

THE ORIGINS OF SOCCER

The origins of football are lost in antiquity, though it is known that Roman soldiers occupying Britain played a game in which two approximately equal teams tried to force an inflated ball over a line marked on the ground at the rear of their opponents. This game, 'harpastum' was probably the ancestor of modern Association Football.

During the middle ages a wild and brutal kind of game was played in which whole towns or villages took part, the object being to drive a ball from one district to another by fair means or foul. This riotous game earned the censure of the law and was prohibited by seven monarchs between 1200 and 1650.

Nevertheless it survived and exists today in the Shrove Tuesday matches at Alnwick, Northumberland, and elsewhere, but football as a team game, with some kind of rules, originated not in these free-for-alls but in the great public schools. Unfortunately each school developed its own form of the game, with its own rules and variations in the size of pitch, number in team, etc... Football developed into a 'handling' and 'hacking' game in the country schools, which played on soft turf, and into a 'dribbling' and 'passing' game in the stone-flagged playgrounds of the London schools.

However, in spite of the failure of two attempts at Cambridge, in 1848 and 1862, to draw up uniform rules, football became popular outside the schools and universities. Clubs started at Sheffield (1855), Blackheath and Hallamshire (both 1857); the Old Harrovians began in 1859 and the Forest Football Club, as well as the Wanderers, in 1860.

The need for uniform rules became imperative as these and other clubs began to attract increasingly large numbers of spectators. Accordingly in October, 1863, a meeting of representatives of the chief clubs and schools playing football was held at the Freemason's Tavern, Great Queen Street, London, with the object of forming an association 'to establish an official code of rules for regulating the game.' In the following month the Football Association came into being and on December 1st, 1863, a set of rules was agreed and adopted.

On the question of the legality of 'hacking', however, there was an open division of opinion and those clubs - led by the Blackheath which upheld 'hacking' withdrew from the Association and later formed the Rugby Union. From that time onwards, one of the prime functions of the Association has remained the same; to act as a coordinating body for the game, so that the various clubs may play against each other under agreed rules and conditions.

By the end of the 19th Century Association Football had become popular throughout Europe and in 1904 The Federation Internationale de Football Association was founded through the agency of M. Robert Gurin, its first President. The F.A. gave its adherence in the following year but, after various disagreements, in 1928 the four British Associations left F.I.F.A. over the payment of amateurs from time to time lost from work. It was not until after the Second World War that the F.A. rejoined.

In 1903 the Football Association was registered as a limited liability company with a capital of £100 in 2,000 shares of 1s. each. But no shareholder has ever made any payment to the company for his shares or received any dividend or bonus. An important part of the F.A.'s revenue is drawn from a percentage of the gate money taken at its Cup and International Matches.

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