Politics and the People's Game: Football and Political Culture in Twentieth Century Britain[1]

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Sports and politics – that particular juxtaposition has never gone down well with the performers, administrators and other patrons of sports. Today, few people believe and insist that sports and politics are separate entities, not belonging together, forever to be kept apart. It used to be otherwise; the Danish historian Hans Bonde recently published a study of the collaboration between the Danish sports authorities and the Nazi occupiers in wartime Denmark, legitimized by the notion of the dissociation of sports and politics, but in fact politicizing sports far beyond anything ever seen, before or after. In fact, Nazi Germany often played a part in putting what Lincoln Allison calls the myth of autonomy to the test. The Olympic Games in Berlin 1936 is a telling example, as is the football match between Germany and England in 1938, with the English side performing a Nazi salute before the match. In the British autonomy mythology, this has long been dismissed as an exception to the general rule, and it is precisely the stubborn resistance to accept sports, and specifically football, as an integrated part of the surrounding, politics-driven society, that is discussed in Matthew Taylor's article.

Taylor's concern, now that it no longer is a question of whether, is to find out how sports are connected to politics. Besides the most obvious expressions of state intervention into sports – such as legal regulation of sporting activities, state financial support, and provision of facilities and resources – and beyond the traditional perspective where football is seen as representing either a conservative or a radical outlook, the author is aiming for more controversial, complex and elusive intersections of football and politics. He studies three aspects of British political culture in particular: democracy and the alleged deference among Brits to political authority; popular and political attitudes to Europe; and notions of national and social decline. Matthew Taylor's article offers an instructive, exciting and learned social historical journey through twentieth century Britain, where football not only reflects, but also, in important respects, helps define and explain the surrounding society and its development.

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1   An earlier version of this paper was published as 'Football et culture politique en Grande-Bretagne' in Yvan Gastaut and Stéphane Mourlane (eds), *Le football dans nos sociétés. Une culture populaire 1914-1998* (Paris: Autrement, 2006), pp. 94-118. Many of the themes are dealt with at greater length in Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football, 1863-2005* (London: Longman, 2007 forthcoming).

Football in Britain has rarely been considered a vehicle for political activity in the same way it has in other parts of the world. While few would subscribe to the erroneous idea that sport and politics have no relationship with one another (what one writer has called the 'myth of autonomy')[2] historians of British sport have tended to emphasise the lack of obvious political involvement in the organisation and development of the game.[3] In common with most sports invented and codified in nineteenth-century Britain, football was born out of the values of amateurism and developed according to the principles of voluntarism. Such an approach emphasised the basic freedom of players, clubs and federations from state intervention and political control. For the ex-public schoolboys and Oxbridge graduates who populated the civil service and ran government departments, the politicisation of cultural activities such as sport was repugnant, contrary to the values of the British and the true meaning of sport.[4] This may have been how they did things in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia but not, it was argued, in Britain. The game's administrators concurred. Writing in 1935, FA secretary Frederick Wall outlined the main difference between the British and the continental attitude to football:

> Abroad, international sport has a political aspect. Football in England is not carried on for the purposes of playing a foreign country and gaining a victory. Football in dear old England is merely a sporting entertainment /…/ England regards international matches as a game, but continental countries look upon these matches as a test of strength, spirit and skill. Victory increases national prestige, and defeat is a sign of decadence. To them, success is vital.[5]

Setting to one side the fact that this in itself was a political statement – a defence of the British version of liberal democracy – few contemporaries would have disagreed. Those cases which did not fit this model of non-intervention, such as the famous Nazi salute given by the England team prior to a match with Germany in 1938, could be dismissed as exceptions to the rule.[6]

Recent research, however, has made it difficult to sustain the assumption that British football has historically been free of 'politics'. The question is now not whether but how the game has been intertwined with political issues. A useful starting-point is to reflect upon what John Hargreaves has categorised the three main modes of state intervention in British sport: legislative and legal controls on sporting activity; state patronage of sport; and the programmed provision of facilities and resources.[7] First of all, one can hardly ig-

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2   Lincoln Allison, 'Sport and Politics', in Lincoln Allison (ed.), *The Politics of Sport* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 17-21.

3   See, for example, Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 344-46.

4   See Richard Holt, 'The Foreign Office and the Football Association: British Sport and Appeasement, 1935-1938', in Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (eds), *Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport* (London: E & FN Spon, 1998), pp. 51-52.

5   Quoted in Peter Beck, *Scoring for Britain: International Football and International Politics, 1900-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), p. 30.

6   Dave Russell, *Football and the English: A Social History of Association Football in England, 1863-1995* (Preston: Carnegie, 1997), p. 123; John Hargreaves, 'The State and Sport: Programmed and Non-Programmed Intervention in Britain', in Allison (ed.), *Politics of Sport*, p. 248.

7   Hargreaves, 'The State and Sport', p. 243. For a useful adaptation of these categories, see Martin Polley, *Moving the Goalposts: A History of Sport and Society since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 20.

nore the impact of government legislation on recent football history. More than anything else it has been the problems associated with hooliganism which have provoked legislative responses, from the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act of 1981, which banned alcohol consumption at, and on the special trains to, grounds, to the Football Spectators Act of 1989, with its aborted membership card scheme, and then on to the Football Offences Act of 1991, 'the most notorious anti-hooligan measure' of all.[8] Legal intervention has taken many forms, often having profound effects on football's trajectory. In 1912 the Kingaby case confirmed the legality of the Football League's retain-and-transfer system, almost bankrupting the Players' Union in the process. Over fifty years later, in 1963, a High Court case brought by the Arsenal player George Eastham against his former employers Newcastle United led to the judgement that the transfer system was 'an unjustifiable restraint of trade'. Some historians see this as a pivotal moment in the game's history, ending years of effective player 'slavery' and changing the face of British football forever.[9] More recently, player violence, race and sex discrimination and even the disciplinary procedures of governing bodies have all been opened up to legal scrutiny. 'We have reached the stage', according to one expert, 'where just about every controversial incident in the game of football attracts a clamour for "a new law" to deal with it'.[10]

The patronage of football by the political elite has a long history in Britain. Some observers regarded the popularity of football as an obstacle to good order, encouraging workers to be ill-disciplined and lazy, but others increasingly saw it as an agent for social harmony, perhaps even social control. As the Conservative politician F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead) commented in 1911:

> What would the devotees of athletics do if their present amusements were abolished? The policeman, the police magistrate, the social worker, the minister of religion, the public schoolmaster and the University don would each /…/ contemplate such a prospect with dismay /…/ The poorer classes have not got the tastes which superior people or a Royal Commission would chose for them and were cricket and football abolished, it would bring upon the masses nothing but misery, depression, sloth, indiscipline and disorder.[11]

Sentiments of this kind may explain the tendency for politicians to become directors and chairmen of local clubs and to frequent the ground on match days. In Swindon, for example, the Unionist candidate Colonel Calley attended the County Ground regularly during the 1910 election year; the Labour MP A. V. Alexander's support of Sheffield Wednesday may have been less instrumental, given that he joined the supporters' club in the early 1930s but continued to attend matches during the 1940s. At the national level, leading politicians with little professed interest in football nonetheless attended important matches and

8   David McArdle, *From Boot Money to Bosman: Football, Society and the Law* (London: Cavendish, 2000), p. 80.

9   Steve Greenfield and Guy Osborn, *Regulating Football: Commodification, Consumption and the Law* (London: Pluto, 2001), pp. 75-83.

10   McArdle, *From Boot Money to Bosman*, p. xxviii.

11   Quoted in Tony Mason, 'Sport and Recreation', in Paul Johnson (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 123.

spoke about the game, if only metaphorically.[12] Long after Prime Minister Lord Roseberry had attended the 1899 FA Cup final, Harold Wilson went out of his way to be identified with England's 1966 World Cup victory, while Tony Blair has continued to publicly pronounce his understanding of 'the pride we all get in identification with our club or our national side'.[13] Similarly, the royal presence at the FA Cup final, beginning in 1914, together with the communal singing of the hymn 'Abide With Me', helped to define the occasion as a state ceremonial event rich with national symbolism and on a par with coronations or the opening of Parliament. Such political ritual represented, in Hargreaves' view, the incorporation of football into what E. P. Thompson originally termed 'the theatre of the great'.[14]

Finally, the work of Stephen Jones has done much to revise the received view of limited state involvement in the provision of footballing facilities.[15] Jones has argued that the continual emphasis on the voluntary tradition of British sport has led to historical neglect of municipal and central government funding. Building on the work of the voluntary National Playing Fields Association, established in 1925, which benefited from considerable public funding, the Physical Training and Recreation Act of 1937, with its associated National Fitness Council, provided a framework for the allocation of funds to local authorities and the wider encouragement of recreational sport. In just a couple of years, some £302,947 had been paid in grants to local authorities for the construction and maintenance of playing fields.[16] It is easy to dismiss such handouts as 'small beer'[17] but Jones argues convincingly that between the wars, and with state assistance, 'leisure was re-cast, if not transformed'.[18] The formation of the Sports Council in 1965, originally with the 'Advisory' prefix, was another important development, although it was, in Hargreaves' words, 'a typically British "non-political" form of intervention, similar to the BBC and other quasi-governmental organisations, an institution poised between state and civil society'.[19] Nonetheless, its resources grew considerably, from £1.58 million in 1968-69 to an estimated £21.03 million by 1981-82. The establishment of 'Football in the Community' schemes from the late 1970s was also important, not just because it led to new and improved facilities but also due to its linking of the elite and recreational sides of the sport.[20]

The discussion so far has focused on the relationship between football and the political in a relatively narrow sense. Yet historians have also recognised a more diffuse and subtle political dimension to the game. As Nicholas Fishwick has argued, football 'played an important part in the lives of people who voted, governed, were governed, fought wars, raised families [and] worked' which meant that it 'had to have implications that were in

12 Nicholas Fishwick, *English Football and Society, 1910-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 136-37.
13 Peter Beck, 'Politics', in Richard Cox, Dave Russell and Wray Vamplew (eds), *Encyclopedia of British Football* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 234.
14 Quoted in Hargreaves, 'The State and Sport', pp. 243, 253.
15 Stephen Jones, *Workers at Play: A Social and Economic History of Leisure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986);
16 Jones, *Workers at Play*, pp. 91-95.
17 Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 380.
18 Jones, *Workers at Play*, p. 198.
19 Hargreaves, 'The State and Sport', p. 255.
20 Jones, *Workers at Play*, pp. 202; Roger Ingham, 'The Fate of a Good Intention: The "Football and the Community" Schemes', in Alan Tomlinson (ed.), *Explorations in Football Culture* (Eastbourne: LSA Publications, 1983), pp. 53-71.

some sense political'.[21] For Dave Russell, 'it is inconceivable that something which drew the time, energy and money of so many people did not have ideological repercussions for some of them'.[22] The existing literature has tended to focus on football as the embodiment of either conservative or radical perspectives but this has taken us only so far. The remainder of this paper will focus on three contested aspects of British political culture – concepts of democracy and deference; attitudes to Europe; and notions of national and social decline – and assess the way in which football discourses over the twentieth century have reflected, or even at times fed into, these broader political debates.

The People's Game? Democracy and Deference

It has become something of a cliché to refer to football as 'the people's game'. James Walvin, the first serious historian of football in Britain, adopted the phrase for the title of his influential 1975 book while, for another writer, it conjured up a range of nostalgic images:

> the game's majesty revealed in sweeping views of massive crowds /…/ cup winning sides parading triumphantly through crowded streets in their home town; convoys of supporter-filled cars, flags waving, horns blaring, celebrating their team's triumph; small boys playing kick-about among the tenements and housing schemes of Glasgow or Liverpool or Manchester.[23]

Yet however well established and popularly accepted, the idea of the 'people's game' has rarely been seriously questioned or subjected to sustained criticism. The notion of 'the people' is an ambiguous and contested one in British social history. Patrick Joyce is one who has advocated its adoption as a more inclusive and universalising alternative to the category of class.[24] But in both general and academic usage the notion of 'the people' often overlaps with that of 'the working class'. There is an implication in the way it is used in the context of football that 'the people' in this sense refers not to the populace as a whole but a certain section of it – the ordinary folk, the lower ranks, the workers. The majority of those who played and watched football may have been drawn from these groups, but it was the mainly middle class administrators, directors and shareholders who controlled and effectively 'owned' the game. Even a self-consciously working-class club such as Woolwich Arsenal, which in its early years boasted significant numbers of skilled labourers among its shareholders and directors, was soon forced to go the way of so many other clubs by seeking the assistance of local patrons of the business community and the professions.[25]

There has been a tendency when faced with such evidence of the lack of working-class authority and autonomy in the organisation of 'their' game to resort to a rather crude model

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21 Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 136.

22 Russell, *Football and the English*, p. 114.

23 James Walvin, *The People's Game: A History of British Football* (London: Allen Lane, 1975); Stephen Morrow, *The People's Game?: Football, Finance and Society* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2003), p. 1.

24 Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

25 Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp. 37-43.

of social control. According to this view, scholars ought to reconsider the assumption that football was a workingman's game 'in anything other than a superficial sense'. Rather, in its professional guise at least, it operated as an instrument of bourgeois control, acting as 'a safety valve through which pressure generated by industrial capitalism could pass safely, without endangering the basic relationships of society'.[26] An alternative view is to see football as the people's game in the sense that it bore the stamp of working-class ideals and characteristics. The colour, noise and partisanship of the football terrace were all aspects of a developing popular football culture that stood in stark contrast to its public-school and bourgeois equivalent. It was the working class who 'made' football in this respect, transforming it from a 'school of moral instruction' to a form of 'popular theatre'.[27] Looked at in this way, football did indeed 'belong' to the working class: it could be said to have 'owned' the game 'in spirit if not in fact'.[28]

Writing in the early 1970s, the sociologist Ian Taylor took up this issue of the 'ownership' of football in his analysis of the relatively 'modern' phenomenon of hooliganism. Football before the Second World War, according to Taylor, was not only marked by close connections between the clubs and their surrounding communities but also by the obligations of directors, managers and players towards the fans. Perceived by supporters as a 'participatory democracy', the football club was a genuine 'club' in the sense that the views of those who entered through the turnstiles were given some degree of recognition and credence. The players, for their part, were considered as representatives of the supporters, expected to play and behave according to the masculine values of the subculture from which they sprang. At the very least, what was important was that the illusion of responsibility towards the supporters was maintained, often by virtue of the appearance of players at the latest pigeon race or in the local public house. This changed, in Taylor's view, as directors attempted to attract and promote the game to a new type of wealthy, middle-class leisure 'consumer'. The illusion of participatory control was undermined as football became increasingly commodified, professionalised and embourgeoisified, leaving the game's core working-class supporters marginalized and alienated. It was in this context that disorder and violence could be explained by Taylor as a form of 'resistance' to football's changing structure and values; a 'democratic response' to the supporters' loss of control of what had previously been 'their' game.[29]

What is of interest here is not so much Taylor's theory of hooliganism as his idea of football as a 'participatory democracy'. Some writers have dismissed as entirely speculative the notion that working-class fans ever viewed their clubs as 'participatory democracies' but this has tended to be based on English evidence.[30] In Scotland, by contrast, the activity of first 'brake clubs', and then formalised supporters' groups which met frequently with club officials, suggests a traditionally closer and more open relationship than existed

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26   Stephen Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen: The Origins of Professional Soccer in England* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1981), pp. 137,136.

27   Russell, *Football and the English*, p.71.

28   Stephen Jones, 'Working-Class Sport in Manchester Between the Wars', in Richard Holt (ed.), *Sport and the Working Class in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 80.

29   Ian Taylor, '"Football Mad": A Speculative Sociology of Football Hooliganism', in Eric Dunning (ed.), *The Sociology of Sport* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), pp. 352-77.

30   Richard Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game* (Oxford: Polity, 1999), p. 42.

south of the border.[31] Even where the club-supporter relationship was less developed, the idea of clubs as 'participatory democracies' nonetheless suggests a form of identification and attachment which many have seen as crucial in understanding the peculiarities of football support. For Taylor, control was initially exerted through participation in the club as much as domination over it. That football fans have traditionally considered themselves 'supporters' of a particular club rather than 'spectators' in a general sense is of course important. In this sense, they were indeed as much 'members' as 'customers' of football clubs.[32] But whether this was ever anything more than a symbolic form of membership is open to debate. Certainly, Russell has dismissed notions of popular control and ownership as 'too thin to carry any interpretative weight'. '"Real" power', he has argued, 'remained firmly in the hands of the propertied classes and the supporters exercised remarkably little influence.'[33]

Questions of control and ownership have remained central to contemporary British football history, especially since the game's so-called 'revolution' in the late 1980s and 1990s. Critics of the path taken by the British, and more particularly the English, game in the wake of the Taylor Report, the introduction of the Premier League and the massive injection of money from satellite television, have focused on the way in which a 'new' breed of director and fan transformed the established power relationships existing between the game's various stakeholders. In place of the so-called 'traditional' directors who viewed the club as a 'public utility' and his position as a civic responsibility came the 'new directors'; entrepreneurs who were interested in football purely as a profit-making business. Changes in the way football was consumed heralded the arrival of a new socially-diverse football audience alongside the mainly working-class 'lads' who had constituted the game's core support. Adorned in club merchandise and unversed in traditional styles of support, these were 'promiscuous consumers' willing to take their place in the new all-seater stadia and acquiesce to the free-market strategy of the new directors.[34] While some recent studies have challenged the notion of a complete transformation in the demographics and social composition of the football crowd, and identified greater continuity in the motivations of those who ran the game, there can be little doubt that the relationship of supporters to their clubs was considerably affected.[35] Indeed it was the sense of a loss of control over the game and its future trajectory – the feeling that football was being 'taken away' from fans in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster and the Taylor Report – that underpinned the emergence from the late 1980s of the independent fan movement and what one writer has called 'fan democracy'.[36] Key to this was the establishment of the Football Supporters Association (in 1985) on a national basis, Independent Supporters Associations

31 H. F. Moorhouse, 'From Zines Like These?: Fanzines, Tradition and Identity in Scottish Football', in Grant Jarvie and Graham Walker (eds), *Scottish Sport in the Making of the Nation* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 175, 177.

32 Taylor, 'Football Mad', pp. 361-62; Holt, *Sport and the British*.

33 Russell, *Football and the English*, p. 114.

34 Anthony King, *The End of the Terraces: The Transformation of English Football in the 1990s* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1998); John Williams, 'The "New Football" in England and Sir John Hall's New "Geordie Nation"', in Siegfried Gehrmann (ed.), *Football and Regional Identity in Europe* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1997), p. 244.

35 Dominic Malcolm, Ian Jones and Ivan Waddington, 'The People's Game?: Football Spectatorship and Demographic Change', *Soccer and Society*, 1, 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 129-43.

36 Adam Brown, 'United We Stand: Some Problems with Fan Democracy', in Adam Brown (ed.), *Fanatics!: Power, Identity and Fandom in Football* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 50-67.

at club level and the associated growth of independent football fanzines, providing fans with a forum to challenge 'modernisation' and organise resistance. While by no means disturbing the power structures of the 'new football' or the hegemony of the game's new ruling class, the success of a number of campaigns during the 1990s at club and national level did serve as an indication of the 'politicisation of football's fandom' and the potential power of supporters to influence the way in which clubs and associations were run.[37] More recently, the growth of supporter trusts (beginning at Northampton Town in 1992) designed to provide fans with a genuine say in the policies of their club, as well as the increasing role of supporter representatives on boards of directors, provide evidence of what might be considered the first steps toward the democratisation of football.[38]

Challenge and resistance to political structures has rarely been considered a defining characteristic of the British. In their famous 1963 study, the American political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba classified Britain as 'a deferential civic culture', in which allegiance to the establishment and the political system and respect for authority and leadership were widespread.[39] In some respects, football offers a characteristic example of British deference. Russell has written that supporters were (and are) 'too addicted to the game to threaten the structures that provide it'. Likewise, Adam Brown has argued that the centrality of football in British social life and the levels of emotional attachment and loyalty to clubs 'make it difficult for fans to challenge the running of the game'.[40] Even the behaviour of spectators during matches has been marked over the years much more by restraint and discipline than disorder and violence. The classic image of the English (if not the Scottish or Welsh) football crowd remains that of the first Wembley FA Cup final in 1923 when, according to popular memory, chaotic scenes caused by overcrowding were soon diffused when the king arrived in the Royal Box and a single policeman on a white horse cleared the pitch. Here football seemed to provide tangible evidence of the stable and orderly nature of British society and the respect reserved for authority and tradition.[41] As was the case with cricket, the general acceptance of football's power structure could be taken as evidence of the fundamental conservatism of the British working class.[42]

Yet this tells only part of the story. Critics of Almond and Verba have long argued that the authors overplayed the deferential nature of British political culture and neglected the evidence of widespread public cynicism. Distrust of parties, leaders and the establishment in general, as well as disillusionment with the political system and the way the country was run, have been evident for many decades, although this never amounted to an over-whelming desire for radical change.[43] In football, too, there has been a long tradition of

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37 Brown, 'United We Stand', p. 53.

38 Brian Lomax, 'Democracy and Fandom: Developing a Supporters' Trust at Northampton Town FC', *Soccer and Society*, 1, 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 79-87; Phil Frampton, Jonathan Michie and Andy Walsh, *Fresh Players, New Tactics: Lessons from the Northampton Town Supporters' Trust* (London: Football Governance Research Centre, 2001); Morrow, *People's Game?*, pp. 52-55.

39 Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (London: Sage, 1989 edition [1st published, 1963]).

40 Dave Russell, 'Associating with Football: Social Identity in England, 1863-1998', in Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti (eds), *Football Cultures and Identities* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 16; Brown, 'United We Stand', p. 54.

41 Russell, *Football and the English*, pp. 120-21.

42 On cricket's relationship with notions of deference and authority, see Jack Williams, *Cricket and England: A Cultural and Social History of the Inter-War Years* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 39-42.

43 Dennis Kavanagh, 'Political Culture in Great Britain: The Decline of the Civic Culture, in Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba (eds), *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), pp. 124-

cynicism, manifesting itself in criticism of the motives and actions of the game's authorities. From the 1930s popular newspapers such as the *People*, *News of the World* and *Daily Express* developed an irreverent anti-establishment approach to football reporting which often brought them into conflict with the clubs and associations.[44] Whether the exposure of financial corruption within football or the portrayal of directors and administrators as 'buffoons and museum pieces' actually affected the wider political attitudes of those who read the stories is of course impossible to judge. Russell has speculated that attacks on football's ruling class might have acted as a substitute for, or at times reinforced, radical action in politics or the workplace. The radicalisation of football 'workers' in the post-war years and the consequent abolition of the maximum wage and restructuring of the transfer system during the early 1960s could then be interpreted in this context as 'a victory for "progressive" forces over an established elite'.[45] But we need to be cautious here. By no means all resistance against the football establishment has been progressive and radical. While some scholars have defined football fanzines, for instance, as an important vehicle for 'cultural and political contestation', H. F. Moorhouse has pointed out that they could be myopic in vision and conservative in outlook, reflecting a strand of working class values which were essentially 'accommodative, defensive and parochial rather than being oppositional, radical and inclusive'.[46]

Splendid Isolation? British Football and Europe

There has been a tendency in the existing literature to present a rather one-dimensional account of British football's relationship with continental Europe. Most writers have stressed the isolation and introversion of the British game over much of the twentieth century. Alan Tomlinson put it thus: 'As the game took a grip on the world…Britain stayed at home'.[47] In many ways, football mirrored the 'splendid isolation' of British politics. The tendency to be suspicious of, and maintain a distance from, continental alliances was as marked at the headquarters of the national associations as it was at the Foreign Office, as was the sense of Britain's separation from and superiority to 'Europe'. British isolationism was manifest in the early history of the world governing body, FIFA.[48] Established in 1904 by representatives of seven European nations, FIFA was without British involvement for its first two years. Yet sensing that the new international body would be a permanent one, the British football associations finally joined in 1906, even proceeding to have their own man, Daniel

76; Richard Topt, 'Political Change and Political Culture in Britain, 1959-87, in John R. Gibbins (ed.), *Contemporary Political Culture: Politics in a Postmodern Age* (London: Sage, 1989), pp. 52-80; John Street, 'Political Culture – From Civic Culture to Mass Culture', *British Journal of Political Science*, 24, 1 (January 1994), pp. 95-113.

44 Fishwick, *English Football and Society*, pp. 101-04.

45 Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 103; Russell, *Football and the English*, pp. 153-54.

46 David Jary, John Horne and Tom Bucke, 'Football "Fanzines" and Football Culture: A Case of Successful "Cultural Contestation"', *Sociological Review*, 39, 3 (August 1991), p. 592; Moorhouse, 'Fanzines, Tradition and Identity', p. 190.

47 Alan Tomlinson, 'Going Global: The FIFA Story', in Alan Tomlinson and Garry Whannel (eds), *Off the Ball: The Football World Cup* (London: Pluto, 1986), p. 84.

48 See Pierre Lanfranchi, Christiane Eisenberg, Tony Mason and Alfred Wahl, *100 Years of Football: The FIFA Centennial Book* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), chapter 3; John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson, *FIFA and the Contest for World Football* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

Woolfall, elected as president. The British withdrew from FIFA in 1920 over the issue of how to treat the defeated wartime nations but rejoined in 1924, only to leave again in 1928 when disagreement surfaced over conflicting definitions of amateurism and the vexed issue of 'broken time' payments. The hauteur of the UK associations was illustrated in its letter of resignation, which rather patronisingly noted that as most of FIFA's member associations were of recent formation, they 'cannot have the knowledge which only experience can bring'.[49] A similar attitude was displayed in the British stance towards the World Cup: they rejected invitations to the first tournament in Uruguay in 1930, the second in Italy in 1934 and the third in France in 1938. Charles Sutcliffe, a leading figure in the Football League, dismissed the 1934 competition as 'a joke' and suggested that the British home internationals amounted to 'a far better World Championship than the one to be staged in Rome'.[50] Matches against 'foreign' sides were consequently accorded a low priority. Indeed Scotland waited until 1929 for its first match against non-British opposition and Wales did not play abroad until 1933.

Beck has argued that this strain of isolationism – 'based on a strong concept of Britishness, a belief in the fundamental superiority of British football, and the primacy of the domestic league programmes' – dominated the thinking of the football authorities in the period.[51] However, not every facet of British football culture was so aloof and anti-European. We should not overlook the less formal connections which many British clubs, coaches and players established and retained with the developing game abroad. Nor should we neglect the voices of the committed football 'Europhiles' who were interested in and knowledgeable about the overseas game and championed the notion of closer links with the continent.[52] That influential figures in British football kept more than an eye on events beyond the Channel is clear from the memoirs of the most successful manager of the inter-war era, Herbert Chapman, and journalists such as the former amateur footballer and *Athletic News* editor Ivan Sharpe, as well as the private archives of his predecessor James Catton.[53] Neither were leading figures in the national associations as parochial as they are sometimes portrayed. It is well known that Stanley Rous, who became FA secretary in 1934, was a dedicated Europhile who had been advocating closer contact with overseas football some time before he spearheaded Britain's return to FIFA during and after the Second World War.[54] But Rous's was hardly a lone voice in this respect. Even his predecessor Frederick Wall, the embodiment of the nineteenth-century amateur gentleman, who ran the governing body well into the twentieth century, was less prepared to dismiss international competition as an irrelevance by the 1930s.[55] The close links with the British game established by 'the presiding geniuses of European football in the 1930s', the Austrian manager and admin-

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49 FA Minute Books, Report of the Conference of Representatives of the Associations of the United Kingdom, 17 February 1928.

50 *Topical Times*, 18 March 1933.

51 Beck, *Scoring for Britain*, p. 102.

52 Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, *Moving With the Ball: The Migration of Professional Footballers* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 46-47; Tony Mason, 'Defeat of the Soccer Exiles', *BBC History Magazine*, 1, 2 (June 2000), pp. 33-36.

53 See Herbert Chapman, *Herbert Chapman On Football* (London: Garrick, 1934); Ivan Sharpe, *40 Years in Football* (London: Sportsman's Book Club, 1954). The James Catton Folders and Archives are held at Arsenal FC, Highbury Stadium, London.

54 On Rous, see Stanley Rous, *Football Worlds: A Lifetime in Sport* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978); Sugden and Tomlinson, *FIFA and the Contest for World Football*.

55 Mason, 'Defeat of the Soccer Exiles', pp. 33-34.

istrator Hugo Meisl and the Italian manager Vittorio Pozzo, also serve a corrective to the idea that having given the game to the world, Britain then bolted the door and ventured out only reluctantly.[56]

The British press, too, were rather more interested in continental football than is generally recognised. Matches between British national teams and foreign opponents, in particular, *did* matter to many. Much has been written about the significance allocated to England's tussles with the Axis powers during the 1930s and with Hungary in 1953-54 but these were hardly exceptions.[57] Press coverage of England's match against a 'Rest of Europe' eleven in November 1938, for example, revealed a range of attitudes towards 'European' football. Although the match was technically only a 'friendly' fixture arranged to celebrate the FA's 75th anniversary, the press took things rather more seriously. Ivan Sharpe's preview in the *Sporting Chronicle* framed the match as 'a test of world soccer supremacy' and urged the English players to regard the game as 'of more importance than a Cup Final'.[58] Frank Carruthers in the *Daily Mail* agreed that the match was of the utmost priority, because if 'Europe' was to win 'the significance of the performance will be sounded abroad at the expense of English football'.[59] Other reporters were equally convinced about the game's significance but less concerned about its outcome. John MacAdam, football correspondent of the *Daily Express*, was most dismissive of the opposition, although even his assessment was based on a comprehensive analysis of form, personnel and tactics rather than an uninformed appeal to assumed British 'mastery'.[60] Indeed, many previews of the match displayed an impressive awareness of, and respect for, continental football. Few papers felt it necessary to introduce the players of the 'Rest of Europe' as if they were unknowns. When the *Daily Express* published a special article on the Italian Olivieri, it portrayed him as the latest in a tradition (after Spain's Zamora and Austria's Hiden) of spectacular and showy but ultimately first-class continental goalkeepers.[61] Reflecting on England's 3-0 victory, the populist *People* saw the result as proof that 'we are still the best…footballers anywhere' but most responses were measured and circumspect. *Sporting Chronicle* felt that defeating a concocted team without a unifying sense of national pride was no cause for celebration and that a first-rate side such as Italy would have provided a much sterner test.[62] Even in victory, there was a recognition that British supremacy could no longer be taken for granted.

British attitudes to European football after 1945 were closely attuned with, but never identical to, broader political debates. In his recent study of post-war national identity, Richard Weight argued that the 1950s were marked by British hostility to the international game but there is little evidence to support this view.[63] The Football League may have been opposed to European competition, pressuring champions Chelsea to withdraw from the inaugural European Cup in the 1955-56 season, but the Scottish were keen and so too, it

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56 Bill Murray, *Football: A History of the World Game* (Aldershot: Scholar, 1994), p. 93.

57 See Beck, *Scoring for Britain* on the matches with Germany and Italy and a special number of *Sport in History*, 23, 2 (Winter 2003/4) on the England-Hungary match.

58 *Sporting Chronicle*, 26 October 1938.

59 *Daily Mail*, 26 October 1938.

60 *Daily Express*, 24, 25 October 1938.

61 *Daily Express*, 25 October 1938.

62 *The People*, 30 October 1938; *Sporting Chronicle*, 27 October 1938.

63 Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain, 1940-2000* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2003), p. 262.

seems, were the English clubs. Many had been playing mid-week floodlit friendly matches against overseas sides since the beginning of the decade, stimulating considerable press, radio and television interest in the process. The allure of European football was such that over 45,000 turned up at Stamford Bridge to watch a representative 'London' eleven take on its Barcelona equivalent in an Inter-Cities' Fairs Cup tie in May 1958. In Glasgow, 80,000 watched Rangers play Fiorentina in the first leg of the final of the new Cup Winners' Cup in May 1961 while 135,000 Scottish fans had packed into Hampden Park the previous year to watch a 'non-British' match: Real Madrid's famous 7-3 victory over Eintract Frankfurt in the final of the European Cup. By this point the Munich aircrash of February 1958 had already helped raise the profile of European football in the national consciousness. Weight thinks that the tragedy contributed to an anti-European mood in British sport, leading some to debate the benefits of involvement in future competitions.[64] Yet there were few signs of a retreat from Europe in the aftermath of Munich. More convincing is the view that it encouraged a growing recognition of the centrality of European competition to British clubs, players and supporters. After 1958, European football was increasingly seen as an end in itself, bound to domestic league and cup competition through widespread acceptance of the principle of entry into Europe on merit rather than by invitation or reputation. In a relatively short time, 'Europe' became the main goal of Britain's best clubs.[65]

The recent 'Europeanization' of British football, characterised above all by the importation of so many continental players and managers, thus represents an acceleration of established trends rather than a radical break from the past. The gaze of the most progressive figures in the British game has always been directed outwards, even if views of 'foreign' opponents were often dismissive at best, narrowly nationalistic or downright xenophobic at worst. Football in the twentieth century was part of a complex and contested political discourse concerning the meaning of 'Europe' and its proper relationship with Britain.[66] The game may not have offered a solution to the uncertainty of whether Britain was a part of Europe or not but its development increasingly suggested a position at the heart of the continent rather than detached and isolated from it. While football continues to be an obvious vehicle for national rivalry and division, Donald McNeill is surely right that, in the case of Britain at least, it has 'done as much as anything to engender the idea of a "Europe" in the popular imagination'.[67]

British Football and the Politics of Decline

Since its emergence in the late nineteenth century as an important facet of British popular culture, football has been bound up with notions of social and national well-being. It took some time to shake off the professional game's early associations with decadence and sordid commercialism but by the inter-war years English football, at least, was 'no longer out of favour with "public opinion" and seemed if anything to stand for much that was good

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64 Weight, *Patriots*, p. 263.
65 James Walvin, *The Only Game: Football in Our Times* (London: Longman, 2001), pp. 125-26.
66 See Piers Ludlow, 'Us or Them?: The Meaning of Europe in British Political Discourse', in Mikael af Malmborg and Bo Stråth (eds), *The Meaning of Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), pp. 101-24.
67 Donald McNeill, *New Europe: Imagined Spaces* (London: Arnold, 2004), p. 42.

in society'.[68] Football's post-1918 rehabilitation had a lot to do with its incorporation as a central aspect of national identity and culture, symbolised in England by the national team and the occasion of the FA Cup final and in Scotland by the annual match against the 'auld enemy'. The game's increasingly close connections south of the border with notions of tolerance, decency and other expressions of 'Englishness', previously the preserve of cricket, arguably reached their pinnacle at the 1953 FA Cup final between Blackpool and Bolton Wanderers. Before a live television audience, Stanley Matthews, the best-known and most well-respected player in English football, helped Blackpool come from behind to gain a dramatic 4-3 win and the first and only honour in his long career. The 'Matthews final' was not only a key event in sporting history but arguably a defining moment in the history of the English nation, reflecting the unity and consensus of its people and thus elevating the status of football higher than ever in the public mind.[69] For the eminent Scottish historian Christopher Harvie, football in its 'golden age' between the wars had become a crucial vehicle for a range of class, religious, gender and national identities and continued to define much that was distinctive about Scottish male popular culture in the post-war years.[70]

The alleged decline of British football from some point in the 1960s onwards has been much discussed by contemporary commentators and academics. In a brilliant exploration of the issue, Dilwyn Porter has shown how football contributed to a post-war narrative of 'declinism' which became essential to the way the British, and especially the English, were beginning to see themselves.[71] He dates this back to the national side's 6-3 home defeat by Hungary in November 1953, a match which decisively changed the relationship between football and English national identity. At a time when Britain was retreating from her empire and losing her political influence on the world stage, the England football team increasingly came to be regarded as an embodiment of the nation itself. As *The Times* observed in early 1955: 'The ordinary man finds the form of our professional footballers a more convenient indication of the state of the nation than all the economist's soundings'.[72] In the wake of the combined defeat by Hungary and the Suez crisis of 1956, there was a change in the way the England football team was perceived by public and popular press alike. Matches against foreign opposition were taken more seriously than ever before and 'winning became more important'.[73] It possibly also affected Anglo-Scottish relations, converting football 'from a shared leisure pursuit to the crucible of national tensions within the Union'.[74] England's victory at the 1966 World Cup did little to arrest perceptions of decline, serving only to raise expectations and make subsequent failure harder to bear. Porter

68 Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 146. On the criticisms of the early professional game, see R. W. Lewis, '"Touched Pitch and Been Shockingly Defiled": Football, Class, Social Darwinism and Decadence in England, 1880-1914', in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *Sport in Europe: Politics, Class, Gender* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 117-43.

69 Russell, *Football and the English*, p. 139. See also Martin Johnes and Gavin Mellor, 'The 1953 FA Cup Final: Modernity and Tradition in British Culture', *Contemporary British History*, 20, 2 (June 2006), pp. 263-80.

70 Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998 edition [1st edition, 1981])

71 Dilwyn Porter, '"Your Boys Took One Hell of a Beating!": English Football and British Decline, c.1950-80', in Adrian Smith and Dilwyn Porter (eds), *Sport and National Identity in the Post-War World* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 31-51.

72 Quoted in John Clarke and Chas Critcher, '1966 and all that: England's World Cup Victory', in Tomlinson and Whannel (eds), *Off the Ball*, p. 120.

73 Richard Holt and Tony Mason, *Sport in Britain, 1945-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 129.

74 Weight, *Patriots*, p. 260.

shows how the team's defeats through the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s were articulated by the press as symptomatic of a wider economic, political and cultural stagnation. Previewing a World Cup qualifying fixture against Italy in November 1977, Frank McGhee of the *Daily Mirror* noted that: 'The days when you could beat the drum for England and make bold fighting forecasts with some certainty of success have long gone.' In *The Times*, Norman Fox spoke of 'England's football poverty'. Defeat by unfancied Norway in September 1981 convinced the *Sun* that England was now 'the laughing-stock of the world', languishing amongst 'the banana republics of world football'.[75]

The discourse of decline extended beyond the fortunes of national teams. Decreasing attendances, poor behaviour on the terraces and the pitch, the growth of racism and manipulation by commercial interests were all put forward as evidence of football's deteriorating health. Academics were to the fore in raising these issues. In his 1981 book *Condition of England*, the political scientist Lincoln Allison mused over 'The State of the Game', concluding that it was 'less attractive and important than it used to be' and no longer held a central place in the nation's social and cultural life.[76] A few years later, in the aftermath of the Heysel stadium disaster of 1985, James Walvin published *Football and the Decline of Britain*, a powerful analysis of the malaise into which the national game had sunk.[77] Once considered a reflection of the qualities of British innovation and character, football had by the 1980s come to epitomise many of the ills of urban Britain. Resistance to modernisation had left clubs in a state of financial crisis and grounds in a dangerous state of ill-repair. Players had been elevated to the status of stars but were more likely to cheat, moan and misbehave than ever before. Most seriously, hooliganism seemed to combine most of Britain's major social problems, such as organised violence, drunkenness and racism. The public affection accumulated by football over much of the twentieth century seemed to have been lost in the course of a decade or two. What had been 'the people's game' was now, according to the *Sunday Times*, 'a slum sport, played in slum stadiums, watched by slum people'.[78] As Walvin argued, many such assessments of the game and its perceived decline were misleading and simplistic, devoid of any detailed understanding of recent social change.[79] Ultimately, however, even football's most ardent defenders could not avoid the fact that the game had changed for the worst and perhaps come to symbolise national decline more potently than anything else.

Since football's more recent rehabilitation, notions of decline have often been expressed through an increasing sense of popular nostalgia for the game's past. One aspect of this has been football's incorporation into what David Lowenthal termed the 'heritage crusade'.[80] Over recent years supporters have not only been able to buy official histories of their club – they have also been able to visit museums dedicated to past glories of the club and its players and to eat in restaurants or sit in stands named after former players and directors. In an age of extensive refurbishment and relocation of stadia, clubs are naturally anxious to retain a link with the past, even if this is less a matter of preservation than of reconstruction to suit the needs of the present. Such developments illustrate not only an awareness of

75   Quoted in Porter, 'English Football and British Decline', p. 45.
76   Lincoln Allison, *Condition of England: Essays and Impressions* (London: Junction, 1998), p. 134.
77   James Walvin, *Football and the Decline of Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).
78   Quoted in Russell, 'Associating with Football', p. 22.
79   Walvin, *Football and the Decline of Britain*, pp. 6-14.
80   David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

the commercial value of the past but also 'a plea for history (or nostalgic versions of it) to remedy contemporary problems'.[81] Similarly, analyses of the growth of the 'new football writing' from the early 1990s noted its fascination with a perceived 'golden age' of football some twenty years earlier (or more specifically, during the childhood of the writer). Fanzines such as *When Saturday Comes* and books like Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* essentially mythologised the past, comparing it favourably with the degenerating 'modern' game.[82] Recollections of a perceived 'golden age' are hardly the preserve of football writers. It has been argued that the 1990s Conservative government's calls for a return to the 'basic values' of the past in the sphere of education, family life and religion are not dissimilar from the periodic evocation of the spirit of 1966 whenever England is eliminated from a major tournament.[83] A perfect example of such nostalgic evocations of football's past came when the legendary Stanley Matthews died in February 2000. Obituaries constructed Matthews as a committed and higher skilled artist and a modest gentleman who played fairly and with scrupulous honesty. As a symbol of 'the past', Matthews was then contrasted with the assumed inadequacies of the present. 'How different he was', wrote the *Daily Mail*, 'from the flamboyant, flashy, highly paid stars of today, with their Ferraris and celebrity wives.' For the *Sun*, he was 'a true hero, whose dedication and lifestyle shame the overpaid, overrated players of today'.[84] For the British press, Matthews' death highlighted much about changes in football and society more broadly, reinforcing assumptions of the moral decay and decline of both.

Conclusion

The relationship between what people thought about football and what they thought about other aspects of social, cultural and political life is inevitably hard to pin down. The appeal of the game for many who played, watched and read about it was precisely that it seemed to be an autonomous world without any obvious link to the arena of work or the realm of politics. It was a sanctuary to which they could escape from 'real life', at least for ninety minutes each week. Of course, as a product of the forces of modernisation and capitalist development, football could never be structurally separated in this way but this did not prevent some assuming that it might be. A more logical response was to draw parallels between football and society. It used to be common to think of sport as a basic reflection of broader issues, in Jeff Hill's words 'a cultural by-product of other (implicitly more important?) economic and social forces'.[85] According to this view, the structures, relationships and values of a given society were simply imprinted upon football. The game was thus 'determined' by society. Yet this approach will no longer do. Increasingly there has been an emphasis on the capacity of cultural forms such as football to bring about social and politi-

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81 Russell, 'Associating with Football, p. 22.
82 King, *End of the Terraces*, pp. 180-83.
83 Chas Critcher, 'England and the World Cup: World Cup Willies, English Football and the Myth of 1966', in John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson (eds), *Hosts and Champions: Soccer Cultures, National Identities and the USA World Cup* (Aldershot: Arena, 1994), p. 87.
84 Quoted in Garry Whannel, *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 103, 105. See also Matthew Taylor, 'Football, History and Memory: The Heroes of Manchester United', *Football Studies*, 3, 2 (October 2000), pp. 24-41.
85 Jeff Hill, 'British Sports History: A Post-Modern Future?', *Journal of Sport History*, 23 (1996), p. 16.

cal change in their right and some recognition that the relationship between the 'social and economic base' and the 'sporting superstructure' is circular and not unidirectional. As Russell argued: 'the football ground has been an important arena within which individuals can learn lessons about social and political roles and identities which are then carried "back" into other aspects of daily life'.[86]

Taking this perspective, it does not seem at all fanciful to suggest that football has played an important historical role in defining and refining British attitudes to democracy, decline and continental relations. Issues concerning the control and ownership of football are as old as the game itself and recent debates over football's democratisation have clearly tapped into wider anxieties about the failures and inadequacies of the British political system and the effective disenfranchisement of large sections of the electorate. Likewise, football has undoubtedly been important in helping the British to work through their attitudes towards 'Europe'. In football, the debate over whether Britain should be a part of Europe or not has been long resolved but the tensions inherent in that relationship certainly have not. Recent concerns over levels of immigration, the 'influx' of asylum seekers and the possible impact of these on 'British' identity have often been conflated with similar fears over the 'domination' of foreign players and coaches in the domestic game. Most obviously, football's 'health' has long been used as a convenient barometer of the state of the British (or the English, Scottish and Welsh) nation. Even since the game's revolution in the late 1980s and early 1990s, decline and degeneration, shot through with a dose of nostalgia, have been recurring themes for football observers and commentators. And just like British society, British football seems to be in a perpetual state of crisis and imminent collapse. Football, in this sense, has been fundamentally 'political' throughout the twentieth century, providing the casual observer as well as its supporters and followers with a reservoir of feelings, beliefs and images with which to interpret and make sense of everyday life.

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