

# THE REAL MADRID HANDBOOK



A CONCISE HISTORY OF REAL MADRID

RAB MACWILLIAM

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# INTRODUCTION

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‘Spain is the problem, and Europe is the solution.’

*José Ortega y Gasset*

‘Real Madrid is the most important thing that happened to me, both as a footballer and as a person.’

*Zinedine Zidane*

## **‘Spain is different’**

Although rough-and-ready versions of the game had for centuries been enjoyed across the world, football – as we know it today – was first codified and developed in England during the second half of the 19th century.

The game quickly spread across the world, and it was introduced to other countries by sailors, travellers, workmen and students. In Europe, today’s leading footballing nations were eager enthusiasts for the game and were establishing football clubs by the early years of the 20th century. However, out of all the major European countries which have embraced this most appealing of games, the story of football in Spain is the most complex and remarkable.

In Spain, one must consider football – as with many aspects of Spanish culture – within the context of the country’s historically divisive, frequently contradictory and singularly confusing history. It is one which has, over the centuries, permeated and shaped all aspects of Spanish life in ways with which few European countries can identify.

Only 70 or so years ago, the country was regarded as a pariah state: an authoritarian regime, internally disputatious, perilously close to bankruptcy, and internationally tolerated but widely ignored. Today, Spain is a prosperous and unitary country, a member of the EU, and recognised globally as a nation equal in status to all other European countries. Spain's complex history has been mirrored by its arrival in the highest echelons of world club football, and few clubs have been as internationally influential and dominant in the game as have Real Madrid.

In the book I cover the story of the club – from the early 20th century years, through their progress in the domestic cup and league, the Republic, the Spanish Civil War and its repressive authoritarian aftermath. I then relate how the stunning success in European football competition of the exceptional Real Madrid side of the mid-1950s to the early 1960s was one of the factors which helped to ease Spain's integration into Europe.

Although the development of mass tourism, and its associated socio-economic liberalisation, led to the gradual decline of Francoism and the stigma of the bloody Spanish Civil War, the growing awareness of the country's footballing talents – in particular, those of Real Madrid – generated a wide appeal across the continent and contributed to the change in the perception of Spain and its acceptance into the wider world. Since then, Real Madrid have been, and today remain, at the forefront of Spanish football's rise to prominence as one of the most skilful and dominant countries in the European – and, indeed, in the global – game.

Over the following pages I offer a necessarily brief but, I hope, informative and entertaining account of the club's origins and development, the games, players, incidents, personalities and much else which have contributed to Real Madrid's contemporary status as one of the world's leading and best-supported football clubs.

I hope you enjoy reading it.

*Rab MacWilliam*  
*July 2022*





## Why Madrid?

Throughout its 'Golden Age' in the 16th and most of the 17th century, Spain was one of the most powerful countries in Europe and far beyond. The country's rise to dominance had been achieved mainly by its twin policies of extensive colonisation, particularly in Latin America, and formidable naval strength.

Internally, however, the country was an unco-ordinated, fragmented, frequently mutually hostile and constantly suspicious assembly of small kingdoms and regions. In the eyes of its rulers, it required firm control. When one of these rulers, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, abdicated in the mid-16th century, his son Philip II became King of Spain.

In 1561, Philip moved his court to the small town of Madrid, with its population of under 20,000, which was in Castile and which he then declared to be the capital of Spain. Until that point, other than its 600–1,000m-high *meseta* (the Castilian Central Plateau) having served as a useful lookout point between the Christian North and the Islamic South, this settlement, surrounded by forests and mountain ranges, possessed no obvious qualifications for such a role. It also lacked a harbour, its river the Manzanares saw few passing boats, and its temperature varied between freezing in winter and relentless summer heat.

However, for Philip II, Madrid had the overriding benefit of its location in the centre of Spain. By selecting Madrid as the home of his court and, therefore, as the capital of the country, he was attempting to show no favour to particular areas and to ensure the equal status of all the troublesome regions within Spain.

From now on, Spain was to be controlled from and by Madrid.



## Madrid in the 21st century

Today, almost 500 years later, Madrid has a population of around 7 million people and is a very different place from that small, unobtrusive settlement. The city has become Spain's most densely populated region, and it is the country's economic, financial and diplomatic centre. Much has happened over the years in this quarrelsome country, but Madrid remains, as it was in Philip's vision, the heart and capital city of Spain.

There is much that can be, and has been, written about the city's history but, this being a football book, I will restrict myself to the game. The 20th century gave birth to a number of football clubs in Madrid, and several have stood the test of time and continued, since their inception, in various divisions in the national league.

These include Rayo Majadahonda, Alcorcón, Leganés, Getafe, Rayo Vallecano and the city's 'second' club Atlético Madrid. In recent years, in particular, Atlético, under Diego Simeone, have again become a leading national club; Getafe, Leganés and Rayo Vallecano have tended to follow the *equipo ascenseur* ('elevator team' or 'yo-yo' club) model; and the first two seem content with their lower-division status.

However, there is one other club in the city whose origins, history and international fame eclipse all others in the capital, in the country and in European football generally. That club is, of course, Real Madrid.



## ‘Los Blancos’

Known to millions of fans as ‘Los Merengues’, ‘Los Blancos’, ‘Los Vikingos’, ‘La Casa Blanca’ and similar friendly nicknames, but referred to by supporters of rival clubs in rather less affectionate terms, Real Madrid are nonetheless the best-known and most successful club in world football.

(In this book, I refer throughout to the club as ‘Real’, unless this creates ambiguity, which is when I use the full name. I also refer to them and other clubs in the plural, as this is a conversational convention and recognises that clubs are a collection of many players and other members.)

Since they were formed 120 years ago, Real have won their national league a record 35 times and claimed Spain’s national cup on 19 occasions. In the European Cup/Champions League they can boast an unequalled 14 trophies, as well as numerous other European and global awards. In the year 2000, Real Madrid were honoured by FIFA – the organisation which governs world football – as the ‘Club of the 20th Century’.

But what were the origins of this footballing giant?



## Real kick off

The first football club to be formally established in the city of Madrid was called, unsurprisingly, the Madrid Football Club.

In 1897, a team calling itself Sociedad Sky Football, usually known as 'La Sociedad', began to play on Sundays in the city. Sky were the sporting outlet for a new organisation – the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (Free Institute of Learning) – which had been formed as a liberal, secular and pro-Enlightenment counterpoint to the conservative views and strict Catholic orthodoxy which until then had dominated Spanish life and culture.

The Sociedad Sky captain was a 23-year-old British businessman, Arthur Johnson, who believed that football could be a positive force in challenging the deeply entrenched, class-ridden system which had for centuries enchained so much of the country. Johnson was also an enthusiastic, knowledgeable football trainer, an exceptionally good player and a pleasant fellow, all of which helped to cement his reputation as 'un Inglés muy simpático'.

In 1900, several members left Sky to set up a new club, Nuevo Sociedad de Football, which was in 1901 renamed Madrid Football Club and was under the direction of one Julián Palacios. Palacios is claimed by Real as their first president, but Nuevo Sociedad were then still an informal gathering of football enthusiasts rather than a legally organised institution.

Other dissidents who joined Madrid FC included brothers Juan and Carlos Padrós, who were born in Barcelona but had moved to the capital as children. They ran a clothes shop, located a few hundred yards to the south of today's Santiago Bernabéu Stadium. Their Catalan connection, however, is curiously absent from the Real official records. After a 1902 restructuring –

and to complicate matters further – Sky also changed their name to New Foot Ball Club.

Eventually, in the late afternoon of Thursday 6 March 1902, a meeting was held in a back room of the clothing shop. The company was established as a legally constituted entity, a board of directors was elected, and Juan Padrós became the first formal president of Madrid FC, the forerunner of Real.



The Real Madrid team in 1902. *Alamy*



## Coronation Cup of 1902

Such was the mass appeal of the new sport of football that, by the early 20th century, other clubs were already being established across the country.

The first official club was Recreativo de Huelva ('El Decano' or 'The Dean'), instituted in 1889 by employees of the Rio Tinto British mining community in Andalucia. In 1898, FC Barcelona arrived on the scene, closely followed by Athletic Club Bilbao in 1901. With the advent of Madrid FC the following year, what were to become known as the 'Big Three' Spanish clubs – Athletic Bilbao, Barcelona and Real (at that time Madrid FC) – were eagerly awaiting Spain's first official football tournament.

This national competition took place on 13/14 May 1902 at the Madrid Hippodrome, only a couple of months after Madrid FC's formation. Held to commemorate the coronation of King Alfonso XIII, it was named the Coronation Cup. However, from the following year it became Spain's first annual national football competition, the Copa del Rey (King's Cup), until the arrival of La Liga in 1929. The Copa del Rey today remains the national annual knockout competition in Spain.

The Coronation Cup was the first opportunity for these new clubs to test themselves in competition against other clubs and regions. Five clubs turned up: Madrid FC, Foot Ball Club Barcelona, Club Español de Foot Ball (another Catalan team), Vizcaya (mainly Athletic Bilbao plus a few other Basque players) and New Foot Ball Club.

The Cup also witnessed the first game between Barcelona and Madrid FC, a confrontation which was to become known as 'El Clásico'. Barcelona, a more experienced side, won 3-1, with Arthur Johnson's goal for Madrid FC ensuring

that a British player scored Real Madrid's first-ever official goal. The competition was won by a strong Vizcaya team who beat Barcelona 2-1 in the final.

The Cup was regarded by spectators and players alike as a successful venture. Extra wooden stands had to be installed in the Hippodrome to accommodate the larger-than-expected crowds, while the quality of the football was impressive. Madrid FC had shown they could hold their own against other top regional clubs, and bullfighting now faced a growing challenge to its historical role as the most popular Spanish 'spectator sport'.