

Global Football: Introduction

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CRITICAL analyses of sport have proliferated in recent decades, forging a vibrant new interdisciplinary field called sport studies. Scholars coming from diverse disciplinary backgrounds – ranging from political economy of sport to film studies – have demonstrated the impact of sports, games, and physical cultures on the societies that host them. An older genre of sport studies that tracked developments internal to particular sports, leagues, or institutions has been joined by studies that interrogate how sport reflects wider social and cultural beliefs and how those social and cultural forces define what constitutes sport.

Historians have had a strong presence in sport studies. Even a cursory glance at the academic journals devoted to sport history suggests the dynamic state of the field: *International Journal of Sport History*, the *Journal of Sport History*, *Sport History Review*, *Sport in History*, and *Sporting Traditions*. A genealogy of Canada's contribution to this list reflects the transformation of sport history. *Sport History Review* was founded in 1970 as *Canadian Journal of Sport History*. Originally dedicated to tracing Canadian athletic traditions and accomplishments, the journal now publishes articles pertaining to sport across the globe, assessing physical cultures, sporting practices, and athletic events ranging from the “big four” of professional sports to recent innovations like Ultimate Frisbee and to the way sport is related to cultural forms such as film and social formations such as national identity.

No sport has attracted as much historical attention as modern football, the game North Americans know as soccer. In early nineteenth-century Britain, traditional forms of folk football gave way to the modern game in which the ball was moved by feet, not hands. It was played on a standard sized field and was organized by local associations (the short form of “Assoc.” is believed to be the origin of the term “soccer”) which codified the rules of play. Historians quickly recognized the social forces at work in these developments. Traditional folk football – played over the course of days through town streets and on village squares with players joining and leaving the game as they took breaks for pints of beer at the local pub – no longer suited the new industrial order of enclosure, regulated public spaces, and disciplined work routines. It is true that modern football was designed by and for middle-class and elite men who as “amateurs” could use the game to express their self-discipline, hard work, and respect for rules. But, by the end of the nineteenth century, British men (and some women)

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of all classes were playing the modern game, often choosing football over other sports like cricket and rugby which had also been codified, standardized, and thus modernized.¹

In his path-breaking study *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, Allen Guttman argued that modern sport was defined by seven characteristics: secularization, equality (on the field, if not always in getting access to the field), specialization, rationalization, bureaucratization, quantification, and record-keeping.² Following Guttman's framework, we can see that, over the course of the nineteenth century, a range of sports "modernized." "Traditional" sports like rugby, baseball, boxing, and horseracing all codified their rules and standardized the size of the field of play and formed organizations to oversee leagues and results, while "newly created" sports like baseball, badminton, and basketball followed suit. Football was not alone in making the transition to a modern game, but it was certainly the first to modernize and the first to "go global." By 1900, football had been taken up throughout continental Europe, in Latin America, and in newly colonized parts of Africa. The game was often introduced by British sailors, railroad workers, merchants, imperial civil servants, or educators as they waited in port for their ship to sail or tried to convince young boys to attend the local mission school.³ Other times, football moved across national boundaries when men who had visited or been educated in Britain took the new game home with them.⁴

Once introduced, football quickly became swept up in processes of commercialization, the growth of consumer culture, and intensification of nationalism. Football had a presence on the front lines of the First World War; it was used by Mussolini to legitimate fascism in 1930s Italy; it emerged as a symbol of national pride in Ghana's independence movement; it was a way for prisoners in South Africa's Robben Island Prison to challenge the legitimacy of apartheid rule.⁵ Football has inspired acts of bravery and violence, of racism and gender exclusion. It has inspired brilliant films and compelling journalism. As a recent review article points out, "There were more than nine hundred books about soccer published in the English language in 2010 – more than about gridiron football and more than about basketball and baseball combined."⁶

Global attention to football intensified in the twenty-first century when FIFA – the sport's international governing body – announced that the 2010 championship, the World Cup, would be held in Africa, with South Africa hosting. Given

1 For an excellent history of football, see David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football* (London: Penguin, 2006).

2 Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978 and 2004).

3 See, for example, Laura Fair, "Football and Leisure in Urban Colonial Zanzibar" in Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Cassandra Rachel Vency, eds., *Leisure in Urban Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003).

4 Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sport and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

5 Chuck Korr and Marvin Closc, *More Than Just a Game: Football v. Apartheid* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

6 Benjamin D. Kisle, "Three Ways of Writing Soccer," *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Spring 2012), p. 157.

the significance of this decision, York University faculty members from History, African Studies, and Women's Studies organized an international conference on the theme of "Global Football: History, Gender, Nation." Held in December 2009, six months before the World Cup kicked off in South Africa, the York conference brought together scholars from around the globe and internationally recognized soccer journalists to share research on the meaning of global football. The papers included in this theme section of *Histoire sociale / Social History* were inspired by that conference.

Papers presented at "Global Football" paid particular attention to sport and nation, interrogating the intersection of football and nationalism, and exploring how football worked across national boundaries. The article by Carl-Gustaf Scott included here examines how and why the supporters of Djurgårdens Athletic Association football team – the hooligans who comprised *Djurgårdens Fina Grabbar* (DFG) or Djurgårdens Fine Lads – served to import the "English disease" of fan violence into Swedish sports in the 1980s and 1990s. Stéphane Mourlane's article analyses the effect of Italy's 1982 World Cup victory, tracing the relationship between football and Italy's political culture over four decades. Stanislas Frenkiel, in a later contribution, tackles the theme of athlete migration from the global north to the global south – echoing a theme that received extensive discussion at the York conference – through his careful investigation of the experiences of four generations of Cameroonian football players who played professionally in France.

These articles illustrate some of the fascinating ways in which sports history contributes to and challenges our understanding of social and cultural history. They reflect the range of possibilities inherent in studying football as a social and political event, as a sport with its own internal dynamics but also with important connections to broader social and cultural forces. While sport history has done an excellent job of speaking to wider social and cultural processes, social and cultural history has been much slower to recognize the significance of research in sport studies or to integrate history of sport into their analysis.⁷ As one recent commentator noted, for all the great work being done in the field, sport history, and sport studies more generally, remain isolated from discussion of wider social processes.⁸ This is evident in history textbooks, where sport might be included as a "special interest" feature or sidebar for illustration. Sport as an active social force is rarely discussed. Including these papers on Global Football in *Histoire sociale / Social History* permits social and cultural historians a window on the compelling research being undertaken by sports studies scholars.

7 For an excellent Canadian example of a study that integrates sport and the social, see Gillian Poulter's *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture and Identity in Montreal, 1840-85* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009).

8 This point is made effectively by sport historians Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young in their "Sport in History: Challenging the *Communis Opinio*," *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 37, no. 12 (Spring 2010), pp. 5-17. They argue that "sport history as such features relatively insignificantly in the broader historical agenda and, where it has been given consideration by mainstream historians, detail is sometimes so shrunken or condensed that the significance of sport is underplayed or misrepresented" (p. 6).