern mass leisure stabilised political tensions. In the Soviet imagination, the opposite was the case, with sport treated not as a guard against radicalism, but an instrument of mass mobilisation, too important, as Beck notes, to be left to "non-political bodies", with Soviet sport "functionalised" into state structures to serve state purposes.[2]

British football's relationship with the USSR was limited by state anxiety, institutional exclusion, and an ideological contestation over what international sport ought to serve. The stance taken by the British government towards Soviet sporting contact was evident not only via official correspondence, but also highly visible interventions into the realm of football tours. Beck describes the British government's refusal to issue visas to a Soviet factory football team invited to participate in a British tournament as "perhaps the clearest and most public example of government intervention in British football between 1900–39".[3] This case will be examined, along with the banning of British football clubs from visiting the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and other manifestations of British football's associations with left-wing politics during the interwar period.

[1] Horatio Bottomley, "The Lesson From Russia – What to Pray for Today," *Sunday Mirror*, 6 January 1918, 4.
[2] Beck, *Scoring*, 137.
[3] Ibid., 141-42

Together, these sporting events, disputes and official interventions illustrate the structural distinctions between British and Soviet football cultures prior to the Second World War. Barbara Keys explains that Soviet government officials discussed international sport in terms of "international work", seeing it as an opportunity for some outward-facing activities that could facilitate diplomatic opportunities, in contrast to British conceptions of sporting tours as mainly private activities, left largely to clubs and associations to organise themselves.[4]

These tensions were shaped by the unstable and contested nature of interwar British attitudes towards the Soviet Union more broadly. Across the political spectrum, the Soviet experiment inspired a fluctuating mixture of curiosity, admiration, suspicion, and fear. Andrew Williams notes that the Labour Party approached the USSR with both "great interest and great suspicion," while Keith Neilson argues that visits by British trade unionists and Labour figures, alongside the growth of domestic communism, contributed to a wider "Red scare".[5] Football contacts with the Soviet Union were necessarily shaped by this fractured political atmosphere, encounters mediated by the ideological anxieties of interwar Britain.

The chapter begins by establishing the pre-revolutionary history of football in Russia, showing that the game was already present before 1917 and had developed in part through British influence and wider European networks. It then examines the remaking of sport under Bolshevik rule, as football was drawn into new ideological and institutional structures. From there, the chapter turns to the rare instances of direct Anglo-Soviet contact, in particular the British Workers' Sports Federation tour of 1927, before considering the significance of tours that did not happen and the reasons why. These absences matter as much as the matches that were played, for they reveal that interwar football touring mapped political constraint as clearly as it enabled international exchange. The chapter concludes by situating Anglo-Soviet football within wider left-wing sporting internationalisms and by considering the competing claims, heard in Britain and abroad, that football could either pacify social conflict or serve as a vehicle for mobilisation. If touring made football international in practice, the Soviet case shows with particular clarity how that internationalism could also be limited and redirected by politics.

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[4] Barbara Keys. "Soviet sport and transnational mass culture in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 3 (2003), 421.

[5] Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45.
Andrew Williams. "The Labour Party's Attitude to the Soviet Union, 1927—35: An Overview with Specific Reference to Unemployment Policies and Peace," *Journal of Contemporary History* 22, no. 1 (1987), 87.

Pre-revolutionary Russian Football

The history of modern football in Russia stretches back to the mid nineteenth century, records indicating British sailors had played football while docked at Odessa in the 1860s, with Robert Edelman affirming that "the British are generally given the credit for popularizing the game in St Petersburg at the turn of the century".[6] James Riordan claims that the first football match played between Russians was in 1892 during a cycling race interval at the Semyonov Hippodrome in St Petersburg, with further co-operation and administrative developments during the 1890s leading to the "the birth of organised Russian soccer" in 1897.[7]

By the early 1910s, football had acquired recognisable organisation beyond Moscow and St Petersburg, with leagues emerging in Odessa, Kiev, and Kharkov before 1914.[8] A Russian national side was formed in 1911, in preparation for the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, where Russia was eliminated by Finland in the second round.[9] Despite some evident and widespread interest in the game, according to Edelman, there was no league "on the Western model," crowds were "small," and working-class involvement was more often informal participation than organised spectatorship.[10]

Football existed in imperial Russia, flourishing in some urban settings, but was not integrated into the lives of the masses as was the case in Britain and other parts of Europe in the early-twentieth century. Even so, some British observers noticed the growth in the game. An *Edinburgh Evening News* article in August 1910 quoted a report from the British Consul-General in Odessa describing how "it has become fashion in the last year or two for the inhabitants to play football", going on to suggest that the sport's growing popularity was due to the formation of a football club by the British community of Odessa, and also partly on account of Russian soldiers having learned it while serving alongside British soldiers when evacuating Cretan Muslims in 1897.[11] As elsewhere, football in Russia developed through distinctly modern international channels of ports, military contact, and travel across borders. This internationalism is evident in further British newspaper reports of football in Russia. In 1911, the *Westminster Gazette* published the scoreline of a match in Moscow between "a

[6] Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: a History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29.
[7] James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 22.
[8] Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 30.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 31.
[11] "Football in Russia," *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 August 1910, 4.

Berlin Association football team" and "Moscow Englishman", with the Berlin side winning "by 6 goals to 3".[12]

Several British football teams toured Russia before the First World War, though such visits were rare. The English Wanderers toured in 1911 and again in 1914, with both the Edinburgh Civil Service Strollers and a London University football team also travelling to Russia in the spring of 1914.[13] The London University team played four matches against Russian student and select sides, winning all four games.[14] One British newspaper report of the students' tour mentions that their first match was played on a new pitch "many miles from Moscow", with a priest blessing the ground and delivering a "short allocution on the beneficial results of sport, especially in the case of the working-classes".[15] The pre-match ceremonial practice suggests that football in Russia was understood by at least some of its advocates as a modernising moralising force.

British military involvement in the Russian Civil War, in support of anti-Bolshevik forces, brought troops to Russia in 1919, with football appearing as part of some men's portable routines. Damian Wright's research of British soldiers' experiences during the Russian Civil War records that while the British fleet was stationed at Primorsk in the winter of 1919, some spent Christmas day "ashore playing soccer in the snow".[16] Some evidence of troops playing in Russia reached home, with the *Newcastle Chronicle* publishing a photo of troops playing, captioned "The British Army in North Russia. Inevitable Football".[17] Such continuation of play within a wartime environment echoes the earlier presence of football along the Western Front, with sport a source of camaraderie and amusement for men living through fear and hardship. Some British POWs captured in Russia by the Red Army are also recorded to have formed a "local soccer league", with Wright noting such activity reflected their relative privilege over other prisoners of the emerging state.[18]

Football was present in Russia from the late nineteenth century, with British figures involved in its development. By the time of the Bolshevik takeover, football was played and watched in various urban centres, where the communist regime would transform the meaning of its

[12] "Football in Russia," *Westminster Gazette*, 29 April 1911, 16.
[13] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[14] Ibid.
[15] "Football in Russia," *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 28 April 1914, 3.
[16] Damian Wright, *Churchill's Secret War with Lenin* (Solihull: Helion, 2017), 384.
[17] "The British Army in North Russia. Inevitable Football," *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 13 September 1919, 3.
[18] Wright, *Churchill's*, 331.

practice, both in a domestic setting and in its contact with the wider international sporting world.

Soviet Sport

Among the many transformations resulting from the Bolshevik Revolution was a fundamental re-ordering of sport. To analyse the development of sport across Europe, Wray Vamplew has divided the continent into four distinct “clusters”, describing how “in the Soviet/Eastern European cluster, which emerged in the twentieth century, sport was an extension of the state apparatus both in spheres of mass display and the cultivation of elite athletes”.[19]

However, David Steinberg notes that the development of Soviet sport policy was slow, as although Lenin had stressed the significance of physical activity at the 1920 Komsomol Congress, “no real attempt was made to develop a unique Soviet ideology that would define the role of workers' sport in a proletarian culture or would prescribe the use of sport as a revolutionary device”.[20] In the years after the revolution the place of sport within the new order remained contested. There was no single, settled Bolshevik line, with sports continuing to operate without national organisation or institutional consolidation.

James Riordan points to the “authoritative resolution on sport and physical culture” agreed by the Bolshevik Party in July 1925 as arising to suppress the “continuing bickering and ambiguity” with regard to the Soviet government’s approach to sport.[21] The resolution sought to ensure sports were politically led, with entirely new sporting associations and networks, which according to Riordan, would make sport “a mass movement that embraced peasants and industrial workers, old and young, men and women, Russians and members of other ethnic groups”.[22] 1930 saw a further turning point in Soviet sport, with the formation of the All-Union Physical Culture and Sports Council, which Beck describes as a “de facto ministry of sport at the head of a hierarchical structure facilitating further changes”.[23]

Furthermore, in 1931, the Soviet Union launched Ready for Labour and Defence of the USSR, a programme of mass physical training, which sought to support the growth of Soviet citizens as ‘Fizkul'turnik’, meaning a person committed to activity and fitness.[24] Reflecting on Soviet

[19] Vamplew, “Industrialisation,” 133.
[20] David Steinberg, “The workers' sport internationals 1920-28,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 2 (1978), 237.
[21] Riordan, *Sport*, 90.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Beck, *Scoring*, 139.
[24] Nicolae Constantin and Valentin Maier. “Sport and physical education in communist factories: from the Soviet Union to Romania,” *Romanian Journal of History and International Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015), 218.

interwar sport from the 1960s, Henry Morton described the 1930s as a "new era" for sport in the USSR, as new trade union sport societies were formed, meaning that "the primary sport circle was retained at the place of production", enabling the creation of broader All-Union competitions.[25]

According to Beck, these changes led to the integration of Soviet Sport "into the all-pervasive socialist state", that could suit state needs, aiding "health, hygiene, defence, patriotism, integration, productivity, international recognition, even nation-building".[26] This breadth of function is central to understanding Soviet sport as a vehicle to strengthen bodies, shape behaviour, and demonstrate the capacity of the communist order. However, sport in the USSR should not be simply understood as a product of state decree. Susan Grant warns not to overstate the impact of Soviet directives on the sporting interests of the people, emphasising the "agenda of the masses themselves", claiming that "those who were interested in physical culture would surely have participated regardless of party policy or the demands of local organisers".[27] For Soviet football to survive, it required more than state support; it required the interests and passions of many.

Changes in Soviet sport were not confined to domestic policy but also shaped the USSR's position on international sport. Keys outlines how, from 1930 "the main aim of Soviet international sports contacts shifted from revolutionary agitation within an independent sports system to results-oriented competition within the western sports system", with the Soviet regime keen to "increase its influence in Europe by devoting more attention to the large numbers of workers in nonworkers' organizations".[28] For much of the 1920s, the USSR pursued a different form of sporting internationalism to that seen across other European nations. The USSR was not a member of FIFA or the IOC, instead seeking to foster alternative relations with overseas "worker-athletes".[29]

The USSR's early international football fixtures do indicate some interest in engaging with other nations on the football pitch, travelling to Sweden and Norway in 1923 and Turkey the following year, although Spain, Czechoslovakia, and Austria all refused visas for the USSR team, limiting their engagement in international football.[30] Despite these obstacles, football

[25] Henry Morton. *Soviet Sport: Mirror of Soviet Society* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1963), 196.
[26] Beck, *Scoring*, 138.
[27] Susan Grant, "The Collective Agitation of Arms and Legs: Organising Mass Physical Culture in 1920s Soviet Russia," *Revolutionary Russia* 23, no. 1 (2010), 108.
[28] Keys, "Soviet Sport," 419.
[29] Beck, *Scoring*, 139.
[30] Riordan, *Soviet Sport*, 352.

could serve broader diplomatic purposes. In 1934, a Soviet team travelled to Czechoslovakia to help improve political relations following Czechoslovakia's recognition of the USSR.[31]

In 1934, FIFA granted authorisation for its members to play matches against the USSR, but saw such contact as a difficult matter, due to Soviet relations with workers' sport organisations that operated beyond the control of FIFA, and Soviet officials were resistant to joining FIFA due to the presence of fascists within the organisation's leadership.[32] Interwar Soviet football was therefore both isolated and integrated within the wider footballing world, as perspectives and relationships within and about Soviet football evolved according to broader political matters. This evolving framework formed the setting for British encounters with Soviet football in a series of revealing encounters across the interwar period.

British Workers' Sports Federation

In 1927, a British Workers' Sports Federation football team travelled to the Soviet Union. The BWSF was self-admittedly "small and weak" in comparison to continental labour sports movements, with the organisation hoping the tour would serve "as a great urge to the further development of our movement".[33] Beck outlines how the travelling BWSF squad was composed of "ordinary workers, railwaymen, woodworkers, and furniture workers," who wanted "the opportunity to see the Workers' State for themselves".[34] Beck also notes that the visit had drawn attention from Whitehall, as exchanges between the Home Office, Foreign Office, and Passport Office seemed concerned by the "tour's propaganda implications", with passports denied for two "known communists" within the squad.[35]

The mission of the tour to the USSR appeared to be more a form of political education than sporting performance, with the BWSF framing their travel as an act of learning. Their report of the tour published upon their return home stated that:

> "The team in Russia not only played matches with some of the best workers' teams in the country, but it also took full advantage of its opportunity to acquaint itself with the economic, political and social position of the Russian workers."

Accordingly, the report was divided to account for the dual purposes of the trip, an indication this was far from a conventional football tour. Instead, it belonged to a wider interwar culture

[31] Keys, "Soviet Sport," 421.
[32] Ibid., 424-426.
[33] PHM Archive, "The Worker's Sports Movement (Including an account of experiences of the first British Workers' football team in Soviet Russia" (CP/ORG/MISC/6/4), 4.
[34] Beck, Scoring, 140.
[35] Ibid.

of labour travel, with British trade unionists and Labour Party members also travelling to the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s to see communism in action first-hand.[36]

Player-manager George Sinfield later wrote that "The Russians, for their part, imagined they were receiving a super side of footballers of the highest quality. After all, we were from Britain, the home of football and for all the Russians knew, our players were of the calibre of Manchester United, Spurs or Celtic".[37] However, the performance of the BWSF on the pitch quickly demonstrated they were far from professional quality.

The BWSF's first match in Moscow was against a representative team of Muscovite trade unions, with "thousands filling the trams and all other kinds of vehicles, while the pavements were packed with those going on foot".[38] As both teams took to the field, they were met with resounding applause from the enthusiastic crowd, impressed by the British team's gesture to allocate part of the match proceeds to a fund for building aircraft in response to the anti-Soviet campaign of the Baldwin Government.[39] The British team lost the match eleven nil, leading the BWSF to joke that "as each goal was scored the band played a few bars, and our boys soon became familiar with the tune".[40]

The subsequent match in Leningrad witnessed a more closely contested game, with a crowd of 15,000 spectators witnessing the British team lose one nil. Further defeats followed in Kharkov, Don Basin, and Kiev, but the tour ended with a victory against the Hungarian Political Club in Moscow, the only win of the seven matches played on tour.[41]

However, the BWSF report of the tour did not reflect upon the trip with failure or regret, but emphasised the value taken from immersing themselves within the economic, political, and social landscape of Russian workers. In the post-tour report, the visitors speak glowingly of "finely-equipped football grounds" and emphasised "the progress that has been made in the social and economic life of the country".[42]

The tour report ends with this declaration by the British team:

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[36] Neilson, *Britain,* 45.
[37] BBC News, "World Cup 2018: The story of the 1927 British Workers tour of Russia", *BBC News*, 30 May 2018, accessed 4 March 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/44073931
[38] PHM, "The Worker's", 4.
[39] PHM, "The Worker's", 5.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 7.

"We bid you farewell. We thank you for the opportunity given us of seeing the First Workers' Republic for ourselves. We have seen many advantages over us, all of which have been gained by your victory over capitalism… LONG LIVE THE WORKING CLASS OF THE USSR! LONG LIVE THE PROLETARIAT OF THE WORLD!"[43]

Shortly after the tour, The *Daily Herald* published a letter, penned by Sinfield, in which he highlighted his conversations with workers in Moscow regarding their wages and working conditions, affirming that "without exception, all the workers we spoke with said that their standard of living had improved significantly since the revolution. These conversations made it absolutely clear to us that Russian workers enthusiastically support the existing political system in the USSR".[44]

Banning tours

Examining the relationship between British and Soviet football during the interwar period, requires attention not only to travel between the nations, but also the barring of travel. The prohibition of Soviet football teams visiting Britain and other corners of the European continent reveals that the interwar international circulation of football was filtered through ideological assumptions and political calculation.

In 1930, when the British Workers' Sports Federation invited a Soviet factory football team to participate in Red Sports Day in Britain, the British government intervened and denied the visas. Beck explains that following Anglo-Soviet links being resumed in December 1929 bilateral exchanges were "strictly controlled": by the British government, who tended only to issue entry visas if they judged such exchange "to benefit British trade in the wake of the recently concluded Anglo-Soviet Agreement" of April 1930.[45]

The matter was raised in parliament, with Home Secretary J. R. Clynes justifying the ban by declaring that "In the absence of any evidence that the object of the proposed tour was for the purpose of genuine sport, I could not see my way to accede to the application".[46] Labour MP William J. Brown challenged the government by pointing to the Soviet workers' teams as having previously visited Germany, Scandinavia, and Turkey "without a revolution being

[43] Ibid., 15-16.
[44] George Sinfield, "From Today's Mailbag", *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1927, 4.
[45] Beck, *Scoring*, 140.
[46] UK Parliament, House of Commons, "Oral Answers," Hansard vol. 238, col. 350 (1 May 1930), https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1930-05-01/debates/71415f21-2ade-4c2e-83f4-8df78470d9af/OralAnswersToQuestions#:~:text=Hansard%20*%20UK%20Parliament.%20*%20Commons:%201%20May%201930.%20*%20Oral%20Answers

brought a day nearer".[47] Clynes replied that "at present my job is limited to this country", before Liberal MP Ernest Brown interjected to ask "does this team wear red jerseys, like Woolwich Arsenal?".[48]

Beck's own conclusion of the episode is unequivocal, affirming that it is "the clearest and most public example of government intervention in British football between 1900–39".[49] The incident spoke to the fact that football's interwar international circuits were selectively connected, with some borders more porous than others, and ideology helping determine which connections were permitted.

During the 1930s, several professional British football clubs, including Arsenal, Manchester City, and Rangers received invitations to tour the USSR, but were prevented.[50] British reports about these prohibitions underscored the ambiguity surrounding the rationale for such refusals, as while the Soviet Union's absence from FIFA membership was cited as justification, this reasoning proved incongruous given that some tours to other non-FIFA member nations were permitted, with international sport often operating through exceptions and informal permissions.

The ambiguity is captured in a 1936 letter printed in the *Daily Record* about the SFA's decision to prevent Third Lanark from travelling to the USSR. The writer claimed that during Rangers' earlier negotiations to visit the USSR "there was no question of the U.S.S.R. being members" of FIFA", suggesting that the objection only crystallised when Third Lanark received its invitation.[51] The incident articulates how potential tourists understood, or rather could not understand, the prevention of their travel, with some suspicions over official association rationale.

The blocking of football teams travelling to and from the Soviet Union indicates how interwar football's internationalism was constituted in part by practices of exclusion. The Soviet Union sat at the edge of the continent, both geographically and politically, with many British figures failing to consider football relations with the Soviet Union as 'genuine sport'. Where the state restricted contact with the Soviet Union, alternative routes for left-wing sporting internationalism across Europe emerged.

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Beck, *Scoring*, 141.
[50] Beck, *International Football*, 224.
[51] "Banned Tour in Russia," *Daily Record*, 8 June 1936, 24.

Alternative Internationalisms

Though British and Soviet football contact was limited, that does not mean that the wider forces of the British left were absent from the world of sport and its international dimensions. As Richard Holt notes, British "trade unionists, moderate and revolutionary socialists all made some effort to move into the world of popular leisure between the wars, though these initiatives largely took the form of a kind of radicalized rational recreation - socialist hikes, Co-op rambles, and the like".[52] Football also formed part of such efforts, with a variety of British trade union and labour teams playing during the 1920s and 1930s, with some even travelling to the continent.

A British Labour Football team made repeated summer visits to the continent during the 1920s, including trips to Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. As with the BWSF tour of the USSR, these tours were often explicitly framed as political endeavours. Ahead of the 1929 itinerary, *Reynolds's Newspaper* reported that "through the interchange of sporting visits it is hoped to assist the movement for creating a better understanding between the nations".[53] Some tours went beyond representing labour solidarity in the abstract, by using their practice to support wider civic and social projects. In 1923, Stoke Ladies played matches in Barcelona against Les Sportives of Paris in 1923 as part of a competition organised by a journalists' union to support affordable housing initiatives.[54]

While tours abroad indicated the outward movement of such political play, evidence of Britain hosting international sporting competition with a cause can be found in the arrangements of the 1934 Tolpuddle Martyrs centenary celebrations.

A meeting of the FA's Finance and General Purposes Committee on 23 June 1934 agreed to an 'application from the National Workers' Sports Association for permission to play matches at Dorchester on August 30th and 31st and September 1st, between their Association and the Workers' Associations of France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Palestine".[55] The centenary itself was a festival commemorating the six Dorset labourers arrested in 1834, and football's prominence within the programme demonstrates the extent to which the game had become one of labour's most effective vehicles for mass participation and public symbolism. During the event, Dorchester Town played the London Labour Football Club, while international

[52] Holt, *Sport and the British*, 147.
[53] "London Labour Football Team to Tour Round Europe," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 23 June 1929, 22.
[54] Jean Williams, *The History of Women's Football* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2021), 48.
[55] NFM, 'The Football Association Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes of Meeting on Saturday 23rd June 1934,' *FA Minutes 1933-35*, 312.

workers' teams from France, Belgium, and Switzerland took the field; a Palestinian team had intended to play but arrived too late to participate.[56]

Football thus functioned as a recognisable and accessible forum in which labour memory, international solidarity, and public demonstration could be enacted. Indeed, interwar international football operated through various channels, with meanings of solidarity, reform, and political fellowship present within the game, even if such exchanges have been largely forgotten.

Football and Politics in Britain

Before concluding it is worthwhile considering how football's politics were understood in Britain during the interwar years. Alongside anti-communism and anxieties over labour unrest, there persisted a prevailing sense that football played a role in mitigating the risk of radical revolt. This perspective drew upon broader British sporting traditions of sport as morally disciplining and moderating force within society. This outlook was expressed unmistakably in a 1923 *Sheffield Telegraph* column titled "Full Pressure Football":

> "Football, however, is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. These almost gladiatorial contests may not secure the ideal combination of a healthy body and a healthy mind, but they head towards this and they certainly act as a deterrent from unhealthiness in both. They are a safety-valve against Communism, fanaticism, discontent, and any worse evils there may be, and they, help to maintain that standard of manliness of which we as a nation are so justly proud"[57]

This political claim expressed the language of sporting morality, portraying football's potential to see off dangerous forces of radicalism. A similar perspective appeared a decade later in Joseph Burton Hobman's 1933 *Birmingham Daily Gazette* article, titled "With so many better national games, England has no time to play soldiers". Hobman, a Liberal politician, contrasted British sporting culture with both fascist and communist models of physical culture, pointing to the huge English crowds drawn by football and cricket as evidence that "ours is a far better way".[58]

[56] "Footballers Delayed," *Gloucestershire Echo*, 3 September 1934, 6.
[57] "Full Pressure Football", *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 1923, 6.
[58] Joseph Burton Hobman, "England has no time to play soldiers," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 16 September 1933, 6.

This sentiment was reinforced by American journalist John Gunther in his 1940 book *Inside Europe*, in which he cited the pause in hostilities between British miners and police during the 1926 General Strike to play football on a Sunday as evidence of British cultural deference and stability.[59] Gunther characterised the thought of revolution during such instances as an absurdity, emphasising how football served as a unifying force that transcended political divides. Robert Wheeler's research into the Workers' Sports Movement across Europe examines how during the 1912 miners' strike in Britain, "a government film showed workers and soldiers in a friendly game of soccer, i.e., a game between the strikers and strike-breaker".[60]

British observers noted that such conceptions of sport were not always shared abroad. George Orwell considered the distinction between British and continental football's relationship with radical politics in his *Down and Out in Paris and London*, first published in 1933, observing that "football and socialism have some mysterious connection on the Continent", contrasting such radical sporting tradition with that of British sporting culture.[61]

Polish poet and writer Alexander Wat's 1927 collection of short stories, titled *Lucifer Unemployed*, offers a further representation of the role of football in Britain. In one of the volume's early stories, "The History of the Last Revolution in England," Wat constructs a deliberately absurd imagined scenario in which England is finally overtaken by social revolution. The story's most revealing moment comes when a football suddenly enters the battlefield, as Wat writes, amid "missiles, bullets, projectiles," the ordinary ball floating above the barricades begins to command more attention than the violence itself, "drawing more attention to itself, more passion and more heroic courage than deadly, dangerous bullets".[62] Wat then has the combatants abandon the barricades and reorganise themselves into teams. In the story's most useful formulation, "an hour later two divisions, formed from the best soccer players, were marching toward the nearest playing field. They had decided to settle the battle for the street with a proper match. The losing side was to surrender unconditionally".[63]

Wat's satire is especially valuable because it shows how British football culture could be read from outside Britain. The story assumes that in England football was so deeply rooted that it might overpower even revolutionary commitment, turning class conflict into political comedy.

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[59] John Gunther, *Inside Europe* (New York: Harper, 1940), 307
[60] Robert Wheeler. "Organized Sport and Organized Labour: The Workers' Sports Movement." *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 2 (1978): 191–210.
[61] George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris* and London (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), 49.
[62] Alexander Wat, *Lucifer Unemployed* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 37.
[63] Ibid., 39.

As Wat's closing line puts it, he merely wished to explain "how the first, and, God willing, last revolution in England came to an end".[64] At the same time, the story also recognises football's remarkable collective power, as the "ordinary soccer ball" draws more attention than the violence around it. In that sense, Wat reinforces the wider interwar idea that football could act as a deradicalising force, while also showing that this belief had become part of England's image abroad.

Yet this reading was always partial, as it overlooked the extent to which football in Britain could itself be entwined with labour politics and left-wing sociability. As Selina Todd notes, trade union organisers sought to draw young workers into collective activity by turning their enthusiasm for "dancing, cycling, rambling, football, gymnastics, and other organised sports and pastimes" into trade union participation.[65] Set alongside the BWSF tour and football's place in events such as the Tolpuddle centenary, this suggests that football was not simply a barrier against radical politics. It could also provide one of the social forms through which labour politics was organised and lived in Britain and beyond.

Conclusion

The relationship between British and Soviet football during the interwar period was shaped less by regular sporting exchange than by the political conditions that enabled, constrained, and gave meaning to contact. Football in Russia long predated the Bolshevik Revolution, developing in part through British influence and wider European networks, but Soviet power transformed the game's institutional setting and ideological significance. Under Bolshevik rule, sport was recast as an instrument of mass mobilisation and social discipline, ensuring that football could never be treated as a merely private or recreational matter.

British contact with Soviet football was limited, uneven, and often politically charged. The rarity of tours between Britain and the USSR indicates that football's internationalism involved not only the creation of connections but also the production of exclusions. Nevertheless, British labour organisations pursued alternative football internationalisms elsewhere in Europe and, on rare occasions, with the Soviet Union itself. The BWSF tour of 1927 demonstrated that where direct exchange did occur, it was understood as a form of political education and solidarity.

[64] Ibid., 40.
[65] Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (London: Murray, 2015), 106.

If contact with the communist left remained so limited and contested, the greater ease or frequency of sporting contact with the authoritarian right becomes historically significant in itself. The contrast suggests that patterns of football touring can reveal British political priorities and the wider logic of interwar diplomacy as much as sporting preferences.

Chapter Seven: Touring Fascism

Introduction

"Germany fears Russia, and shouts demands for all that in her sole judgment is hers. France traditionally fears Germany, and in diplomatic barter gives no inches for fear that may be taken unbeknownst. Italy, bankrupt and desperate, looks greedily round for advantage where she may grasp it. Spain, the football field of clashing interest. So the seemingly interminable vicious circle goes on. And John Bull, poor old gentleman, pushes up his spectacles on his forehead, and somewhat irritably wonders why his Sunday afternoon meditations must be so frequently disturbed by the clamour of the noisy, ill-conditioned lot."

Capt. M. J. Hunter, *Diss Express*, 22 July 1938[1]

"The man back from Budapest assured me that, in Central Europe, people discuss the next war just as we discuss football. "They do not say 'If' he added. "They say 'When'. And everywhere the horrors of Fascism are either expected or feared. On the Continent you are disillusioned. Your hopes for the future disappear. Then when you reach Dover, you begin to breathe again. Britons, do you really value the liberties for which your ancestors died? You should travel abroad if you want to know their meaning."

Hannen Swaffer, *Daily Herald*, 11 October 1933[2]

On a tour of Germany, Italy, and Switzerland in 1914, Tottenham Hotspur played against Bavarian Club SpVgg Fürth, the match ending in a 2-2 draw. Exactly three weeks later, SpVgg Fürth would win the final of the German Football Championship, beating VfB Leipzig in Magdeburg, led by their English coach William Townley.[3] SpVgg Fürth's employment of a foreign coach and the club's eagerness to compete against English teams hint at the porousness of sporting borders at the time, with football a vehicle for Anglophilia, including in Germany. Within months, this sentiment shifted, with the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. Many of the SpVgg Fürth players enlisted to serve their nation, such as Karl Franz, who died on the Western Front within the first months of the war, evidence of how

[1] M. J. Hunter. "The Volcanoes of Europe," *Diss Express,* 22 July 1938, 5.
[2] Hannen Swaffer, "L.G. Censored by the Nazis," *Daily Herald*, 11 October 1933, 8.
[3] "Der Sport am Sonntag," *Württemberger Zeitung*, 11 May 1914, 9.

swiftly the peaceful rituals of sport gave way to the mechanised slaughter of modern industrialised war, and how the fellowship of the football field was transfigured to the enmity of the battlefield.[4]

Franz's Fürth teammate Hans Schmidt survived the war and returned to play football in the 1920s, going on to represent Germany and manage Schalke 04, leading the Gelsenkirchen club to three national championships in the 1930s. By then, German football had been harnessed by fascist propaganda, and according to Julia Wambach's study of Schalke, the Nazis used the club's successes "to promote and bolster its own ideology".[5]

Another Fürth player who faced Tottenham was Julius Hirsch, who won a penalty in that match. Hirsch was also a veteran of the First World War, earning an Iron Cross for his service. Hirsch was also the first Jew to play for Germany, competing at the 1912 Olympics, an emblem of the cosmopolitan patriotism that would soon give way to far-right nationalism.[6] Twenty years later Julius Hirsch was deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in 1943.[7] The match between Tottenham and Fürth offers in microcosm a vision of twentieth-century hope and tragedy, how promise for a peaceful Europe, united by growing shared culture, was soon shattered by the destruction of war and the division that followed.

Throughout previous chapters, the interwar rise of authoritarianism and the entangling of sport and politics have been investigated. Yet to be considered is the importance of forms of fascism upon the development of sport, both in Britain and on the Continent. Fascist groups and governments placed sport, and often football, at the centre of their political projects, though such sporting culture operated according to different interests than in Britain. John Hoberman explains how fascists often resisted commercialised professional sport, prioritising "racial collectivity of the folk" over the figure of the "asocial individualist" elite athlete.[8]

This chapter concentrates on Italy and Germany because, during the interwar period, they offer the clearest cases of football being systematically incorporated into fascist state power and projected through high-profile international fixtures. As Robert Paxton's study of fascism

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[4] Holger Layer, "The Glorious Championship team of 1914," *BR 24 Sport*, 30 May 2024, accessed 1 February 2026, https://www.br.de/themen/sport/inhalt/fussball/2-bundesliga/spvgg-greuther-fuerth/100-jahre-deutscher-meister-fuerth-100.html

[5] Julia Wambach. "Feeling political through a football club: FC Schalke 04, 1904–2020," in *Feeling Political: Emotions and Institutions since 1789* ed. Ute Frevert et al (Cham: Springer, 2022), 254.

[6] DFB, "Julius Hirsch Preis," *DFB*, accessed 1 February 2026, https://www.dfb.de/nachhaltigkeit-2/julius-hirsch-preis

[7] Ibid.

[8] John Hoberman, "Primacy of Performance: Superman not Superathlete," in *Shaping the Superman: Fascist Body as Political Icon – Aryan Fascism* ed. J. A. Mangan (London: Frank Cass, 1999). 76.

indicates, “only in Germany and Italy have fascists so far fully grasped the reins”.[9] Other interwar authoritarian states such as Spain, Portugal, and Hungary are therefore not examined here, with their political formations and sporting contexts less pertinent to the focus of British football’s fascist connections.

In Italy, Benito Mussolini’s regime used football to unify the nation, and project abroad an image of disciplined vigour. Italy’s victories at the 1934 and 1938 World Cups were celebrated as triumphs of the fascist spirit. Jonathan Wilson emphasises that these were part of wider sporting successes, as in the same month Italy claimed their second FIFA World Cup in Paris, an Italian horse won the Grand Prix de Paris, and an Italian rider claimed victory in the Tour de France, “for Fascists determined to view sport as an expression of Italian superiority, there seemed to be plenty of evidence”.[10]

England’s three matches against Italy during the 1930s took on this ideological significance. In both nations, they were understood as contests of more than twenty-two men: symbolic encounters between differing visions of civilisation, character, and modernity. In Nazi Germany, sport likewise was deployed to demonstrate order and strength, and though Germany played a less high-profile role in international football in the 1930s, it was far more embedded within British football networks, hosting dozens of British football clubs, whereas only two club sides travelled to Italy in the 1920s and 1930s.[11] The depth of these relationships offers insight into British attitudes towards Nazi Germany prior to WWII, complicating later post-war and contemporary narratives which cast this relationship as one of simple moral or political opposition.

British interpretations of these encounters were shaped by a deeply rooted self-conception of sport as a national code rather than a state instrument. Holt captures this through a German visitor’s observation in the 1920s that, while all peoples play, none of the great modern nations had elevated play in quite the same way into “a rule of life and a national code,” and that this “play-spirit” gave English character one of its most politically and culturally significant features.[12] Indeed, British football culture was grounded in the idea that sport existed outside the political sphere. Yet, as the interwar years unfolded, these ideals came under further strain. The growing professionalisation of football, economic depression, and the expansion of mass spectatorship complicated the old narrative of amateur purity.

[9] Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 111.
[10] Jonathan Wilson, *The Power and the Glory: A New History of the World Cup* (London: Abacus, 2025), 73.
[11] García, “British and Irish Clubs”.
[12] Holt, *Sport and the British*, 1.

These tensions were neatly captured by the Notts County manager Percy Smith in 1935, while addressing the Nottingham Referees Association, who observed that "abroad the people looked upon the game politically as well as nationally. In countries like Italy, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Spain football was more like bull fighting, because over there did not exist that inherent spirit of sport which marked these Isles. Here, sport was not mixed with politics and religion. The public desired sport for itself".[13] Smith suggested that it would thus be beneficial for British managers and directors to express to their players the importance of "playing the game in the proper spirit".

Such views reveal the pride and anxiety of British football in the interwar period, with the sport felt to be under moral and philosophical threat from without and within. Encounters with fascist football, both as international fixtures and through club tours, brought these tensions to the surface. The spectacle of well-organised stadiums, politicised ceremonies, and state-sponsored teams compelled British observers to reflect on football's social function and its relation to nationalism; as Joan Tumblety has described, fascist Europe developed a "model of mass athletic-political spectacle" that fused sport and politics in ways that were difficult to reconcile with British claims of football's civic neutrality.[14] These encounters therefore reveal the cultural distance between British and continental understandings of sport, exposing how notions of class, order, and identity shaped perceptions of both foreign football and fascism itself.

This chapter incorporates an examination of how the adoption and support of football by European fascists influenced British perspectives on the purpose and potential of the game. The opening section outlines how fascist regimes in Italy and Germany used football to promote national cohesion and international prestige, particularly in Italy and Germany. Throughout, the British response will be considered, examining how British observers, journalists, players, and administrators interpreted these developments through the lens of their own sporting ideals.

While encounters such as the England versus Italy fixtures, particularly the 'Battle of Highbury' have long drawn scholarly attention, the extensive tours undertaken by British clubs across fascist Europe remain less explored.[15] [16] Though mostly presented at the time as friendly

[13] "Two Referees Question," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28 November 1935, 10.
[14] Joan Tumblety, "Rethinking the Fascist Aesthetic: Mass Gymnastics, Political Spectacle and the Stadium in 1930s France," *European History Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2013), 718.
[15] Mike Huggins, "Projecting the Visual: British Newsreels, Soccer and Popular Culture 1918–39," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no. 1 (2007), 95.
[16] Macon Benoit. "The Politicization of Football: The European Game and the Approach to the Second World War," *Soccer & Society* 9, no. 4 (2008), 538.

exhibitions, devoid of overt political purpose, they offer insight into how Britons understood the continent and themselves. Also examined are the contested memories of episodes such as narratives around protesting Nazi salutes, and the moral ambiguities that surround such stories. Taken together, these studies demonstrate how British football, far from existing apart from politics, mirrored the wider tensions of interwar Britain: between moral idealism and modern spectacle, between national pride and a wary fascination with authoritarian order.

There were some in Britain who admired the apparent orderliness and healthiness of fascist society, particularly in Germany, with some visiting Britons interpreting the marks of conformity of authoritarian order as signs of progress to emulate, though many British tourists did openly condemn what they had seen upon their return home.[17]

By contrast, matches in Italy were often depicted in the British press as chaotic, theatrical, or undisciplined, reflecting long-standing racialised and class-inflected stereotypes of Southern Europe, dismissing the sporting culture of the region as dangerous, emotional, undisciplined, and corrupt. Yet such reactions also obscured the extent to which Italian football under fascism was being presented as disciplined national culture rather than mere spectacle. As Andrew McFarland notes, a "common response" in Southern Europe was "to nationalize [sport] as swiftly and thoroughly as possible", and in Italy this process included the deliberate rebranding of football as calcio and the insistence upon Italian vocabulary within the game.[18] In this sense, British responses to fascist football were habitually shaped by cultural prejudice as well as by political principle. Fascist control of sport exposed the contradictions within British sporting ideology: the claim to moral superiority coexisted with fascination for authoritarian order and distaste for 'Latin passion'. Football thus served as a mirror through which Britons viewed both themselves and their European neighbours, projecting anxieties about professionalism, masculinity, and modernity.

Such encounters reinforced its self-image as apolitical, a stance that masked deeper cultural and class predispositions. In this way, British football was both a site for resistance to and tacit admiration for fascism, embodying the tensions and ambiguities of interwar British identity itself.

Italy

[17] Angela Schwarz, "Image and Reality: British Visitors to National Socialist Germany," *European History Quarterly*, 23, no. 3 (1993), 391.
[18] Andrew McFarland, "Sport in Southern Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 350.

The official poster for the 1934 FIFA World Cup, hosted by Fascist Italy, was the creation of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the Futurist poet and artist who had authored the Futurist Manifesto in 1909, and co-authored the Fascist Manifesto a decade later.[19] The poster accordingly placed a monumental Italian footballer at its centre, his shirt emblazoned with the fasces, while another fascio occupied the lower left corner. The flags of the competing nations displayed around the player, symbols of internationalism, turned into a subordinate decoration of Italian power. By the following year, as the Abyssinian crisis opened a rift between Rome and London, Marinetti intensified his political writings with *Italiani liberatevi dalle abitudini inglesi*, in which he denounced Britain as a civilisation in decay; puritanical, alcoholic, sexually deviant, and spiritually exhausted.[20] Marinetti's words gave backing to Fascist Italy's need to mobilise Italians for a confrontation with the old imperial power that now opposed Mussolini's expansionism.

These gestures, whether in poster art or political polemic, were symptoms of a deeper historical trajectory. The 1930s were a decade in which Anglo-Italian relations deteriorated, as Fascist Italy strove to assert itself as a power, and Britain clung to crumbling hopes of international collective security.[21] In this climate, football became not an escape from politics but one of its most visible stages, where the mounting antagonisms between the two states were rehearsed on pitches before mass audiences.

In the decades before the First World War, a considerable contingent of British football clubs, professional and amateur outfits alike, made their way to Italy. Notts County, Reading, Tottenham Hotspur, West Auckland, and the Corinthians all played on Italian soil in these early years, staging matches that Italians treated as lessons from the original custodians of the game.[22]

In 1922, Burnley and Liverpool toured northern and central Italy, playing not only local sides but each other in a roving exhibition that took place only months before Mussolini became Prime Minister.[23] However, once Fascist power became consolidated, the scale of Anglo-Italian footballing contact narrowed dramatically. Between 1922 and 1939, only two British clubs, either amateur or professional, ventured to Italy: Newcastle United in 1929 and

[19] Jean Williams, "Over 100,000 Posters: the Unprecedented Commercialism of the 1966 World Cup in England," in *Picturing the Beautiful Game: A History of Soccer in Visual Culture and Art* ed. Daniel Haxall (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), 215.
[20] Ernest Ialongo, "Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: The Futurist as Fascist, 1929–37," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 18, no. 4 (2013), 408.
[21] B.J.C. McKercher, "Our Most Dangerous Enemy: Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s," *The International History Review*, 13, no. 4 (1991), 777.
[22] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[23] Ibid.

Manchester City in 1934. Each played a single match, Newcastle in Milan, and Manchester City in Florence. The decline of these encounters reflected the journey of football from a vehicle of unstructured cultural export into a field increasingly shaped by the tensions, rivalries, and ideological boundaries of Europe, moving toward greater conflict and inevitable war.

Newcastle United's visit to Milan in May 1929 demonstrated some of the new harsh realities of interwar Italy. Newcastle beat Inter Milan, then known as Ambrosiana, as the club's name changed to avoid possible association to the Communist Third International.[24] After the match, which ended 1-0, the scene descended into violent hostility. The *Daily News* reported that "a crowd waited for the Newcastle players, who were subjected to abuse and threats, and stones were thrown at their motor-coach, several players being hit… Police and Fascisti had to be called upon to escort the players to their hotel".[25] Commentary in the *Shields Daily Gazette* suggested that Newcastle's poor run of results in Hungary afterwards was a result of the violence suffered in Milan as "'safety first' was their motto in the subsequent games" and indicated that Newcastle United "may cut out the Continent altogether in future".[26] Indeed, Newcastle only returned to the Continent once more before the Second World War, a 1932 visit to France and Germany.

The experience of the Newcastle team highlights how international football in Fascist Italy operated within a fraught political environment, where sporting success brought the risk of ferocious retaliation. As John Foot notes, under Mussolini, "Fascism was good for Italian football, and football was good for fascism", a relationship that heightened matches into symbols of both national significance and state power.[27]

Manchester City visited Florence in May 1934, weeks after lifting their second FA Cup, and weeks before the second FIFA World Cup began in Italy, though the British press coverage did not mention the upcoming tournament. Manchester City played AC Fiorentina, who had been founded in 1926 by a National Fascist Party member Luigi Ridolfi, who acted as deputy commander on the March on Rome.[28] Coverage of the team's time in Italy was limited, though a report on the game from a British expatriate in Tuscany offered greater detail than was usual for interwar tour games, indicating that "the English were greatly handicapped" due to climatic conditions.[29] The report from Florence also criticised two of the Manchester City players for standing with their hands behind their backs as *God Save the King* was played before kick-

[24] Fabien Archambault, "Football and Fascism in Italy," *Soccer & Society* 21, no. 6 (2020), 645.
[25] "Football Scene," *Daily News*, 27 May 1929, 14.
[26] "No More Continental Tours?," *Shields Daily Gazette*, 16 October 1929, 2.
[27] John Foot, *Calcio: A History of Italian Football* (London: Harper Collins, 2006), 33.
[28] Archambault, "Football and Fascism," 643.
[29] "Cup Holders' Handicap in Italy," *Sunday Express*, 20 May 1934, 21.

off, with several more of their team then practising shots at goal during the Italian anthem, meaning the "effect on the public cannot have been very favourable".[30]

These moments of cultural misalignment reveal much about the incoming changes of interwar football. The supposed 'handicaps' were an indication that football was not controlled according to British terms and conditions. The game had moved beyond British rule, with other nations claiming victory through it. Italy would win the World Cup in the summer of 1934, a tournament out of Britain's orbit, underscoring how the geography of football had shifted.

Scotland became the first of the home nations to meet Fascist Italy on Italian soil when they travelled to Rome in May 1931. The match, played at the newly built Stadio del Partito Nazionale Fascista, was an encounter staged firmly within the architecture of Mussolini's regime. British press coverage was limited in its portrayal of the political dimensions of the occasion, yet emphasised the presence of Mussolini himself, seated alongside the British ambassador in a stadium named after his ruling party.[31]

The Scots were beaten 3-1, with the defeat received at home with a mixture of wounded pride and humour. *The Scotsman* lamented "another humiliation in the eyes of the Continent," while the *Daily Mirror* reduced the loss to a culinary joke: "Joy in Soho to-day means sorrow in Scotland – a slump in oatcakes and a rise in macaroni".[32] More revealing was a *Scotsman* article written by Albert Mackinnon, a Scottish priest working in the Mediterranean, whose reflections, having attended the match, captured both the spectacle and its ideological weight. Mussolini, he wrote, appeared every inch "Italy's great statesman," his stance "Napoleonic".[33] According to Mackinnon, the Duce saw the match as "an exhibition of national skill and spirit", that "victory on this new battle-ground would help to give Italy her place in the realm of sport, and add to the growing reputation which fascism brought her".[34] Mackinnon closed with the tale of Robert the Bruce and the spider; Scotland, he claimed, must "try again".[35] Every nation reaches for its own symbols and stories, whether medieval legend or Fascist spectacle. Football merely supplied the occasion for these different nationalisms to display themselves.

It is worth noting that it was far from a full-strength Scottish side who fell in Rome. Players from Rangers and Celtic, who both topped the Scottish league that season, were absent;

[30] Ibid.
[31] "Scotland Beaten", *The Scotsman*, 21 May 1931, 15.
[32] "Points From The Day's Sport," *Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1931, 18.
[33] Albert Mackinnon, "Football in Rome," *The Scotsman*, 25 May 1931, 8.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

Rangers players requesting rest, while Celtic were touring North America.[36] The imbalance was not only symbolic but practical: Scotland arrived with a side reflecting the demands of the domestic professional club game, while Italy fielded a team carefully prepared to serve the regime's nationalistic interest. Scotland's other fixtures that May, against Austria and Switzerland, passed without reference to politics, with match reports on these games focussed solely on events on the pitch rather than any attendance of government officials.[37]

Two years after Scotland's visit, England travelled to Rome for their first ever meeting with Italy. Ahead of the 1933 encounter, British newspapers projected narratives of England as the superior and more powerful football nation. The *Daily Mirror* announced that "England Soccer invades Rome", expressing confidence that the youthful balance of the English squad would overpower the ageing Italian team.[38] Yet there was caution among some commentators. In his match preview Charlie Buchan described the "desperate seriousness" of the Italian approach, as it was for them "a battle for the football supremacy of Europe".[39]

Upon their arrival in Rome, the Englishmen were received by Mussolini at the Palazzo Venezia, and then by the Pope in the Vatican.[40] Reportedly, upon meeting Mussolini some players performed the fascist salute, though some bowed instead.[41] Allegedly, the England team were instructed to reply to the Fascist salute with a naval salute before kick-off, though photographs published in England pointedly showed the team as standing stiff with both arms lowered.[42] [43] Mussolini attended the match, accompanied by the British Ambassador, with the former's entrance greeted by cries of "Duce, Duce" by the crowds of Italians.[44]

The match finished as a 1-1 draw, and according to British accounts, England were rather lucky to avoid defeat.[45] Buchan explained that only their "magnificent defence" held the Italians at bay, with the Englishmen also struggling to control the smaller Italian football.[46] Commentary of the match emphasised cordiality and mutual respect. English officials referred

[36] "Great Week for Scottish Footballers," *Sunday Post*, 10 May 1931, 20.
[37] "Football 'Nationals," *The Scotsman*, 18 May 1931, 14; "Scottish Victory", *The Scotsman*, 25 May 1931, 6.
[38] "England Soccer Invades Rome," *Daily Mirror*, 9 May 1933, 24.
[39] "England Team in Rome," *Daily News*, 11 May 1933, 1.
[40] "Graceful Compliment to the English Footballers," *Lancashire Evening Post*, 15 May 1933, 3.
[41] Ibid.
[42] "Rome Excited at English Footballers' Visit," *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 13 May 1933, 5.
[43] "The Camera as Recorder: News by Photography," *The Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1933, 18.
[44] "Football in a Ring of Steel," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 14 May 1933, 1.
[45] Charles Buchan, "England Saved by Defence in Match with Italy," *Daily News*, 15 May 1933, 5.
[46] Ibid.

to the match as a fine contest of skill and athleticism, while Herbert Chapman asserted that the Italians now considered Cliff Bastin to be the best player in the world.[47]

The return fixture played in London in November 1934, labelled the 'Battle of Highbury' for its injuries and ferocity, proved, as Beck notes, "one of the more controversial internationals played on British soil," yet generated "remarkably little political fallout" despite coming at a moment when Anglo-Italian relations were under sharper scrutiny over "Germany, the Mediterranean and East Africa" as well as "the relative standing of the two countries in the world of football".[48]

Ahead of the fixture, the *Daily Mirror* featured the headline "Drake to lead this Arsenal 'Armada'", referring to the seven Arsenal players selected for the England squad.[49] As well as recalling narratives of war with Southern Europe, the paper made reference to "Patriotic Frenzy" and suggested that "the combined efforts of half a dozen of the greatest politicians and business men in England cannot do more for the prestige of this country than our football team can do to-day".[50] The rhetoric of the match as a trial of national standing elevated the diplomatic significance of the occasion while denigrating the opponents and absolute adversaries.

The stars of the Italian national team were profiled in detail for the *Daily Herald* by Willy Meisl, Austrian football journalist and the brother of then Austria football coach Hugo Meisl.[51] The match previews mention the ages and attributes of each Italian, as well as the club they play for, even suggesting the international fixture may as well be called 'Arsenal v Juventus' due to the number of players from each club within the national teams.[52] Such coverage reflects a shift in approach and insight of the British press, with continental football now better understood, and there existing an appetite among readers for information about international rivals. Nevertheless, such growing interest was limited with Italian striker Enrique Guaita referred to as "Ensica Guaita", illustrating that even basic intelligence on opposing teams was incomplete.[53] The *Daily News* dubbed Italy's coach, Vittorio Pozzo, as "football's dictator", due to the quasi-military discipline of his methods and the privacy he demanded for his team.[54]

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[47] "England Soccer Team Home," *Halifax Evening Courier*, 27 May 1933, 13.
[48] Beck, *Scoring*, 154.
[49] "Drake to lead this Arsenal 'Armada'," *Daily Mirror*, 14 November 1934. 26.
[50] Ibid.
[51] "England's Formidable Soccer Foes From Italy," *Daily Herald*, 7 November 1934, 22.
[52] "Arsenal v Juventus," *Daily Mirror*, 14 November 1934. 26.
[53] Ibid.
[54] "Italy's Football Dictator," *Daily News*, 2 November 1934, 11.

When the match came, the atmosphere was intense, with visiting Italians shouting "Forza Italia" to drown out the shouts and songs of their hosts.[55] The *Daily Mirror* observed that the match was a test of "national prestige", the FIFA World Cup champion versus the self-appointed founder and custodian of football.[56]

Even according to the less regulated standards of the day, the match was ferocious in its play. The Italian press celebrated their team for "fighting like lions", while English journalists in attendance described it as one of the roughest matches ever played on British soil.[57] Charlie Buchan went so far as to claim that he "learned at least a dozen more" fouls that he had not known before. Some English football officials even suggested that matches against Continental nations should be suspended. Another post-match account considered that "in Italy there is a tendency to combine Fascism and football, and one report says the morale of the Italian team is worth more than any work of propaganda, however long and carefully prepared".[58] Such a portrayal was not necessarily based upon a truthful and comprehensive understanding of Italian politics and society, but rather reflected how Italian Fascism operated in the international imagination.

British parliamentary debates the week after the match did not mention football, but stressed Italy's significant role as a force for the stabilisation of the continent, exemplified through their being a signatory of the Four-Power Pact. Conservative MP Sir Park Goff declared to the Commons that "Italy is playing an increasingly important part in mid-European politics to-day as a Fascist State… keeping in contact with her through that Pact, we can undoubtedly use our influence for good".[59] Foreign Secretary John Simon referred to Goff's comments as "interesting, and, in parts, an amusing speech", while affirming Britain's own role in Europe, stressing that it was "owing to the influence which this country has been able to exercise that many dangers have been avoided".[60] Despite obvious hostility on the football pitch and throughout critical commentary in the press, Italy in 1934 was viewed in Westminster as a power Britain should work with, not against. Though football exposed some political and cultural tensions, the actual work of formal diplomacy reflected a more measured, pragmatic calculation to ensure European stability.

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[55] "From Italy to Highbury," *Daily News*, Wednesday 14 November 1934, 1.
[56] "England v Italy," *Daily Mirror*, 14 November 1934, 11.
[57] "Italy is Proud of her Team," *Daily Express*, 16 November 1934, 13.
[58] "Highbury Aftermath," *Western Daily Press*, 16 November 1934, 12.
[59] UK Parliament, House of Commons, "Debate on the Address," *Hansard* vol. 295, col. 287 (22 November 1934), https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1934-11-22/debates/163447b8-b8bf-4c67-80ad-c7b3b8d75d74/DebateOnTheAddress?
[60] Ibid.

When England's national football team returned to Italy in 1939, six years to the day after their match in Rome, the nature of Anglo-Italian relations had further evolved. Ahead of the game, Ivan Sharpe, writing in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, assured readers that "everything has been done to make the match as smooth and pleasant as possible", reflecting the careful choreography of the encounter, including England's performance of the Fascist salute.[61] Though Benito Mussolini did not attend the match, his son Vittorio was present, alongside Sir Percy Loraine, Britain's new Ambassador in Rome. The *Leicester Daily Mercury* noted that Italian papers had referred to England as "splendid isolationists", revealing a sense of Italian irritation at British aloofness from international football.[62] The match ended in a 2-2 draw, a respectable result for both teams, with *The People* reporting it to have been "an excellent game" as "both sides played good football".[63]

The performance of the salute was noted in the British press, the *Sunday Express* detailing its action: "as our players lined up side by side with the Italians they gave a short Fascist salute for the Italian anthem. And then, at the end, they stood in the centre of the field, and again gave the Fascist salute to both sides of the field".[64] That article then concluded that the salute, and the game as a whole had "done no harm to Anglo-Italian relationships, and, in fact they have probably done a great deal to increase friendship".[65] The optimism of appeasement emerges through such commentary, a rhetoric which would not last long before Britain waged war against Italy. However, writing in *The Bystander*, AG Macdonell offered a terser analysis of the occasion: "The features of the match were that an Italian punched a neat goal with his fist that the referee was a German and that the English team gave the Fascist salute before the match started".[66] Macdonell commented that Englishmen in Madrid had recently celebrated with Italian troops upon the ending of the Spanish Civil War, with Macdonell observing that such troops' presence there was actually a breach of the 1938 Anglo-Italian agreement.[67]

A week after the Italy-England match, Alfred Baker, a Labour councillor, penned an article in the *Holloway Press* warning of the state of interwar international politics. Baker made note of the ordered salute and compliance of the Italian crowd, suggesting such behaviour reflected a deep and dangerous moral degradation.[68] Baker added that sport could offer a means of

[61] Ivan Sharpe, "Italy v England," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 13 May 1939, 12.
[62] "Italy had to Cheer the English Footballers," *Sunday Express*, 14 May 1939, 15.
[63] "England and Italy Draw," *The People*, 14 May 1939, 1.
[64] "Italy had to Cheer the English Footballers," *Sunday Express*, 14 May 1939, 15.
[65] Ibid.
[66] A. G. Macdonell. "The Passing Hour," *The Bystander*, 24 May 1939, 287.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Baker, Alfred. "Facts Column," *Holloway Press*, 20 May 1939, 4.

challenging the rhetoric of rearmament and rivalry, arguing "that team spirit is so essentially needed in the political field to-day as in sport".[69] Baker thus expressed a belief that although football was being mobilised for nationalist spectacle, it could still act as a valuable example of international co-operation.

British football teams visiting Fascist Italy found themselves in a state where their defeat could carry diplomatic weight, and the ritual of sport was difficult to distinguish from popular politics. From Newcastle United's hostile treatment in Milan to England's highly charged matches against Italy, football tours were shaped by the tensions and rhetoric of the era, the stadium an arena for anxiety, admiration, and appeasement. However, such spectacles did not enforce a singular unchallenged meaning, as dissenting British voices, from the press and politicians, reiterated that sport could act to challenge advancements by authoritarian regimes.

Germany

England first met Germany in a senior official international fixture in May 1930 in Berlin. The game was a 3-3 draw, though British coverage of the encounter seemed as interested in the pre-match scene as much as the game itself. Reports described fifty thousand Germans standing for the playing of both *God Save the King* and *Deutschland über Alles*.[70] The match was thus framed as a symbolic reconciliation, evidence that sport could bring together two former enemies to meet visibly and peacefully.

The tone of coverage of the match was tinged with wistful optimism. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* described the game as representative of "sinking of old differences", claiming that "it is a characteristic of the British nation to shake hands with a former enemy immediately an issue in dispute has been fought out".[71] This narrative presented sport as not only a form of civic practice, but as representative of aspirational "democratic spirit", helping to leaven burgeoning Anglo-German relations.[72] Writing about the match in *The Sphere*, Lady Drummond Hay addressed the history and growth of football, indicating that the sport's global reach and popularity lay both in modern mass society, and in ancient tradition.[73] The match may then be considered a milestone of contemporary popular culture on both sides of the channel, rather than an explicitly political or diplomatic event. As the domestic politics of

[69] Ibid.
[70] "England v Germany," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 12 May 1930, 4.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Lady Drummond Hay. "World Affairs," *The Sphere*, 24 May 1930, 20.

Germany transformed during the 1930s, future encounters between national sides and clubs became imbued with greater public and political narratives and governmental interference.

All of Germany's goals that day came from Richard Hofmann, who became the first non-Scottish player to score a hat-trick against England.[74] The draw indicated that Germany ought not be considered a developing pupil of the game, but as a competitive rival, and one which would develop its own distinct sporting cultures and characteristics.

The year of 1930 saw another encounter between England and Germany on the football pitch, but with a game played on bikes rather than with boots. That year, a German Police team travelled around England playing games of 'motorcycle football', a distinctly modern sport blending tradition, technology, and public spectacle.[75] The final match of the tour saw the German side face an English team at Wembley. Though in retrospect, the Pathe recordings of the event appear a quirky historical sidenote, the encounter exemplifies how the football field was emerging as a platform for new forms of international encounter in the interwar period.

The 1930 encounters in both Berlin and London hinted at a dawning decade of peaceful reconciliation between Britain and Germany. British football's relationship with Germany in the 1930s would be tested repeatedly but developed in a political space distinct from its relations with Fascist Italy. Where Italian football was considered aggressive, and at times theatrically nationalistic, Germany's re-emergence on the sporting stage was greeted with hope, curiosity, and some admiration.

Even as the Nazi regime rose and consolidated its power, punishing its political and racial enemies, some British coverage of German sport was complimentary. In both the British parliament and press, Germany was often discussed less as an aggressive dictatorship, more as an efficient society that could mobilise discipline and fitness more effectively than Britain. In a 1934 Foreign Affairs debate, Lord Rennell even argued that "physical exercises are the form most acceptable to the German youth, who from their boyhood upwards have always

[74] Vesa Vares. "22 Players Run After the Ball for 90 Minutes, and in the End England Wins. German Views of the 1935 and 1938 Germany–England Football Matches," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 41, no. 6 (2024), 492.
[75] British Pathe, "England v Germany motorcycle football match at Wembley (1930)," *British Pathe*, accessed 10 November 2025, https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/115485/

spent their time at playing at soldiers, which is as natural to them as cricket and football are to English boys".[76]

British admiration and indulgence for German culture can be understood as part of a wider cultural economy of race and region. German football was largely treated without the derisory suspicion and condemnation of Italian and Spanish sides. Northern European connotations of seriousness and discipline within the British imagination shaped such double-standards, with German football's adherence to amateurism further reassuring British observers of their shared ideals of fair-play. Petra Rau observes that though both Britain and Germany had sought to project physiological and cultural superiority since the Victorian era, "by the 1930s the Germans simply did a better job at demonstrating that they were in excellent shape, a (national) body ascendant".[77] Therefore, British respect for Fascist German sport can be understood as reflecting an insecurity over the degradation and limits of British physical culture.

British narratives presented after the Second World War offer a different perspective, one of brave resistance, especially with regard to refusing the Nazi salutes while on tour in Germany. Such narrative shifts, which illustrate substantial changes in international relations and British culture, are observable in the experiences of those involved in football tours. These narratives and competing accounts of British football's approach to playing in Germany will be considered in this section, evaluating how prejudice, political calculation, and sporting traditions each shaped views and actions amid a decade of transformation and tragedy.

White Hart Lane 1935

When England next faced Germany, at White Hart Lane in December 1935, the context of German football had evolved beyond recognition. The match took place just three months after the Nuremberg Laws had codified racial discrimination across German society, and in the aftermath of a UK General Election that had provoked debate about Britain's relationship with the continent.[78] Indeed, at the beginning of 1935, millions of Britons had voted in the Peace Ballot to voice concern over militarism and collective security against growing Fascist

[76] UK Parliament, House of Lords, "Foreign Affairs," *Hansard* vol. 92, col. 46 (7 May 1934), https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1934-05-07/debates/cb2c537a-8dd9-428e-ae1e-0a93da496fe9/ForeignAffairs?
[77] Rau, Petra. "The Fascist Body Beautiful and the Imperial Crisis in 1930s British writing." *Journal of European Studies* 39, no. 1 (2009), p.9.
[78] J. C. Robertson, The British General Election of 1935, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, no. 1 (1974), 153.

aggression.[79] Nevertheless, in the build-up to the match at White Hart Lane, the dominant language set forth by the footballing establishment was that football ought to remain separate from such issues.

Both Peter Beck and Brian Stoddart have carefully detailed the circumstances surrounding the match, from the role of the Home Office and Metropolitan Police orchestrating the transport of ten thousand visiting German fans, to the organised campaigns of trade unionists in opposition to the event.[80] [81] The evidence of such administration is striking in its rarity. The match was one of the few moments in which the British government both intervened in football and documented in detail the extent of its bureaucratic thoroughness. Such evidence stands out against the otherwise laissez-faire approach applied to sport, with such surviving archival material from government departments highlighting their evident careful concern over this occasion in comparison to other sporting events.

Examining how opposition to the match was articulated reveals much about how football and Germany were understood at the time. Both the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council and the National Union of Railwaymen cited the example of a Russian team being denied admission to the UK in 1930 as evidence of the government's double standards, indicating that the German team should also be prevented from playing in Britain.[82] Other critics of the match pointed to a recent report of a Jewish footballer, Edmund Baumgartner, being killed in Germany.[83] These claims were officially denied by German authorities, with details remaining contested around the matter.[84] Nevertheless, the story was widely published in the British press, particularly in Jewish publications, in which it was offered as a moral warning of what was to come for Jews under Nazi rule.

Protests against the match were monitored carefully by the authorities. One '40 year old of Jewish extraction' was even cautioned for threatening to disrupt the match from the air, despite the fact that the man in question had no plane or pilot's licence.[85] German officials also sought to avoid explicit political disruption. Ahead of the match, Dr Xandry, managing secretary of the German Football Association, affirmed that "Germans who come over will not be wearing Nazi

[79] Martin Ceadel, "The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934-5," *The English Historical Review* 95, no. 377 (1980), 838.
[80] Beck. *International Football.*
[81] Brian Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Politics and International Relations: England versus Germany, 1935,' *Soccer & Society* 7, no. 1 (2006), 29.
[82] TNA (HO 45/16425)
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Anthony Clavane, *Does Your Rabbi Know You're Here?: The Story of English Football's Forgotten Tribe* (London: Quercus, 2012), 66.

badges in their button-holes. There will be no political songs. Those are orders, not requests".[86]

When the match came, protest persisted. A Tottenham supporter, Ernest Wooley, climbed onto the White Hart Lane roof to remove the waving Swastika flag, for which he was charged with having caused three shillings and sixpence worth of damage.[87] Herbert Dunnico MP, discussed earlier regarding his involvement with Ilford FC in Chapter Four, labelled Wooley's action as reflecting a "small but noisy section" of society who had betrayed the "high traditions of British sportsmanship".[88] Dunnico's rhetoric reflected a broader view of English football as a realm for dignified moral conduct and duty rather than rebellious protest. Indeed, FA Secretary Stanley Rous reiterated Dunnico's statement, stating that it fell in line with 'the sentiments of the FA exactly".[89] Evidently, the political and footballing authorities sought sport to be distinct from explicit political contestation.

On the field, England claimed a comfortable 3-0 win. The *Daily Express* described the match as a "picnic in a dell", with major disorder averted, and the German captain Szepan labelled the defeat as "honourable".[90] Sporting success complemented the successful restraint of dissent and disorder, as if control over the event represented a deeper moral victory. Beck indicates that the game positively impacted British-German relations, as a striking "triumph of the Keep Politics Out of Sport brigade".[91] However, as argued by Brian Stoddart, the match was also indicative of German exploitation of English ambivalence to the politics of sport, and helped strengthen Germany's international support, especially in the build-up to the 1936 Berlin Olympics.[92] Re-examining the encounter almost a century on, with an acute awareness of how British relations with Germany would develop in the ten years following the match, the actions and language of the British government and Football Association are alarming. Their clear opposition to voices of protest and dissent, and framing of sportsmanship and obedience as effectively synonymous, reveal how football was mobilised as an instrument of political normalisation. Privileging order and civility over ethical debate and scrutiny, English football authorities contributed to a wider culture of accommodation of Nazi Germany, with the

[86] TNA (HO 45/16425)
[87] Clavane, *Does Your Rabbi*, 66.
[88] Ibid.
[89] David Downing, *The Best of Enemies: England v. Germany, a Century of Football Rivalry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 30.
[90] "England 3 – 0 Germany," *Daily Express*, 5 December 1935, 1.
[91] Beck. *International Football*.
[92] Stoddart. "Sport, Cultural Politics", 40.

symbolic power of football obscuring rather than confronting the realities of the regime they faced.

Scotland 1936

The persistence of British accommodation was evident the following year, when Scotland hosted Germany for a friendly at Ibrox in October 1936. By then, the Berlin Olympics had further illustrated Nazi Germany's interest in using sport as a political spectacle, and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland indicated the political motives of the regime. Nevertheless, football proceeded as if separate from these developments, sustained by the belief in the neutral independence of sport, even as this belief came under increased pressure from its critics. Beck notes that protests against the match came from various Scottish organisations. Unperturbed, the SFA's Secretary George Graham vehemently responded that "we don't worry our heads about the people who object to this match. Sport and politics are things apart".[93] The phrase echoed the rhetoric of the FA a year earlier, a rhetoric apparently embedded in British football culture, as discussed in the previous chapter.

However, this insistence on the separation of sport and politics was contested. Though the Lord Provost of Glasgow publicly criticised those unwilling to welcome the German team, political dissent did make itself known.[94] Independent Labour Party councillor Tom Taylor challenged the Provost's stance, citing "the fact that the British T.U.C. had protested to the Home Secretary about an almost similar matter, and that the Jews were being debarred from sport in Germany".[95] Thus, Taylor's intervention sought to reframe the match not as a neutral sporting occasion, but as a moment of moral reflection and a political choice.

The German team travelled to Glasgow by air, whereas the German supporters came via boat at the port of Leith, an arrival that attracted considerable local attention. Crowds gathered to watch some four hundred Germans disembark, with reports noting that many Germans offered their packed lunches to the unemployed Scots who had assembled at the docks.[96] Such gestures were described by some sections of the press as "fraternising", hinting at the unease over such generosity.[97] A nearby warehouse was graffitied with the phrase "Down with Hitler" in German, an indication of the antagonisms beneath the surface civility.[98]

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[93] Beck. *International Football.*
[94] "German Footballers," *The Scotsman*, 2 October 1936, 7.
[95] "Visit of Nazi Footballers," *Dundee Courier*, 2 October 1936, 7.
[96] "German Visitors," *Evening Despatch*, 14 October 1936, 15.
[97] "Football "Fans" Arrive," *Edinburgh Evening News*, 14 October 1936, 11.
[98] "German Football Fans," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 14 October 1936, 1.

Sixty thousand supporters witnessed Scotland's two-nil victory at Ibrox, though the match itself was also a site of tension and dissent. Two young Scottish men were arrested on the charge of breaching the peace for waving a banner reading "Who murdered the Jewish footballer? Hitler" and for shouting "Down with Hitler! Down with the Nazis!".[99] Although they were later acquitted, their actions again underscore how football, despite the efforts of political leaders, was becoming a space for contestation, in which opposition to continental fascism was prominently voiced and policed.

Professional Club Tours

Though only two professional British clubs toured Fascist Italy, a far greater number travelled to Germany between 1933 and 1939. Aston Villa, Brentford, Derby County, Everton, Manchester City, Glasgow Rangers, and West Ham United all undertook tours to the Third Reich.[100] To an extent, these tours represented continuity, with British clubs having travelled to Germany for decades since the late nineteenth century, with such tours indicating burgeoning sporting internationalism, commercial opportunity, and cultural curiosity. However, the tours undertaken from 1933 were conducted in a Germany that had subordinated sport to the objectives of the fascist state.

Despite the Nazis' transformation of football, this was rarely discussed in club and press reports of these tours, which tended to ignore such political realities. Tour accounts emphasised the hospitality of their hosts, the size of crowds, and the performance of their matches, over reference to the repression, racism, and rapid Nazification of German society. The Nazi regime reshaped German football, with clubs and organisations ordered under Gleichschaltung to adopt racial and ideological guidelines.[101] Ulrich Hesse-Lichtenberger's study of German football points out that the Nazis did not execute their initial plan "to do away with the old clubs altogether, and to replace them with new, artificial and centrally ruled 'local sporting groups'", but this was "a goal the Nazis never lost sight of".[102] The change in German sport is shown in the experience of Dr Hermann Horwitz, a Jewish physician who worked as team doctor for Hertha BSC. Despite his long service to the club, he was removed from his position at the club, and in April 1943 deported from Berlin and murdered in Auschwitz.[103]

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[99] "German Visitors", *The Scotsman*, 15 October 1936, 9.
[100] García, "British and Irish Clubs".
[101] Udo Merkel. "The Hidden Social and Political History of the German Football Association (DFB), 1900–50," *Soccer & Society* 1, no. 2 (2000), 184.
[102] Hesse-Lichtenberger, *Tor*, 62.
[103] Fussball Museum, "Dr Hermann Horwitz," *Fussball Museum*, accessed 23 September 2025, https://www.fussballmuseum.de/juedische-fussballer/lexikon/mehr/28?utm_campaign=26-06-2020-sommer&cHash=6dcbf32e11d17b77096078ab9cf4dae4

In 1937, just a year after Horwitz's tenure was cut short at Hertha, the First Division side Brentford travelled to Berlin to play the club. Reports before and after the tour make no mention of the exclusion of Jews from German football, the increasing anti-Jewish legislation, or the broader racial underpinnings of German sport and society. Brentford's visit to Berlin, Hamburg, Nuremberg, and Gelsenkirchen was presented as a model of international sporting exchange. Indeed, at Brentford's annual dinner a month prior to the tour, club secretary HC Curtis claimed that the team were all learning German ahead of their travels and were "hoping for the best".[104]

Former Brentford Chairman, William Flewitt of the Football Association, stated that "the forthcoming visit of the Bees to Germany would further cement the bonds of friendship between Britain and Germany", adding that football "was the best governed sport in the whole world, and their thanks were due to the Football Association for their untiring work in the interests of the game".[105] Such language reflected a deeper British view that saw football as a civilising, apolitical force that transcended ideology. The continuation of tours to Germany under Nazism thus normalised relations with fascism and presented the Third Reich as another nation to respect and co-operate with.

The Germany to which British football travelled in the 1930s was imbued with evolving social norms and signals. A prominent example was the Nazi salute, also known variously as the Hitler, fascist, or Roman salute, a simple greeting that reduced interactions to a universal visible demonstration of commitment to National Socialism. In his study of historical greetings, Torbjörn Lundmark explains how "the outstretched arm had been designed to permeate all of German society. It wasn't only in front of Hitler and military officers that the Nazi salute was used, but everywhere in administrative, commercial and social settings… school children were punished for saying *guten Morgen* instead of *Heil Hitler*, and people were refused service in shops unless they did the salute".[106]

It is therefore understandable that visiting football teams would also be expected to perform the salute when competing in Nazi Germany. More intriguing, though, is how rarely contemporary British reports address the salute, yet how, after 1945 memoirs and club histories have often focussed on such performance as central points of dramatic tension of tours.

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[104] "FA Think Brentford a Model Club," *Middlesex County Times*, 24 April 1937, 22.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Torbjörn Lundmark, *Tales of Hi and Bye: Greeting and Parting Rituals Around the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19

In March 1932, the *Edinburgh Evening News* reported the Arsenal manager Herbert Chapman's comments that "football has developed on the Continent. Austria very seriously menaces our prestige, but Germany has not yet reached that standard".[107] The same paper in May published criticism from the German press of English football, based upon their observations of British touring sides. "The Englishmen play surprisingly primitive football" according to a Cologne journal in reference to Everton's performances on the continent, which attacked the team for treating the tour as a holiday and demonstrating foul play, suggesting that in the future, Austrian sides would be preferable opponents.[108]

Nevertheless, in 1932 Everton refused offers from Malta, Norway, and Sweden, preferring to take up the invitation of Dr Otto Nerz, then head coach of the German National Team to play five matches across Germany.[109] The *Edinburgh Evening News* provided an update on the progress of British touring sides, suggesting that English teams had been "slaughtering their foes" with Everton "maintaining their prestige… and carrying the onus of champions of English football" despite "a determined attempt to beat them by hook or by crook".[110]

It is notable that Everton's tour of Germany evoked conversation and columns comparing British and European football unlike any other Everton tour undertaken during the interwar period. Commenting on Dixie Dean's performance in Berlin, a report in the *Portsmouth Evening News* declared that "the British professional footballer is still far superior to those of other nations, for he has no nerves and hardly fails to seize on a chance when it is offered".[111] Such newspaper reports do not necessarily reflect the actual experiences or views of travelling players though. Chelsea player Leslie Odell also visited Germany during the summer of 1932 and recorded how impressed he was by Berlin and got on much better with Germans than he had with Argentines on a recent tour to South America.[112]

Although no hostility between the travelling Everton side and their German hosts was reported in the 1930s, during the post-war period accounts of the tour emerged that suggested a serious incident had taken place before one of Everton's matches. According to the official biography of Dean, written by Nick Walsh in 1977, in 1932 "Dean as captain, and holding a personal abhorrence of the Nazi system, was anxious to achieve a convincing victory… the

[107] "Sports of All Sorts," *Edinburgh Evening News*, 26 March 1932, 24.
[108] "British Touring Sides: Severe Criticism by German Press," *Edinburgh Evening News*, 20 May 1932, 9.
[109] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 29 March 1932*, available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f20&p=206
[110] "Prestige Restored," *Edinburgh Evening News*, 27 May 1932, 11.
[111] "Fine displays for Everton," *Portsmouth Evening News*, 24 May 1932, 8.
[112] "Football Tour of Germany," *Biggleswade Chronicle*, 1 July 1932, 5.

teams lined up on the pitch whilst the national anthems were played and Dean says he had to pull the arm down of one player who, obviously trying to be diplomatic, had made a move to give the Nazi salute. Dean's actions brought screams of disapproval from the crowd but nevertheless this did not persuade the team to alter its boycott of the sign".[113]

Dean's defiance of Nazism has since been reproduced in other books written about Everton during the 1930s. The story elevates the club's greatest ever player to even loftier heights, representing a staunch moral character as well as unparalleled footballing ability. However, the 1977 book appears to be the first recorded telling of this event. In fact, when Dean took part in a 1971 interview series with the *Liverpool Echo* he made no mention of his refusal to obey the salute, despite talking about the 1932 tour, instead recalling a humorous incident involving the size of the football used in one of the matches.[114]

Furthermore, Everton toured Germany in May of that year, two months before Nazi gains in the July election and over six months before Hitler became Chancellor; therefore it is unlikely that Everton players would have felt much pressure to perform the salute. Moreover, Everton were invited back to Germany four years later, suggesting that their earlier trip had strengthened rather than fractured the bonds between Merseyside and Germany.

Everton returned to Germany in the summer of 1936, several months before Germany would host the Summer Olympics. In fact, many of the German sides Everton faced were comprised of players hoping to be picked for the Olympic team. In his write up of the tour for the *Liverpool Echo*, Club Secretary Theo Kelly suggested that it was because of this pressure that Everton lost two of their five matches; "consider that Germans were playing for their place in the national team at the Olympics and you will see that the matches were test matches of the sternest kind".[115]

The British press made no mention of the political situation in Germany during Everton's tour, despite growing Anglo-German tensions and Everton playing at the Adolf Hitler stadium in Berlin. Otto Nerz had joined the Nazi Party before Hitler had become chancellor, and joined the SA in 1933.[116] Nevertheless, Kelly publicly described Nerz as "the life and soul of the officials group", full of "wiseisms".[117] Any political tension seems to have been made in jest. Everton's Scottish winger Torry Gillick was "re-named as the foreign secretary. This arose

[113] Nick Walsh. *Dixie Dean: the Life Story of a Goal Scoring Legend* (London: Macdonald, 1977), 111.
[114] Ken Rogers, *Dixie Dean Uncut: The Lost Interview* (Liverpool: Trinity Mirror, 2005), 106.
[115] "Everton All Over," *Liverpool Echo*, 28 May 1936, 10.
[116] Sheldon Anderson, *The Politics and Culture of Modern Sports* (London: Lexington, 2015), 104.
[117] "Everton's Tour," *Liverpool Echo*, 19 May 1936, 10

because he happened to be seen carrying a large parcel in book form under his arm, and this was declared to be the Locarno Pact".[118]

Much more attention was given to Everton's journey to Germany, with the liner the squad and staff travelled on having collided with a smaller Dutch vessel on their way to Hamburg. The *Echo* correspondent reported that "the experience was a new one for most and not as unpleasant as it might easily have turned out to be" adding that "this was the first occasion that the ship had carried a football team, and Captain Warner had a group photograph taken with the full party yesterday afternoon".[119]

In January 1939, Everton accepted another invitation to Germany from Otto Nerz, with the *Nottingham Evening Post* reporting how "the Germans are anxious to see Tom Lawton".[120] However, on 21 March 1939 the Everton directors "decided that we write the German F.A. retracting the promise to tour, on account of the political situation".[121] Instead, it was arranged for Everton to play a series of games in Switzerland and Holland.[122]

The change of tour itinerary was interpreted by much of the British press as evidence of sport reacting too strongly to the political climate. The *Shields Daily News* reported that "having in mind the cancelling of Everton's proposed trip to Germany we would emphasise that if sport is to be kept clean it must steer clear of the wicked whirl of embitterment and hatred which in some countries is killing the very essence of sportsmanship".[123] The *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* claimed that "the world is in a terrible state. But we stick to our sport and will do so to the last. And it is the best policy. Sport makes us forget the evil days for a brief spell… no one would be surprised at Everton's step. The Continent is not a healthy spot at the moment. Explosions are likely to occur any time judging by the sabre rattling".[124] Philippe Vonnard explains the politicisation of football at this time as resulting from the fact that "the interwar period was the game's first period of democratisation… as politicians across Europe began to see the people's game as an effective means of reinforcing national identity and showing their strength in international relations".[125]

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[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] "Everton and German Tour," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 January 1939, 11.
[121] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 21 March 1939.* available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f23&p=270
[122] EFC Directors. *Minutes of EFC Directors Meeting 29 June 1939.* available at: http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk/object?id=796%20EFC%2f1%2f1%2f23&p=296
[123] "All Sorts of Sport," *Shields Daily News*, 29 March 1939, 6.
[124] "That Continental Tour and Team for Hampden," *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 25 March 1939, 18.
[125] Philippe Vonnard, "From Mitropa Cup to UEFA Cup: The Role of UEFA in the Establishment of a European Scale in Football, 1927-1972," *Soccer and Society* 20, no. 7 (2019), 1026.

Dean's salute incident is not recorded in any newspaper articles written during the 1930s. Dean's account is only documented in accounts written decades later, suggesting he may have misremembered his experiences in Germany over time. After the war other players and teams also claimed to have refused to perform the salute whilst touring in Germany, with stories emerging after the war relating to Aston Villa, Sheffield United, Manchester City, and Derby County players refusing the gesture.

Several Aston Villa players documented a similar story from their tour of Germany in 1938, and in recent years the club have published articles recounting the story.[126] However, contemporary newspaper reports suggest that these claims are exaggerated. After the match referred to, Villa Manager Jimmy Hogan phoned the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* to confirm that all players gave the salute before the game but that some players had left the pitch after full time when they had been supposed to salute again. Hogan made sure to add that "the German people are still treating us with the warmest hospitality and the utmost cordiality", and the team would be saluting before and after matches during the rest of their German tour.[127]

Berlin 1938

The most renowned example of British footballers performing the Nazi salute was prior to England's match against Germany in Berlin in May 1938. Compared to the fragmented and contested evidence of club tours, this England versus Germany match is better documented, with press coverage, government correspondence, photographs, memoirs, and plentiful secondary literature. Such density of source material and its analysis has led to the performance of the salute becoming a canonical case for historians to consider and frame sport's relationship with appeasement.

As the match approached, British newspapers presented it as a clash between 'pupil' and 'master', emphasising a narrative of England as originator and Germany as threatening imitator.[128] These articles traced the history of football in Germany since the Victorian era and highlighted the role of British coaches, Jimmy Hogan, John Madden, and Steve Bloomer, who had all coached in Germany, as well as professional and amateur British teams touring the

[126] Paul Brown, "From the Archives: Villa Say 'No' To The Nazis", *AVFC*, 27 November 2012, accessed 4 February 2025, https://www.avfc.co.uk/news/2012/11/27/from-the-archives-villa-say-no-to-the-nazis
[127] "Incident that was exaggerated," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 18 May 1938, 6.
[128] "England Taught Germany Football," *Portsmouth Evening News*, 11 May 1938, 10.
"Germany's Rise as Football Nation," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 11 May 1938, 8.

country.[129] However, match previews did not address the politics of the present, with the Anschluss and rearmament seemingly absent from discussion. England beat Germany 6-3, in front of a six-figure crowd at the Olympic Stadium, though relatively little of the discussion about the game in the years since has focussed on the events of the ninety-minute match.

Peter Beck's research on the match directly addresses the England team's performance of the salute, concluding that the decision to perform the salute was taken by FA officials according to the advice received from the British Ambassador in Berlin, Neville Henderson.[130] According to Beck, both Stanley Rous and Wreford Brown of the FA accepted Henderson's advice, trusting that it would be understood by their hosts as a gesture of friendship, thereby maintaining a hospitable atmosphere and avoiding a diplomatic incident. Such analysis is supported by correspondence between the FA and the British Government. A letter sent from Stanley Rous to Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, assured Vansittart "that every member of the Team will do his utmost to uphold the prestige of his Country", implying his recognition that the conduct of the sportsmen was understood to have diplomatic significance.[131]

The testimonies of players somewhat complicate the narrative. After the Second World War, memoirs by England players were published that included accounts of the tour and the salute, emphasising that it was no neutral courtesy but an unpopular imposition. The team's captain, Eddie Hapgood, reflected that he was 'sickened' by the order, while Stanley Matthews recalled it causing 'alarm' among the squad.[132] Such testimonies are understandably shaped by the experience of war and reassessment of appeasement. As Vares explains, players' recollections were "filtered" through retrospection, in doing so transforming what seems to have been a moment of well-intentioned sensible strategy into a memory of moral failure.[133]

Accounts developed further in the decades after the Second World War. Stanley Matthews' two autobiographies, *Feet First Again*, first published in 1948, and *The Way It Was*, published after Matthews' death in 2000, both addressed the topic of the 1938 Berlin match. In the earlier book Matthews framed the tour as an encounter with evil, recalling how he "came eye to eye with my first Nazi", his shock at how Germans "really regarded Hitler as a god," adding, "Previously, I did not believe such fanaticism was possible. I had believed much of it to be the

[129] Ibid.
[130] Beck, *Scoring for Britain*, 6.
[131] TNA (FO 395/568)
[132] Beck, *Scoring for Britain*, 7.
[133] Vares, "22 Players Run," 501.

imagination of Hollywood script writers. I am glad I saw for myself".[134] Matthews' first account details instructions from the FA that "in order to get the crowd friendly towards you we want you to give the Nazi salute", and his subsequent reaction "every player had a troubled face… Nazism was something that every decent person rebelled against, yet here we were being ordered to hide our true feelings".[135] Matthews justified his compliance by stating that "we ourselves were ambassadors for England that day" though he reflected that "even to this day I still feel shame whenever I sit by the fire and glance through my scrapbook and gaze on that infamous picture of an England football team lining up like a bunch of Nazi robots".[136]

By comparison, *The Way it Was*, written five decades later, though reflecting upon the same scenes, is a less dramatic retelling of the narrative. Matthews revealed that "on the face of it, pre-war Berlin came across as a beautiful city" though added that such beauty "was confined to its architecture".[137] The omnipresence of Hitler is again a focus, Matthews recalling that "wherever I looked in Berlin, there was a statue, poster, flag or hoarding depicting the face of the Führer" but, with the passage of time, this was recollected comically, as "Eddie Hapgood joked he looked just like a former girlfriend of his, only according to Eddie, the ex-girlfriend's moustache was bigger".[138]

Matthews' second account lingers less on the performing of the salute, instead focussing on the post-match celebrations, noting the "row of empty seats where Goering, Goebbels and other members of the Nazi hierarchy had been sitting. We later learned that with some ten minutes remaining, and with no chance of Germany getting back into the game, they had stormed off in a strop, just as they had done two years earlier in that very same stadium when that great American athlete Jesse Owens put the theory of the Nazi master race in its place at the 1936 Olympics".[139] Thus, in this retelling, the narrative presented is not one of humiliating obedience to Nazi demands, but of a victory for England against Nazism.

The distinctions between the accounts reveal how the understandings of the past are shaped by the context of the present. Writing in the 1940s, Matthews belonged to a society shaped by recent war with Germany, having himself served in the Royal Air Force, though not in a combat role, thus emphasising how hated and shameful the salute was. By the end of the twentieth century, Nazism was consigned to a more distant past, the events recalled belonging to a different world. Therefore, the two autobiographies do not simply record Matthews'

[134] Stanley Matthews, *Feet First Again* (London: Nicholas Kaye, 1952), 64.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., 66.
[137] Stanley Matthews, *The Way It Was: My Autobiography* (London: Headline, 2000), 82.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.,87.

experience, but reorganise his past, illustrating not only what it was like to play in Berlin in 1938, but also how the meaning of that experience was reshaped according to Britain's relationship with Germany and to its own past.

Vares' investigation of German newspapers' coverage of the match emphasises how few mentioned the salute, and where there were references to it, these were brief, with British reports that a photograph was published on the front page of *Völkischer Beobachter* being false.[140] Such confused accounts offer a paradox, that the symbolic salute of appeasement matters more to the British in retrospect than to the Germans at the time. Beck stresses that in the immediate aftermath, the salute was felt to have been a success in having smoothed relations, a justification for government and FA officials.[141] Indeed, England would again perform the salute in 1939 in Milan, indicating that its performance in Berlin had not been a regrettable mistake from the perspective of British authorities.[142]

The apparent differences between circumstantial pragmatism and retrospective condemnation are found in Sir Robert Vansittart's *Black Record: Germans Past and Present*, published in 1941. Vansittart had served as Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in the 1930s, corresponding with the FA to ensure smooth relations with Germany on their 1938 trip. Several years later, Vansittart did not encourage accommodating Nazi Germany but presented an aggressive critique of Germany, citing Nazi attitudes to sport:

> "Prussianism, militarism, lust of world-conquest, Nazism that sequence has made German the exponents of every imaginable variety of dirty fighting and foul play. Incidentally, Nazis have some very odd notions of play. Listen to the adjutant of Julius Streicher, chief Nazi purveyor of smut. He is urging children to play football instead of going to church; '"but," he says, "if one of your comrades will not play, then beat him till he drops dead." Sad stuff!"[143]

Football had shifted, just as it had during the First World War, from an instrument of diplomacy to an indicator of foreign barbarism, with the cultural practice once utilised to smooth international relations now deployed as proof of Britain's enemy's moral depravity.

Barclays Bank

[140] Vares, "22 Players Run," 503.
[141] Beck. *International Football.*
[142] Ibid.
[143] Robert Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (Bombay: Times of India Press, 1941), 9.

Barclays Bank plays a central role in twenty-first-century British Football, its name synonymous with the commercialisation of the Premier League and is now also a sponsor of the Women's Super League and the Scottish national football stadium, Hampden Park. Barclays' involvement in football goes back much further, though, to an era long before naming rights deals. During the interwar period, Barclays, like many major firms of the time, maintained company teams that competed in a range of sports, though it was their football team that seemed to have travelled the most widely. The tours undertaken by Barclays' football team operated not to share the game abroad, or raise money through ticket revenue, but to strengthen the bank's international connections, and provide an opportunity for employees to enjoy foreign travel.

In January 1938, Barclays visited Berlin, where they were hosted as the guests of Dresdner Bank. This visit occurred in a Germany now fully mobilised by Nazism, with the tour itinerary reflecting the priorities and values of their hosts. Barclays played a match against the Dresdner Bank at the Stadion am Gesundbrunnen, home of Hertha Berlin, with the English side winning 6-2.[144] British Ambassador in Berlin Neville Henderson attended the game, meeting the players and German officials.[145]

Beyond the match, the Barclays team was shown parts of Berlin to demonstrate the power and purpose of National Socialism. The team was taken to see the Reichssportfeld and met the Reichssportführer, Hans von Tschammer und Osten.[146] A third of the group then witnessed preparations for Adolf Hitler's birthday parade, another third visited Berlin's new airport, a showcase of modern German aviation infrastructure, while another third toured the Zoological gardens, which that year had forced out Jewish board members and shareholders.[147] Then, the entire team visited the Potsdam Garrison Church, in recent years described as a "symbol of evil" due to its association with the Nazis' rise to power in 1933, as the site where President Paul von Hindenburg shook hands with new Chancellor Adolf Hitler.[148] Evidently, the schedule of the tour was imbued with Nazi political interests, highlighting fascist spectacle for the foreign visitors.

Interest in the tour went to the top of both banks. Barclays Chairman Edwin Fischer personally corresponded with Karl Rasche, board member and spokesperson of the Dresdner Bank,

[144] Barclays Bank Archive, 'Association Football Club: Visit to Berlin' *The Spread Eagle*. February 1938, 79.
[145] Ibid., 82.
[146] Ibid., 80-81.
[147] Ibid., 82.
[148] BBC News. 'The Church described as a 'symbol of evil', *BBC News*, 16 September 2014, accessed 8 April 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-29141925

regarding the tour arrangements, underscoring how the exchange operated as corporate diplomacy as well as a sporting encounter. Rasche joined the SS in 1939 and was the only private sector banker on trial at Nuremberg.[149]

The mutuality of the corporate relationship was confirmed later that year when a Dresdner Bank team was hosted in London by Barclays. Ahead of the match, the visitors were taken to Eton and Windsor Castle, sites representing English establishment tradition.[150] During the dinner following the match, Fischer affirmed that the occasion:

> "lies far beyond that of a Football Match between two opposing teams, for it symbolises the state of good fellowship and understanding which we all feel to be of so much importance in the world today. It is by meetings such as these that we can get to know each other, and what is true of two teams of sportsmen should also be true of two individual Nations".[151]

Such language exemplified how sport offered an opportunity to strengthen international corporate relations while reflecting and projecting national identity.

Sussex 1938

By 1938, the impact of international politics on international football was strained to the point of untenability. This was apparent in the visit of a German police football team to Sussex in November 1938, with the encounter attracting fierce opposition, exposing the limits of peaceful acceptance of amateur international sport. The hostility the German police team faced was glaring in comparison with the aforementioned German police motorcycle football team's visit to England eight years earlier, with that tour seemingly attracting no controversy or broader political commentary. However, by 1938, Germany was no longer a former enemy intent on reconciliation, but an authoritarian expansionist state, whose institutions, particularly its police, were actively enacting political and racial repression.

The visit to Sussex was rooted in personal networks from the previous war that had persisted despite the tensions of the 1930s. The tour appears to have been initiated by the Wuppertal chief of police, who, having been held prisoner in Britain during the First World War, maintained some affection for, and connection with Britain.[152] The visit was also supported by

[149] Susanne Karstedt, "Managing Criminal Reputations: West German Elites after the Nuremberg Trials, 1946–1960," *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 13, no. 4, September (2015), 738.
[150] Barclays Bank Archive, "A Visit from Dresdner Bank Footballers", *The Spread Eagle*. December 1938, p.767.
[151] Ibid.
[152] "Do They Remember," *West Sussex Gazette*, 5 October 1939, 4.

the Anglo-German Friendship League, as it was a reciprocation of an earlier tour by Sussex police officers to Wuppertal in the spring of 1938, a trip to which the Home Office consented, though on the condition that officers would not wear their uniforms abroad.[153] The organisers of the exchange emphasised their intention to separate politics from the sporting encounter, with one Hove councillor declaring that "political affairs abroad make no difference".[154] This is contradicted somewhat by examining the itinerary of the visit to Wuppertal, with the Sussex police participating in a local military parade marking Hitler's birthday.[155]

Demonstrators in Hove did not accept the idea of the separation of sport from politics, gathering to protest the visit of the Wuppertal team, shouting "we don't want Fascism here" and "send the Nazi police back".[156] The objection was so forceful that a further planned visit by the German team to play a match in Hastings was cancelled out of fear for further disorder.[157] Stories of the successful protest were carried across Britain throughout the national press, the episode an example of inflamed international relations. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, David Walker scorned protestors and "hysterical idiots" and "flatulent citizens" for offending "guests in our country".[158] Walker's account also displays the gendered contempt at the women who took part in the protest, framing their opposition as emanating from emotional instability rather than political belief. Walker's column culminated with an alarming assertion that "it is just this kind of kittenish hysteria that makes one wonder whether there isn't something in the Concentration Camp idea after all".[159]

The invocation of courteous sporting rhetoric in this way served to marginalise the victims of fascism, prioritising civility over opposition to authoritarian violence. Though only one small example of interwar international sport, the case ought to be remembered as a moment in which the practice and language of sport were mobilised to avoid the discussion and opposition of political realities in Britain and overseas. Though it was a tour intended to demonstrate the strength of Anglo-German relations, instead it exposed the fractures both between the two nations and within British society.

The belief that British football could remain separate from the political realities of Continental Europe was eroded throughout the 1930s. Across the decade, encounters between British and German teams became harder to understand as they sought to further peaceful co-

[153] TNA (FO 395/568)
[154] "No Cancelling of German Tour," *Evening News*, 16 March 1938, 5.
[155] Ibid.
[156] "We Don't Want You Here 'Cry'," *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 22 August 1938, 1.
[157] David Walker, "David Walker's Talking Shop," *Daily Mirror*, 23 August 1938, 14.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

operation. Despite officials' insistence on keeping politics out of sport, such a preference for accommodation was itself a political act. Football did not prevent the collapse of Anglo-German relations but did offer a highly public arena in which relations between the nations were staged.

Fascism's victims, including figures such as Julius Hirsch and Hermann Horwitz, were not killed because of football's failure to act, but due to the political systems that football authorities had helped normalise. Football's rhetoric of sportsmanship and international goodwill inadvertently obscured the scale and immediacy of the emergent threat to human life.

Conclusion

The evidence collated in this chapter indicates that the belief that sport was separate from politics persisted despite increased criticism of sporting co-operation with fascist states. As the fate of the players involved in the Tottenham vs SpVgg Fürth match showed, the experience of politics and sport could not be neatly disentangled, as forms of popular culture became expressions of nationalist politics on the continent. Julius Hirsch's descent from football hero to Auschwitz victim shows how sporting actors operate within political and sometimes lethal constraints.

Whereas Britain resisted the explicit deployment of football for political purposes, the Fascist regimes of Italy and Germany utilised the sport to gather crowds, discipline bodies, and project their nation abroad. However, in recent decades, both these nations have sought to address and educate football fans about such histories. In Germany, Julius Hirsch's name has been remembered through a national prize, founded in 2005, awarded to football clubs and organisations combatting racism and supporting tolerant integration in a variety of ways.[160] For example, in 2025, there were three winners of this prize: a school in Karlsruhe engaging students in the history of the Holocaust, a street football project in Dortmund running a football competition in remembrance of a kiosk owner murdered by neo-Nazis, and an amateur football club in Munich supporting their diverse members in integrating into their community.[161]

A similar process is in play in Italy. On Holocaust Memorial Day in 2025, Inter Milan's youth teams were educated about Árpád Weisz, the club's coach on three separate occasions in the interwar period, covering their match with Newcastle United.[162] Weisz was Jewish and was

[160] DFB, "Julius Hirsch Preis".
[161] Ibid.
[162] Inter, "Holocaust Memorial Day: young Nerazzurri learn the story of Árpád Weisz," *Inter*, 27 January 2025, accessed 9 November 2025, https://www.inter.it/en/news/holocaust-memorial-day-youth-sector-arpad-weisz-gianfelice-facchetti

killed at Auschwitz in 1944. Lazio, a club with some associations to the far-right, and who currently employ the great-grandson of Benito Mussolini, Romano Benito Floriani Mussolini, as a player, have actively attempted to learn from history and challenge antisemitism. In 2025, Lazio created a partnership with two Israeli clubs to promote "values of integration and social inclusion".[163]

By comparison, British football's engagement with history appears to be more selective. Although clubs and national teams have supported Holocaust education initiatives, with the England team even visiting Auschwitz during the 2012 UEFA European Championships, such efforts have tended to discuss Britain's role as liberators rather than appeasers.[164] In 2020, Chelsea unveiled a mural featuring Julius Hirsch and Árpád Weisz as part of the club's 'Say No to Antisemitism' campaign, paid for by their Jewish owner, Roman Abramovich.[165] Although such visits and memorials demonstrate respect for the dead, they do little to confront the structures of British football, which during the interwar period respectfully engaged with regimes that exterminated such figures.

British clubs that eagerly engaged with Nazi Germany do not address such histories, and neither do Barclays, which was entangled through corporate and sporting networks with the Nazi economy, and now sit at the highest levels of British football. Though post-war Britain has with clarity condemned continental fascism as an evil, it has been less able to confront its own complex and comprehensive connections to it. Instead, British society can frame itself as external to European catastrophe until the moment it helped end it, reiterating its 'semi-detached' identity to the continent, and assuming a position of moral authority rather than past implication.

[163] Reuters, "Lazio, Maccabi teams forge partnership to fight discrimination," *Reuters*, 20 March 2025, accessed 9 November 2025, https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/lazio-maccabi-teams-forge-partnership-fight-discrimination-2025-03-20/
[164] BBC News, "Euro 2012: England players visit Auschwitz," *BBC News*, 9 June 2012, accessed 9 November 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/18373960
[165] Chelsea FC, "Completed Holocaust Remembrance mural hangs proudly at Stamford Bridge," *Chelsea FC*, 27 January 2020, accessed 9 November 2025, https://www.chelseafc.com/en/news/article/completed-commemorative-mural-hangs-proudly-at-stamford-bridge

Conclusion

"War has been let loose in Europe. Dark trouble shadows the coalfields of Britain. On the Continent Fascism rears its ugly head and binds the worker in chains of servitude. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse may even now be riding the chilly steel-gray sky. But as long as football lasts, the splendid free and fair spectacle that it is, so long have we something here at home which transcends the limits of a mere game and keeps the spirit of Englishman refreshed and free which keeps masters from domineering men, and men from unduly fearing masters; something which, even in its trifling ceremonial, ensures the reality of the democracy of all honest Britons."

Maurice Wiggin. *Evening Despatch* - Thursday 9 January 1936[1]

"All the world has become our competitor in the one as in the other. Our monopoly has gone, and we have to live on our merit… whatever the causes we shall never recover our old supremacy in sport. The world has overtaken us, and the best we can expect is an occasional place in the sun. But nothing can deprive us of the glory of having taught the world to play games or the credit of having taught it to play them in the right spirit."

Alfred George Gardiner. *Edinburgh Evening News* - Friday 9 July 1937[2]

To illustrate the divisions in interwar Europe, Benjamin Martin and Elisabeth Piller draw attention to the imposing structures of the German and Soviet pavilions "facing off" at the 1937 Paris International Exposition, "capturing the interwar period's great conflict of ideologies, the international connectedness of the age and the aestheticisation of political and ideological conflict in the age of mass media and mass spectacle".[3] This visual representation encapsulated the ideological conflicts of the era, the exchange between nations, and the spectacle of political discord in an age of mass media.

A year later, another international 'face-off' occurred as England took on a 'FIFA' team in a football match held at Highbury to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the English Football Association. Though it was officially a FIFA team, some FA documents referred to them as

[1] Maurice Wiggin. "The Best Sight of All", *Evening Despatch*, 9 January 1936, 6.
[2] Alfred George Gardiner. "Means to an End," *Edinburgh Evening News*, 9 July 1937
[3] Martin and Piller. "Cultural Diplomacy," 149

'Europeans', and all played international football for a continental nation. Five players were Italian and two were German, with one Belgian, one Norwegian, one Hungarian, and one French player making up the team.[4] In some FA documents, 'Europe' has been scribbled out in pen and replaced with 'FIFA', a clear indication of the confusion surrounding the nature of the encounter.

The Football Association celebrated its fiftieth and seventy-fifth anniversaries on the eve of catastrophe. In 1913 and then 1938, both occasions were marked by a banquet in London, with representatives of football from across the continent in attendance. Between the two events, Europe had experienced war, revolutions, economic crisis, and the growth of communism, fascism, and football. International football in 1913 remained embryonic, and the modesty of the anniversary celebrations that year reflected this, with no match arranged; the event was limited to a ceremonial dinner.

By 1938, the football world was better connected, with international sport accepted as a feature of 1930s European culture. As has been explored throughout this thesis, the interwar period saw football become increasingly internationalised and formalised, with the expansion of international competition, the migrations of players and coaches, and the expansion of overseas tours. Football thus ascended to a capacity to enable international exchange at a time when the international order was under threat and international relations were deteriorating.

Across this thesis, the chapters have sought to answer four questions cumulatively. The first considered how touring emerged as a regular practice and how it developed between 1904 and 1939. Chapters Two and Four traced this process, showing how early tours were sporadic, framed according to amateur sociability and gentlemanly exchange. These developed into more routine close season tours because of regulatory and commercial changes, affirming tours as part of the football calendar. Chapter Four demonstrated how tours became entwined with processes of remembrance and commemoration after the First World War, while later Chapters showed that tours had become so common and normalised that their scale and success became a discussion point within the football press. Changes in touring were driven by evolving rhythms of work, transport, the football season, to the extent that they became an expected feature of the football calendar by clubs, journalists, and spectators in Britain and on the continent.

[4] "Europe's Football Challenge," *Lancashire Evening Post*, 26 October 1938, 17.

The second question, regarding how tours were shaped both by infrastructure and institutions, was addressed across Chapters One, Two, and Five. Chapter One examined the institutional preconditions that enabled football to grow in Britain and the continent, with codification and associational growth providing frameworks for clubs and nations to meet on the football pitch. Chapter Two then considered how developments in railway and steamship travel, as well as expanding communications and increasing organisational capacities of clubs turned travel into workable sporting routines, while also highlighting the persistent role of institutional constraint, in the form of the FA granting permissions for clubs to travel overseas. Chapter Five illustrated how tours interacted with the institutionalisation of international competition itself, with tournaments and federations both moving football on tour from informal friendly encounters to organised competition. Touring did not therefore happen on the margins of European football; it was produced by the infrastructure of its age and governed by institutions even when it appeared as an informal practice.

The third question of how touring intersected with political and ideological tensions was discussed throughout Chapters Three, Four, Six and Seven. Chapter Three showed how the First World War did not end football travel, but reformed and rerouted it according to military mobilisation and captivity, with football becoming a significant feature of wartime experience for some British men on the continent. Chapter Four then considered how touring was entangled with the politics of memory after the First World War, with British football teams travelling through landscapes of destruction to play, with many incorporating commemorative practices into their travels. Chapters Six and Seven extended this examination into the late 1920s and 1930s, showing how claims that football exists outside of politics became untenable as touring entered new ideological spaces. Through encountering both communist and fascist Europe, British football tourists witnessed and participated in moments of diplomatic signalling and propaganda, revealing how international football during the interwar period was both a reflection and a participant in Europe's broader crisis of internationalism.

Finally, the fourth question, considering how touring varied by team type and social make-up runs across each chapter. While professional club touring became more prominent as the period proceeded, the thesis repeatedly shows that touring was also carried out by amateur sides, works teams, labour organisations, schoolboy parties, and women's teams. The motives, constraints, and receptions of each team varied, with Chapters Two and Four illustrating such variations. Amateur tours were often embedded with elite sociability and local civic ritual, whereas professional tours were increasingly shaped by commercial imperatives. Meanwhile, women's teams are shown to have travelled overseas even while they were banned from playing on football grounds back home, and while on tour engaged in distinct

practices. Chapters Six and Seven consider the teams of workers, both the BWSF and Barclays Bank employees, with each team's destination and activities on tour a reflection of their organisational background. Football's internationalism was therefore not driven by a narrow institutional centre, but a plurality of historical actors, each operating according to uneven hierarchies and among changing visions over what touring was for.

This thesis has emphasised that touring was not a faint peripheral or simple episodic feature of early twentieth-century football but, in fact, one of the principal means through which the game became international. The movement of teams across national borders carried with it much more than players and fixtures, transporting sporting practices, institutional assumptions, commercial interests, political values and competing ideas of nation, class, race, and gender, while exposing these to negotiation in unfamiliar social and cultural settings. Touring was significant because the encounters which constituted it could reinforce existing hierarchies and prejudices, but they could also unsettle them, producing forms of exchange, imitation, rivalry and adaptation that cannot be adequately understood within national histories alone.

This thesis makes three principal interventions in the field of sport history. Empirically, this study has partially recovered the scale, frequency, and diversity of British football touring to continental Europe before 1939, demonstrating throughout how such journeys were not exceptional or incidental to the development of the game. Conceptually, this study has positioned touring within the broader history of footballing mobility, with the movement of players, officials, institutions, and ideas forming important historical processes. Historiographically, this study has challenged accounts of football's internationalism that have implied straightforward diffusion of a British game to passive continental recipients. The evidence examined and presented here reveals a contingent and reciprocal process between British and continental actors, with repeated encounters on tours forming the interpretation, contestation, and remaking of football on both sides of the channel.

Mobility was a constituent force in the development of football's internationalism. The international game was produced in stadiums and the committee rooms of football clubs and national associations, but also in railway carriages, steamships, hotels, civic receptions, and the innumerable contacts of continental travel. Following football across borders exposes an internationalism tried and tested long before it was formalised and institutionalised, with touring embedded in the regular movements of the game and those who played it.

Such changes and connections thus enabled the orchestration of the match in October 1938. The willingness of FIFA to assemble an international composite team, and the FA's desire to host them, showed the existence of an international footballing order, though it appeared to be an order with two competing centres. The organisation of the 1938 match showed that, despite being absent from FIFA since 1928, the Home Nations had maintained good relations with FIFA, with Beck describing them as "practising a virtual form of connection".[5]

The 1938 anniversary match functioned to represent England as the foundational place of the sport, yet the meaning of such representation by 1938 had been altered. England's three-nil win was not an affirmation of their authority over the sport, even if the occasion was in part an assertion of its origin. While the German-Soviet rivalry at the Paris exhibition mirrored political divisions between fascism and communism, the 1938 football match showed a division within global football, England and the rest, as a single nation stood against a team composed from a continent and representing the world. In 1937 another clash of cross continental teams had taken place, with a West Europe vs Central Europe match staged in Amsterdam, no British players featured, but Englishman Jimmy Jewell acted as referee for the occasion.[6]

Despite a comprehensive victory for England against the FIFA team, the speeches at the following banquet did not display boastful bluster but peaceful proclamations of goodwill. Key figures from both Britain and Europe articulated a vision of sport as a moral force during the 1938 banquet, which followed the match. FA administrator B. A. Glanvill referred to the recent Sudetenland crisis, and quoted *The Times* appeal for "our leaders, business men and sportsmen, so that by meeting and discussions we can see each other's point of view", before calling upon "all those gentlemen that represent our great game and our athletics that they should do all they can to take their players to the other side of the Channel and to every part of Europe in order that we may come in touch with other friends in the sporting world and they may know our views and we may know theirs".[7] President of FIFA and the French Football Federation, Jules Rimet, declared that "music is the only thing I know, apart from sport, which can claim the same universal appeal".[8] Such language was reiterated in 2025 by Gianni Infantino, current FIFA President, who claimed football "is the language of passion, which is the language of love, which is the language of happiness, because you should know that FIFA is the official happiness provider for humanity for over 100 years".[9]

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[5] Beck, *International Football*, 13.
[6] "Mr. Jewell Honoured", *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 17 June 1937, 19.
[7] NFM. "The Football Association 75th Anniversary Celebrations, 26th October 1938," (FA Coll: 122), 31.
[8] Ibid., 31.
[9] FIFA, "'We are here to celebrate,' FIFA President Gianni Infantino says at festive FIFA World Cup 2026™ Final Draw," *FIFA*, 6 December 2025, accessed 3 January 2026,

FA President William Pickford was unable to attend due to poor health and died just ten days after the banquet. A statement from Pickford was printed for all attendees, in English, French, German, and Italian, which outlined the English footballing establishment's understanding of the moral dimensions of football:

"But ideals are always worth repeating, ideals of sound and honest legislation, of just treatment and of fair play. I have read some criticisms of late as to the failure of international matches to promote friendly relations between the Nations. It is quite possible that a victory by eleven players of one Country over eleven of another may be hailed, in some quarters, as a proof of racial superiority, or that defeat may be construed into a sign of national decadence. I do not think that the players and the officials concerned take that view. The British have played more international matches than any other country and have maintained their friendly relations in football, at any rate, for 66 years with everybody"[10]

Pickford's statement encapsulated the moral underpinning of British football at the time. Addressing criticisms regarding the failure of international matches to promote friendly relations, Pickford offered thoughtful insight into the process and procedure of football. His perspective of perceptions surrounding victories and defeats in football matches reflected an awareness of the tensions that might arise in the anticipation and aftermath of such games.

Lord Burghley MP, President of the Amateur Athletic Association and Chairman of the British Olympic Association, and a gold medal winning hurdler at the 1928 Olympics, also spoke at the event, warning that "we hear a great deal of talk about peace and a great many plans are put forward for peace, but none of those plans are worth the paper they are written on unless they are backed by understanding between the peoples concerned" before calling upon the "twenty-four nations [that] are represented here this evening" to go "back to their country saying that they have seen a good afternoon's sport, had a happy evening and made many friends".[11]

Burghley's remarks implied that the bonds formed through sporting interactions possess the potential to transcend the field, encouraging stronger understanding and friendship among nations. He stressed that for peace initiatives to be successful, they must be rooted in mutual

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https://inside.fifa.com/organisation/president/news/world-cup-2026-draw-gianni-infantino-reaction-donald-trump

[10] NFM. "The Football Association 75th Anniversary Celebrations, 26th October 1938," (FA Coll: 122), 33.

[11] Ibid.

understanding and respect among those involved, with football providing a crucial platform for such understanding.

These prominent figures from British and European society articulated a vision of sport as a force of peace, with Britain placed as the central agent of this process. As has been evidenced throughout this study, the peacebuilding potential of football was not mere rhetoric, but was also carried out in practice, through touring British clubs visiting battlefields to learn from war, staging remembrance events around tour matches, and even playing against former enemies.

The rhetoric of football as an instrument of international goodwill persisted well into 1939. In May 1939, England travelled on a tour of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Romania, their only win coming against the latter. A report in the *Leicester Evening Mail* ahead of the final match of the tour referred to the squad as "carrying that old burden, British prestige" suggesting English football fans ought to "discard the idea that our fellows disgrace themselves by failure on the Continent".[12] Such analysis of the tour reflects an English sentiment that the continent had now caught up with the Home Nations on the football field, a theme continually discussed across the chapters of this thesis. Many 'pupils' had now beaten or tied with the 'master', relegating such an idiom as hollow by the end of the interwar period.

British club sides continued to tour during the spring and summer of 1939. Arsenal, Everton, Leeds, Liverpool, Watford, Wolves, and Wimbledon all went overseas, though limited their travels to more neutral corners of the continent such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. As discussed in the previous chapter, Everton had planned to visit Germany in 1939, but changed route, despite demands from Germans to see their best players.

Evidently, the limiting of football tours according to political tensions abroad marked the erosion of the neutrality of sporting exchange. Deciding who and where to play was demonstrably a political rather than purely sporting or logistical question. Though leading members of the FA and FIFA may have espoused that football transcended politics, in 1939, football was in practice defined and constrained by the political turmoil.

The outbreak of the Second World War did not so much suspend football as resituate its role in European society. Across the continent, the game was absorbed into functions that advanced national order, reshaped to further economic, physical, and emotional needs. The

[12] "Footballer's Burden," *Leicester Evening Mail*, 24 May 1939, 13.

repurposing of football is also illustrated in the redeployment of some of the personnel discussed throughout this thesis. Herbert Dunnico, the Labour politician who had organised peacebuilding tours to Weimar Germany, became Public Relations officer for the Entertainments National Service Association, arranging for well-known current and former footballers such as Ted Drake, Tommy Lawton, Jimmy Jewell, and Charles Buchan to visit troops and bolster morale.[13] Many footballers who had travelled on interwar tours and enjoyed relations with their hosts would take up arms and fight against them. The internationalism of interwar football ceased, as British football now sought to play its part in international war.

Football matches continued to be played across Britain during the Second World War. Many wartime matches were imbued with different ceremonial and international dimensions. For example, in November 1939, a match was played on Armistice Day between a Czechoslovakian Legation team and Margate Allied Forces team, with match proceeds supporting "a cigarette fund for local troops serving overseas and the Margate Children's Penny Dinner and Boot Fund".[14] Concessionary tickets were available for children, the unemployed and Czechs, with poppies for sale at the ground.[15] Here, football reflected both the national interest and the new international networks redrawn by war.

Nevertheless, football was not ubiquitously understood to serve the nation. In his history of the British aristocracy, David Cannadine cites Lord Leconfield hunting in Sussex in 1940, when he encountered a village football match, whose players he berated, "haven't you people got anything better to do in wartime than play football?".[16] The supposed comment reveals more about class than patriotism, with modern mass sport contrasted against the traditional upper-class pastime. As has been repeatedly shown in this thesis, football was and remains a deeply embedded social practice shaped by and against power. The rituals, processes, and participants in the sport can be flexibly transformed from instruments of peace to agents of war, while always remaining in their own way political actors.

Football was not a neutral bystander to the transformations of Europe, but a participant and indicator of them. From the earliest international tours to the mobilisation of the sport by fascist and communist governments, and its continuation into wartime, football continually functioned as practice for international relations to be both normalised and contested. Despite continued articulation that the sport was separate from politics, the evidence collated in this study

[13] R. B. Alaway, *Football all Around the World* (London: Newsservice, 1948), 157.
[14] "Armistice Day Match," *Thanet Advertiser*, 10 November 1939, 2.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Cannadine, David. *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 617.

challenges such an assertion, displaying how across historical moments and nations, football was tangled with the politics of the age.

During the First World War, playing football helped soldiers endure combat and captivity while emerging as a propaganda tool. The interwar period saw football reflect the new ideological boundaries of Europe, at times reinforcing rivalries and stereotypes whilst also traversing social and cultural boundaries. In seeking to avoid the politicisation of the sport, some British football clubs acted as forces of accommodation to authoritarian regimes.

The notion that football could facilitate peace dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. A 1901 edition of *Blackwood's Magazine* suggested that international football could act as "a better guarantee of the peace of Europe than in many rescripts".[17] As discussed throughout this thesis, this optimism was continually frustrated by the more powerful forces of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism. Nevertheless, this failure has not extinguished hopefulness in sport's potential as an agent of peace, including in contemporary practice.

In 2025, the inaugural FIFA Peace Prize was awarded to sitting United States of America President Donald Trump, stressing the persistence of both the rhetoric of football for peace and its explicit political associations. The awarding of the prize follows a historic tradition of controversial sporting honours. The Olympic Cup is a prize awarded by the IOC since 1906 "to an institution or association with a general reputation for merit and integrity which has been active and efficient development of the Olympic Movement".[18] In 1939, the Olympic Cup was awarded to Kraft durch Freude, a Nazi organisation which arranged sporting events and encouraged tourism to Germany, and whose works explicitly aided rearmament.[19] Applying the language of peace and moral contribution to such recipients does not automatically demonstrate the corruption of an otherwise sporting ideal. Instead, such actions show how football, and sport more generally, has been produced within and used by the politics many had hoped it would transcend.

The histories traced through this study do not end in 1939. The meanings associated with pre-Second World War international football have since then continually evolved and been reinterpreted. New generations have forgotten certain episodes while adding significance and moral weight to others, as waves of reflections and revaluations take place.

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[17] "The Football Nations". *Blackwood's Magazine*, 492.
[18] Olympic Museum, "The Olympic Cup," *Olympic Museum*, accessed 2 January 2026, https://www.olympicmuseum.de/awards/olympic_cup.php#:~:text=The%20Olympic%20Cup%20was%20instituted,the%20Cup%20receives%20a%20reproduction.
[19] Ibid.

Some interwar football narratives endure today. In 2018, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reportedly sent the then UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson a photograph of the England football team performing the Nazi salute in Berlin in 1938, a response to the UK Government's criticism of the 2018 World Cup hosted by Russia.[20] The performance of the salute, framed by English officials at the time as a practical diplomatic concession, emerged eighty years later into a diplomatic row. Devoid of its context and deployed for provocative dispute, the incident illustrates how the history of football as well as the sport itself is politicised.

The further post-war growth of football, in Britain and across the world, has seen memory and knowledge of it be reorganised and analysed retrospectively. The complexity of these dynamics offers scope for a broader field of future research. This study has sought to understand where, how, and why British football tours to the continent functioned prior to the Second World War. It has shown that such tours operated in a contradictory form, often promoted as gestures of goodwill, while also sparking violence, protest, and political engagement.

What is yet to be understood is how the moments and memories of football across this period shaped new generations, and how these tours were understood in the post-war period. Examining how players, clubs, national associations, and broader communities on both sides of the channel have recalled their earlier footballing encounters offers a lens to examine the politics of memory in modern mass culture. Just as the football matches of the past were contested on the pitch, now so are memories of them. Reckoning with the past, whether by individuals or institutions, requires active engagement with the historical conditions under which football operated, and grappling with the fact that football never served as a refuge from politics, but as an adaptable form of it.

[20] "Exclusive: Russians taunt Boris Johnson with photograph of England football team doing Nazi salute", *Mirror*, 7 April 2018, accessed 2 January 2026, https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/russians-taunt-boris-johnson-photograph-12320768

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Hertfordshire Express
Holloway Press
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