



THE PEOPLE'S GAME

JAMES WALVIN

TRANSWORLD
BOOKS

About the Book

At the beginning of the twentieth century, soccer was widely accepted as the most popular game in the western world. In the space of a few decades, it had become the best-supported team game in Britain, watched and played by more boys and men than any other sport. Yet here was a game with strong traditional folk roots and a history that stretched back to the late Middle Ages. In the course of the nineteenth century, football was transformed, mainly within the British public schools, to become the codified and disciplined game of urban working men. The passion for the game spread from one town to another, a passion that, though familiar today, was new in the years after 1870. Thereafter, the game rapidly spread to much of the world: to Europe, South America and a host of other societies.

This book tells the story of the rise of this remarkable British game and the way it became the game of the masses across the world. In the wealth of literature about football published in recent years, no other book provides so concise and colourful an account as *The People's Game*.

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THE PEOPLE'S GAME

The History of Football Revisited

JAMES WALVIN

Introduction

The People's Game Revisited

In an early history of sports in England, Joseph Strutt made the bold claim that:

In order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the Sports and Pastimes most generally prevalent among them.

For all its exaggeration, such a claim would receive warm support from a range of modern scholars. Time and again, sociologists have regarded sports as a lens they can hold up to particular societies and see in it a refraction of deeper social patterns. Indeed it would be hard to think of any modern society where sport does not occupy a central and influential role, not merely in the way local people seek their pleasures, but more especially how they see and define themselves. Contemporary evidence is abundant, readily available and ubiquitous; we are assailed, in print, on the radio and television, with images, discussion and analysis about modern sports. Those who do not enjoy sports are often driven to distraction by the cacophany of sporting noise and the blur of athletic imagery which permeate British life. Major sporting events, of every imaginable sort, characterise the weekly, seasonal and yearly calendar. For the house-bound sports lover, it is delight; an endless parade of games, matches, races, tournaments, Tests, and contests. Beamed from the far ends of the earth, bounced from circling satellites, the skills and strengths of the world's greatest sportsmen and

women provide a display of sporting pleasures on a scale and with an intensity and coverage which was unimaginable a mere generation ago. But for those who do not like sport (and it is hard for sports lovers even to comprehend that such people exist), it is a source of irritation and annoyance. The powerful men in charge of the media seem to assume that people the world over enjoy sport; enjoy watching it, listening to it or reading about it.

It is one of the great, and largely unnoticed, curiosities of this global fascination with sports that a host – perhaps even a majority – of the world’s most popular sports (athletics, the Olympics, football and cricket) have their origins deep in British history. Even those games which took local root and flourished in distinctively local form (for example, American or Australian football) had cultural roots which could be traced to Britain. But of all the world’s major sports, few can rival football – soccer – for ubiquity, for the numbers who play (on dirt patches and slum streets the world over), for the armies who watch it and for the passions the game inspires. It is, quite simply, a game played by more people – mainly men – and watched by more people than any other.

It is difficult to dispute the figures. No other sporting event – not even the Olympics – attracts such colossal audiences as soccer’s World Cup. The language, folk-memory, heroes and stars of this remarkable game are universal, serving to unite (and periodically to divide) millions of people who would otherwise have little in common. Football is a universal, powerful force. Yet it is also a very British institution; a game fashioned from particular British circumstances and spread around the world by the British. It is a game born of British circumstances, forged by British history; given its form, its nature and its purpose by the changing patterns of British life. It is, then, a game with its own rich and revealing history. But more than that, it is a game which throws light

on the unfolding patterns of British life, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The history of football is interesting in itself, but, more revealing still, it provides a unique entrée to British society in the recent past. Yet for a very long time indeed the significance of football went largely unnoticed.

* * *

When I wrote the first version of this book, twenty years ago, I was keen to stress how little serious attention and academic research had been devoted to the history of football – and to the history of sports in general. There seemed a huge gap between the obvious and undeniable importance of sports, at any point in the western world over the past century, and the failure of historians to rise to that interesting challenge. Now, twenty years on, the position has changed fundamentally. Then, the difficulty was locating the data; now it is knowing how to keep abreast of the profusion of literature, and how best to make sense of the sometimes highly specialised material. In less than two decades there has been a prodigious output of serious work, acknowledging the game's proper importance, and helping to locate the role of sport within its defining social context. Much of what I wrote in the early 1970s has simply been superseded by this long-overdue and welcome turn of events.

Curiously, it was this richness and profusion of scholarly literature which convinced me that there is still a place for the type of book I sought to write in *The People's Game*: a crisp and concise volume, which brings together current findings in a style which is accessible to a wider readership. This revised version – greatly rewritten, though maintaining the original structure – has set itself that same task. What follows is not a scholarly book, but it could not have been written, in its current form, without the efforts

of a number of researchers, whose findings appear in the bibliography.

Rewriting an old book has not been an easy task. Like the historiography of the game, the author too has changed. But I have thought it best to try to stick to the original tone and form of the book; to maintain the existing structure and write to my old brief. But what follows is a very different book; it is not simply a reprint. While keeping the same overall structure, each individual chapter is different, trying to keep older relevant material, but updating it and recasting it in the light of recent findings. I have, in brief, sought to keep the best of the old book and align it with the best of the new scholarship.

Twenty years ago I could confidently preface my book with the remark that sports have failed to make much of an impact on historiography; that football in particular had 'failed to find an adequate place in written history'. Today, that claim is simply untrue. Month after month, excellent scholarly books and articles come flying off the presses – quite apart from that voluminous and important cottage industry of local, amateur, fan-based literature. The two traditions – scholarly and antiquarian – co-exist comfortably together. And this is quite apart from the amazingly profuse world of journalism and fanzines (now measured in their thousands) which feed the apparently insatiable demand for printed words about the story of football.

What follows, then, is an effort – revised and in a new format – to bridge the gap between scholarly professionals and a broader readership; to tell an important story, to tell it crisply, untrammelled by scholarship yet acknowledging the crucial work of colleagues without whom it could not have been written. This book looks at the history of football; at the game which by the early twentieth century was widely recognized throughout Britain as the people's game. By the end of that same century, its claims to the same status were even stronger. No longer primarily the

game of British people, football was now the game of people the world over.

1 Pre-Industrial Football

Numerous forms of informal or regulated games in which balls were kicked around and handled by opposing teams were a common feature of pre-industrial society. From the late Middle Ages onward, in town and country, the evidence for social history is peppered with references to footballing incidents – sometimes bizarre, always colourful and frequently tragic. Until the emergence of a recognizably modern urban society in the early nineteenth century, forms of football remained a common denominator of male social behaviour and a continuing theme of popular recreation. The origins of the game (or games) are shrouded in mystery, though historians of football have spent an inordinate amount of time seeking them. Such a task is unrealistic and unrewarding (despite the scope offered by historical study of the game), for games of football were ubiquitous, spontaneous and traditional. The killing of animals, for example, provided people with bladders, unusable for most other purposes but ideal to inflate and play with.

Even before we have evidence for early games in Britain, games of football had been recorded in a host of other civilizations. A Chinese writer, Li Yu (AD 50–130), wrote eulogies to the local game, designed to be hung on the goal posts:

A round ball and a square goal
Suggest the shape of the Yin and the Yang.
The ball is like the full moon,
And the two teams stand opposed;
Captains are appointed and take their place.
In the game make no allowance for relationship

And let there be no partiality.
Determination and coolness are essential
And there must not be the slightest irritation for failure.
Such is the game. Let its principles apply to life.

How far a similar game existed in classical Greece and Rome is unclear. Curiously, ball games played little or no role in the development of the Olympic Games in Greece, where interest focused on wrestling, boxing and athletics. Ball games were considered the preserve of children and women and had no role in the classical conventions of male athleticism, itself shaped by military needs and the adoration of certain forms of fitness. Even some of the earliest claims for the existence of the game in Britain remain unsubstantiated, though Nennius wrote in the ninth century of a 'game of ball' in Britain. Between 1170 and 1183, however, William Fitz Stephen, biographer of Thomas à Becket and witness to his death, offered an early account of a possible game of football in a description of London.

After dinner all the youth of the City goes out into the fields for the very popular game of ball. The scholars of each school have their own ball, and almost all the workers of each trade have theirs also in their hands. The elders, the fathers, and the men of wealth come on horseback to view the contests of their juniors, and in their fashion sport with the young men; and there seems to be aroused in these elders a stirring of natural heat by viewing so much activity and by participation in the joys of unrestrained youth.

From the first, here was a game played by younger men and watched by their seniors. Equally, many of the earliest references are concerned with the game's physical toughness and violence, and the frequent threat which it posed to the life and limb of players and spectators and to the peace and property of the neighbourhood. From the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries, football was to appear in legal records, court cases and contemporary denunciations as a violent game; a cause and occasion of social unrest in which personal and collective scores could

be settled. It was a game of indeterminate numbers, unspecified time and local conventions, in which marauding bands of young men tested their strength, enjoyed themselves and displayed their prowess in the pursuit of a ball. At its worst, it was a game which at times came perilously close to testing to the limits the social control exercised by local and national governments.

It was, above all, a tough, often violent game. Personal injury and even death characterized many of the early references to football. Had there been no such incidents, the games would, and presumably did, go unrecorded. In 1280, for example, 'Henry, son of William de Ellington, while playing at ball at Ulkham on Trinity Sunday with David le Ken and many others ran against David and received an accidental wound from David's knife of which he died on the following Friday.' A similar fatality occurred 50 years later, in 1321, which resulted in Pope John XXII granting a dispensation to William de Spalding, a canon, for his role in the accident. 'During the game at ball as he kicked the ball, a lay friend of his, also called William, ran against him and wounded himself on a sheath knife carried by the canon, so severely that he died within six days.' Violence and accidental death haunted the game for centuries; sometimes footballing quarrels spilled over into mayhem after the game. Injuries of a less serious nature were commonplace. John Hendyman remembered an incident in 1425 because 'he played with other companions at football, and so playing broke his left leg'. One of the posthumous miracles allegedly worked by Henry VI in the fifteenth century was on William Bartram of Caunton near Newark, who 'was kicked during a game, and suffered long and scarce endurable pain, but suddenly recovered the blessing of health when he had seen the glorious king Henry in a dream'. Not surprisingly, contemporaries were often appalled at a game which habitually led to such injuries. It was a game:

in which young men, in country sport, propel a huge ball not by throwing it into the air, but by striking and rolling it along the ground, and that not with their hands but with their feet. A game, I say, abominable enough, and, in my judgement at least, more common, undignified, and worthless than any other kind of game, rarely ending but with some loss, accident or disadvantage to the players themselves.

Quite apart from the injuries to players, medieval observers were more alarmed by the wider social unrest caused by football. The game was simply an ill-defined contest between indeterminate crowds of youths, often played in riotous fashion, often in tightly restricted city streets, producing uproar and damage to property, and attracting to the fray anyone with an inclination to violence. Understandably, regular efforts were made to control it just as, in the thirteenth century, there had been efforts to control tournaments, for similar reasons. In 1314, for instance, a proclamation of Edward II complained of 'great uproar in the City, through certain tumults arising from great footballs in the fields of the public, from which many evils may arise'. Through succeeding centuries, riotous crowds (of players rather than spectators) continued to test the precarious ability of government to maintain law and order. In 1576 a group of artisans in Ruislip 'with unknown malefactors to the number of a hundred, assembled themselves unlawfully and played a certain unlawful game, called football, by reason of which unlawful game there arose amongst them great affray, likely to result in homicides and serious accidents'. Fully three centuries after the proclamation of Edward II, football in the City of London continued to cause 'great disorders and tumults' (1615) as it did across the length and breadth of the country, from Devonshire to Manchester, from Worcester to Northumberland.

The game proved most troublesome when played in towns. In Maidstone in 1656, John Bishop, a local apothecary, played football in the High Street, 'to the

disquiet and disturbance of the good people of this Commonwealth'. Similarly in Manchester, in 1608 and 1609, 'a companye of lewde and disordered persons using that unlawful exercise of playinge with the footbale in ye streets of the a said towne breakinge many men's windows and glasse ...' Games of football were played across the face of the nation, in urban and rural settings. When played on open or common land, football was unlikely to cause the problems created when it was played in towns. Threats of damage and fears for social tranquillity lay behind the frequent protestations against the game by men in authority. And their fears were regularly reflected in attempts to ban or limit the game by monarchs or local authorities.

When played in towns and cities, few doubted what the consequences would be. If the results of football matches, then as now, were always in doubt, it was nonetheless predictable that damage, violence and chaos would ensue, as the game surged through streets, into buildings, through rivers and local ponds, until the contestants tired or reached a particular goal. A game at Hitchin in 1772 saw the ball 'drowned for a time in the Priory pond, then forced along Angel Street across the Market Place into the Artichoke beer-house, and finally goaled in the porch of St Mary's Church'.

Some of football's worst excesses took place in games which from the sixteenth century became a feature of Shrove Tuesday. On that day excessive outbursts of popular exuberance came to symbolize the last fling of human frailty before the onset of the austerities of Lent. It may well be that this 'carnival' spirit of pre-industrial Shrove Tuesdays, similar in kind to that enjoyed today in parts of Southern Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America, provided the ruling elites with a safety valve for the escape of dangerous tensions from below. In a world which lacked effective policing systems, and in which the control of men

in authority was often uncertain and tenuous, public turbulence, even in the pursuit of pleasure, was a volatile and potentially threatening force. To allow the common folk to have their day, to permit them to rule the streets and public space, through their boisterous enjoyments, if only for a day, was to turn the world upside-down. But such outbursts were permitted on the strict understanding that the *status quo* returned the following day. Games played on Shrove Tuesday seemed to fit this pattern, and from the sixteenth century onward they were synonymous with a flurry of communal, turbulent pleasures; animal sports, cock-fighting – and football. The cultural habits of the people were, however, shaped by local forces; their pleasures and games tended to be specific and very parochial. Shrove Tuesday games often differed enormously from one place to another. In their turn, local games spawned their own distinctive customs. In Dorset the football was provided by the last man to have been married; in Glasgow local shoe-makers supplied the ball. In London, footballing fraternities were sufficiently well organized by the 1420s to hold football dinners. The games, predictably, often led to violence, but, so quickly did the game sink its roots as a folk-custom, that attempts to prohibit Shrove Tuesday football were likely to cause as much unrest as the game itself. Yet such local ‘village’ games often had complex rules and conventions. Too often they have been seen simply as incoherent, turbulent outbursts. In places, their rules were as complicated as modern games. They were part of a much broader popular culture which grew from religious, agricultural, seasonal and generational roots. Games took place between the married and the unmarried, on certain religious days, or at key moments in the local agricultural cycle.

Among the best-known Shrove Tuesday football games were those played in Ashbourne and Derby. In Ashbourne the game, played by two teams consisting of anyone who

lived in the town, surged between 'goals' three miles apart. The teams tunneled through crowded streets before fanning out into an open brawl in a nearby stream. Innumerable attempts were made to prosecute the players and to transplant the game into remoter, less vulnerable places, but order and regulation were only finally imposed in the twentieth century. The similar contest in Derby, a contest between the parishes of St Peter and All Saints, plagued generations of local law officers, and gave birth to the term a local 'derby'. This 'coarse sport' threw up its footballing heroes and more than its quota of 'black eyes, bruised arms and broken shins'. A local historian commented acidly in 1790, 'I need not say that this is the delight of the lower ranks, and is attained at an early period.' In keeping with the unrestrained traditions of popular footballing violence, the Derby game claimed its share of victims. In 1796 John Snape was killed, 'an unfortunate victim to this custom of playing at Football at Shrove Tide; a custom which ... is disgraceful to humanity and civilisation, subversive of good order and Government and destructive of the Morals, Properties, and very Lives of our Inhabitants'. Consequently, determined attempts were made to outlaw the game but such prosecutions were, again, doomed to failure by the strength of popular resistance. Indeed prosecutions for Shrove Tuesday footballing incidents continued through the late nineteenth century and into the present century. In Derby and other parts of Britain, football was regularly denounced and proscribed, but nonetheless continued to survive because of its deep popularity among ordinary people. It had in fact become a folk-custom. Folk games littered the face of pre-modern Britain. Many of them survived to the present century; many more thrived longer than historians traditionally recognized. In Scotland, for example, the Old Handsel Monday football match, played on the Roman Camp at Callander, was described in 1853 as a 'custom of

immemorial usage'. Folk football had extensive and popular roots throughout Scotland.

Throughout the history of folk football, from its beginnings to the development of the modern game in the nineteenth century, official attitudes to it have often been marked by distrust and suspicion. Where it was seen to serve a special purpose, football could be tolerated - within strict limits. More often, however, folk football was a game seen to be in need of careful control and limitation.

From the fourteenth century onward we know of a battery of laws, proclamations, edicts and regulations against football which regularly issued from monarchs, governments and local authorities, all compounded by informal though influential denunciations of the game. But to understand such continuing hostility on the part of successive governing and propertied classes, to appreciate fully the fears of government about the mass leisure pursuits and recreational outbursts of the lower orders, we need to probe behind these laws and regulations and try to assess the strains placed upon the fabric of society by the apparently volatile forces of certain popular recreations.

The history of football before the nineteenth century could be written in terms of the attempts to suppress it. London, for example - always a sensitive complexity of social problems for English governments - witnessed regular impositions against local games from 1314 onwards. In that year, as Edward II went north to fight the Scots, football and other tumultuous games were banned in the city. The ban was repeated in 1331 and again in 1365, when football was considered to be interfering with more useful pursuits, particularly archery. This same motive inspired a similar interdict against football in 1388. In both cases the emphasis on 'useful' pastimes was ostensibly dictated by military needs. Unhappily for successive governments, the bans on football continued to be ignored and had to be reinforced, again, in 1410 by a fine of 20s

and six days' imprisonment. Four years later, however, Henry V introduced a further proclamation ordering men to practise archery rather than football. Such prohibitions seemed to fail for the basic reason that they were attempting to uproot a simple and attractive pastime which had already established itself as an aspect of social life for young males in the capital.

The exigencies of defence, however, remained a prime concern of governments and dictated their response to various sports. A statute of Edward IV in 1477 noted that 'no person shall practise any unlawful games such as dice, quoits, football and such games, but that every strong and able-bodied person shall practise with bow for the reason that the national defence depends upon such bowmen'. Outlawed again by Henry VII in 1496, football nonetheless remained sufficiently popular to require repeated preventive legislation by Henry VIII. One of his statutes remained on the books until 1845.

London was not alone in seeking to ban football. A number of provincial towns enacted prohibitions against local games. In Halifax, in 1450, men were forbidden to play on pain of a fine of 12d; four years later the fine had to be increased by 4d. Leicester, taking its cue from Parliament in 1467, levied a fine of 4d on local footballers, but the order had to be revived again in 1488. The game was similarly banned in Liverpool in 1555 and, in 1608-9, in nearby Manchester. In the latter, despite the ban, so troublesome was the game that in 1618 special 'football officers' were appointed, but still in 1655, 1656 and 1657 new orders were issued against it.

Objections to the game were varied and complex. Often they were very local. There were, however, a number of objections which recurred from one place to another. Concern about damage and personal injury (and, in the earlier cases, concern about military skills) clearly help to explain a great deal of formal alarm about folk football. But

the problems posed by the game were often of a more fundamental order. The game appealed primarily to young, healthy men whose vigour and collective boisterousness could not easily be contained by a society which lacked effective police forces or similar agents of social control. In London, for example, the apprentices – traditionally radical groupings, always willing to test the resilience of national and local governments – were often the chief cause of footballing incidents. By the reign of Edward III the game had gained great popularity among the apprentices, and their street games were directly responsible for a number of legal prohibitions. One (fictional) apprentice complained, in a play of 1592, that his master ‘will allow me not one hour for sport, I must not strike a football in the street, But he will frown’. Then – as now – the game provided apprentices with a perfect way of happily wasting their working hours. As late as the eighteenth century, footballing apprentices frequently disrupted London life.

I spy the Furies of the Football War:
The Prentice quits his Shop, to join the Crew,
Increasing Crouds the flying Game pursue.

Football clearly offered an ideal excuse for a crowd to collect – and a young, excitable, moody crowd at that. Apprentices, moreover, were no ordinary crowd. Overworked, exploited and generally harbouring a range of grievances, they formed a frequently disaffected body of young men, living close to each other in the same areas of the city and thus easily in touch with each other. They posed a regular threat of unruliness and often erupted into outbursts of radical agitation. Not surprisingly, they were readily recruited for football, especially for matches on Shrove Tuesday. On that day, apprentices’ (and in other areas, rural workers’) outbursts became an accepted annual institution. But as long as such spasms could be restricted to infrequent holidays, the social forces

unleashed could be tolerated. But such popular pleasures were strictly on condition that matters returned to normal on the following day; the world, upside-down for a day, was expected to right itself within 24 hours. Yet the history of football suggests that nothing could be taken for granted. The fact that it was a game against which legal enactments and prohibitions continued to be implemented points to a game which was, for centuries, often uncontrolled and spontaneous, sometimes threatening, and always a matter of unease for men worried about the problems of civil order and social stability.

It would be easy to dismiss the alarm of contemporaries as an exaggerated response to popular rowdiness, but pre-industrial society was a delicately balanced order in which the maintenance of the peace fell to an informal collection of vested interests and prominent individuals. The uncertainty of social control was an ever-present factor in the minds of the governing orders, certainly until the nineteenth century when the advance of urban society recast both the nature of the population and the machinery of regulation available to the government. Social unrest in pre-industrial society was easily precipitated; food prices, military impressing, religious passions and plain hunger frequently sparked off public disturbances. Football, with its robust teams and its mayhem, like many other apparently non-political and innocent phenomena, could easily become the spark for a wider disturbance.

With the exception of violence, perhaps the most recurrent complaint against football was that it violated the Sabbath. To a degree this was inevitable; for many ordinary people Sunday was the sole day of rest. Football on Sunday (and on other religious days) came in for frequent ecclesiastical criticism. In 1572 the Bishop of Rochester demanded its suppression. At Chester in 1589, Hugh Case and William Shurlock were fined 2s for playing football in St Werburgh's cemetery during the sermon. Four years

later, Richard Jeffercy of Essex was charged with having 'procured company together and plaid at foot-ball in Hackwell, on Easter Monday, in the Evening Service time'. At the Essex Quarter Sessions in 1599, Thomas Whistock of White Notyle was accused 'with nyne other of his fellows the XXVth day of February in the XLY yere of her Ma/jes/^{tis} rayne being the sabaothe did play at an unlawfull game called the fote bale wheron grew bludshedd contrary to her Ma/jes/^{tis} peace'. In 1609, twelve men were prosecuted in a similar vein, at Thirsk. A year later men were fined in Bedford for simply watching football on Sunday. At Guisborough in Yorkshire in 1616, a man was prosecuted for organizing a banquet for footballers on a Sunday. Despite such frequent prosecutions, men continued to use their day of rest for football and a multitude of other recreations. In 1688 ten men were prosecuted at Richmond in Yorkshire for playing football during divine service. Condemnation of such activities was the usual reaction, but there were exceptions. The Revd Thomas Robinson, vicar of Ousby in Cumberland, made use of football, 'It was his common practice, after Sunday afternoon prayers, to accompany the leading men of his parish to the adjoining alehouse, where each spent a penny and only a penny; that done, he set the younger sort to play at football (of which he was a great promoter) and other rustical diversions.'

Such active clerical support for football was to remain exceptional until the nineteenth century, when church ministers came to appreciate that the game was enjoyable and offered a useful entry to working-class life. Ironically, in 1722 at East Looe in Cornwall footballing diversions on the Sabbath saved many lives, for 'during the usual time of Divine Service, there happened such a violent Hurricane, that a great part of the Steeple of the Church was blown down; which would have done very considerable Damage to the Parishioners had they been at Church: But they

happened to be luckily at a Foot-ball Match, by which means their lives were probably saved’.

At the heart of this clash between popular recreations and defenders of the Sabbath (and other holy days) lay the complicated story of Puritanism, though in fact complaints against sports in general and football on the Sabbath in particular, predate the emergence of the forces of Puritanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The frequency of these later Puritan-inspired attempts to curb Sunday recreations is as revealing about popular recreation as about Puritanism itself. Earlier claims that the Puritan embargoes of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked a new departure in British history by driving out the last vestiges of traditional pleasures hinge largely upon the prosecutions of Sunday sports. Such prosecutions, however, had, as we have seen, been commonplace long before, and all we can usefully deduce from the evidence is that prosecutions became more common under Puritan direction. As we might expect, the games – including football – continued as before. Because of the Puritan presence, it is claimed by Brailsford that sport came ‘nearer to being a political issue than at any other period in our history’. The reason was straightforward: the breakdown of parliamentary government in the seventeenth century produced more frequent attempts by the Court to interfere directly into the details of everyone’s lives, an intervention which stemmed in part from a concern for social stability. Paradoxically, the result of this royal initiative was a conjunction of interest between the far-from-Puritan early Stuarts and local Puritans, to intervene against unruly Sunday sports which many had come to regard as their ancient and rightful prerogative. But Puritan antipathy towards sports, and the unease of James I about football in the early years of the seventeenth century had firm historical precedents, for they belonged to the traditional resistance to popular recreations. Indeed

the edicts against football in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were remarkably similar to the Puritan objections of the next two centuries. From the sixteenth century, denunciations of the game became more common (partly also because the printed word became more widespread), more bitter and riddled with the fears traditionally expressed by the privileged towards the activities of their social inferiors. In 1531, for example, Sir Thomas Eliot thoroughly denounced football, which was, he claimed, a game 'wherein is nothinge but beastly furie and exstreme violence whereof proceedeth hurte and consequently rancour and malice do remaine with them that be wounded; wherefore it is to be put into perpetual silence'. But perhaps the most withering attack on the game came in 1583 in Phillip Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses*, provoked in part by the continuing violations of the Sabbath. According to Stubbes, men amuse themselves 'in foot-ball playing, and such other devilish pastimes'.

Any exercise which withdraweth us from godliness, either upon the Sabaoth or any other day, is wicked and to be forbidden ... For as concerning football playing, I protest unto you it may be rather called a friendly kinde of fight than a play or recreation, a bloody and murdering practise than a felowly sporte or pastime. For dooth not everyone lye in waight for his adversarie, seeking to overthrowe him and picke him on his nose, though it be uppon hard stones?... So that by this means, sometimes their necks are broken, sometimes their backs, sometime their legs, sometime their arms; sometime one part is thrust out of joynt, sometime another; sometime the noses gush out with blood, sometimes their eyes start out and sometimes hurt in one place, sometimes in another.

Nor was Stubbes' feeling peculiar to Puritans. James I, though anxious to uphold traditional sporting rights against the intrusions of Puritans, allowed no place for football in the education of his son Henry, debarring from the Court 'all rough and violent exercise, as the football; meeter for laming, than making able the users thereof'.

The Puritan denunciations of football were part of a more broadly based drive to secure the Sabbath; to ensure that the Lord's Day was preserved for godly matters. It took its most extreme form, of course, in the Puritan settlements in New England, and under Cromwell's godly government. But even in those regions of America where the godly ruled, they could never purge the people of their desire to play traditional games. And few games were more traditional than football. Yet it would be wrong to think that only the devout took exception to popular recreations. The turbulence of football, its common indiscipline and the passions it provoked left many others uneasy. Many men of property and enterprise, anxious to promote social calm as well as economic well-being, thought that here was a game which simply got in the way. Though the formal trappings and vernacular of Puritanism had rapidly waned by the late seventeenth century, its objections to football - and other sports - survived among those keen to see society change. Traditional folk football was disliked as much by eighteenth-century social improvers (and dissenters) as it had been by seventeenth-century Puritans. To the latter, it was an offence to God's name (and a desecration of his day); to the former it was an obstacle to social and material advancement.

Until the nineteenth century, open acceptance of folk football was rare among men of property and influence. Rarer still was the enthusiastic support for the game shown by Richard Mulcaster, headmaster of Merchant Taylors' (1561-86) and later of St Paul's School (1596-1608). In retrospect, Mulcaster's support for football seems to have been well ahead of its time, closely resembling the sporting attitudes of the 'muscular Christians' in the nineteenth-century public schools. In fact his views were perfectly in accord with sixteenth-century (especially Italian) humanism. Mulcaster appreciated the social and physical benefits of organized sports, proposing a game with smaller

teams, an impartial judge – and no violence. Under careful supervision, football would provide:

much good to the body, by the chiefe use of the armes. And being so used, the Footeball strengtheneth and brawneth the whole body, and by provoking superfluities downward it dischargeth the head, and upper parts, it is good for the bowells, and driveth downe the stone and gravell from both the bladder and kidneies.

Mulcaster conceded that the British version, for all its popularity, was ‘neither civil, neither worthy of the name of any traine to healthe’. The inspiration for his belief in the healthy potential of football was drawn not from British but from Italian football, *calcio*, which had developed into a highly disciplined and controlled recreation and spectator sport by the sixteenth century. Mulcaster, like other humanists, turned for his evidence on this, as on a number of other political and social issues, to sixteenth-century Italian sources which, in concentrating on the local game, stressed the social and physical virtues of football. Mulcaster was, moreover, a prominent educationalist working within a grammar-school system which did much to create wider opportunities for a more articulate and self-confident gentry. He seems to have been in a strong position to convert other schools to his humanist views on recreation and to encourage them to attend to the physical well-being of their pupils. Unhappily, Mulcaster died in poverty and obscurity and there seems little evidence that the pupils in the grammar schools (from the social groups to which Puritanism made its strongest appeal) were much affected by his ideas.

Football seems to have been more securely based among the young men of Oxford and Cambridge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There, college and university records are littered with references to the popularity of football among undergraduates. Inevitably, and like the traditions of folk football to which it was related, football at

Oxford and Cambridge created problems – for players and local officials. It was a game in need of regulation. At Cambridge, there is record of scholars playing football as early as the 1570s, and in the 1580s the Vice-Chancellor ordered students to play ‘Only within the presincts of their several colleges, not permitting any stranger or scholars of other colleges or houses to play with them or in their company.’ Such regulations proved as ineffective as other legislation we have encountered, and in 1595 the Vice-Chancellor ordered ‘That the hurtfull and unschollerlike exercise of Footeball and meetings tending to that ende to from henceforth utterly cease (excepte within the places severall to the Colledges, and that for them only that be of the same Colledge without noyse or outcry ...)’.

The game in Cambridge was as notable for its vigour as the game traditionally played by the common people. Not surprisingly, further detailed regulations were introduced, in 1632, to control football within the university. In common with the outside world, football at seventeenth-century Cambridge was sometimes played on feast-days – with the predictable results and attempts at regulation. In 1660 a football match took place ‘where several disorders were committed, and affronts offered to the officers of the University ...’ In September of that year it was alleged of an undergraduate that ‘he was in a companie that did in a Riotous manner throw clotts or stones at the deputy Proctor, and M^{rs} of Arts who came to prevent scholars from playing at football, and other disorderly meetings there ...’.

Such offences led to heavy fines and, in extreme cases, to imprisonment. Nonetheless, by the early seventeenth century, football at the university seems to have established itself as an undergraduate recreation in its own right. It may have been helped by the popularity of a form of football, ‘camp-ball’, which was played nearby in East Anglia.

At Oxford there seems to have been no such particular local traditions. But within the university the game was nevertheless well represented during the same period. Football was explicitly forbidden at Oxford in 1555 (some twenty years before the first ban in Cambridge). By 1584, however, it had become apparent that 'diverse ministers abidinge in the universities, especial nonresidents, so use open plaigne at football and maintininge of quarrelles to the great discredit of this universitye' that more stringent regulations had to be introduced. But students still continued to be attracted to the game. In 1607 'the schollars of Oxford at a match of football burned the furnesses of Bullington Green contayning 3 acres or thereabouts'. In 1636 the heavy-handed rule of the Chancellor, Archbishop Laud, challenged the physical recreations of Oxford students by ordering that 'no scholars of any condition (and least of all graduates) are to play foot-ball, within the University or its presinct (and particularly not in the public streets and places of the city) whether alone by themselves, or in company with townsmen'. The Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 led to a relaxation of the more severe restrictions and atmosphere which had characterized Cromwell's government. Even so, the Oxford statute against football continued to be enforced against student footballers.

By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, football - impromptu or ritualized - had become a notable aspect of popular cultural life. Foreign visitors, those barometers of social life who often registered phenomena which went unnoticed by locals, frequently commented on this, by now distinctively British pastime. A Frenchman in 1698 noted many such games. 'En hiver, le Footbal est un exercise utile et charmant. C'est un ballon de cuir, gros comme la tête et rempli de vent; cela se belotte avec le pied dans les rues par celui qui le peur attraper; il n'y a point d'autre science.' A correspondent in the *Spectator* of