

# SALUTE!

The Inside Story of England's Own Goal  
at Berlin's Olympiastadion



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## ‘MASTERS OF WORLD FOOTBALL’

JUST WHO ruled the world? English patriots believed they did. At least they ruled over more than a quarter of the planet, the largest empire in history. As a bonus, these men of the British Empire took their ball games across the globe. All agreed at the height of empire, whether fan, player or coach, just one country was the master of world football. It was England.

This rather arrogant assessment of English football’s worth on the world stage will come as no surprise to disgruntled fans from the Celtic nations. What is surprising is that this view appeared to be shared for decades by fans in many other European countries and indeed across the globe. As a matter of national pride, beating England’s football team mattered. It mattered, above all, to autocratic states, especially Nazi Germany.

And why not? After all, the English gave birth to modern football. It was born in the most quintessential of English institutions, a pub. Even some of the rugby lads turned up to baptise the baby’s head. How to play football largely depended on which private school they attended. Just the views of mostly former public schoolboys mattered. Forget anyone off the streets, from the working classes.

On Monday, 26 October 1863, captains of football clubs gathered at the Freemasons’ Tavern in Great Queen Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London. They went along in response to an appeal placed in the weekly newspaper *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* to convene a meeting for ‘the purpose of

promoting the adoption of a general code of rules for football'. For several years correspondents argued in its letters page over the correct way to play football.

Similar rows ensued in the letter pages of *The Times*. These mostly appeared to focus on who thought he went to the better public school or university. In a pure sporting sense, opinion divided along lines of whether to play the form of football preferred by Cambridge University Football Club or former pupils of Rugby School. Eventually, Cambridge won but not without a mighty row. Naturally enough, the role of the pub bore in discussing football's foibles was also born.

It was left to members of Blackheath FC, now a rugby union outfit, proudly glorying in the nickname 'The Club', to put the case for rugby's rules to be included. Blackheath FC agreed to join the newly formed Football Association. Membership subscriptions amounted to £1 per year. Francis Maule Campbell of Blackheath was duly appointed as the FA's first treasurer. Sadly, for Campbell, he failed to persuade his friends to adopt a key rugby rule of the time.

Oddly enough, this was not whether a player was able to handle the ball, and nor was it the shape of the ball, or the size of the goal. It concerned whether a player was able to kick his opponent as well as the ball. The rugby lads insisted on carrying on with what they called 'hacking' an opponent.

The original laws of what became known as association football or soccer, a nickname derived from the word association, were published in *Bell's Life* on 28 November 1863. When the gentlemen of the FA gathered to meet again in the Freemasons' Tavern a week later, laws allowing players to go around kicking each other were expunged. Ebenezer Morley of Barnes FC put forward a fresh draft. Morley protested that any tolerance of players hacking or kicking one another would mean 'men of business, to whom it is important to take care of themselves, would be unwilling to play football.'

Rows over the laws of association football and their interpretation by officials have persisted throughout the

sport’s history. They became a fan’s staple. This early round of arguments down the pub ended at a sixth and final meeting in the Freemasons’ Tavern on 7 December 1863. Blackheath FC duly left the Football Association to contest the ‘hooligan’s game played by gentlemen’. As a parting shot, Blackheath’s Maule Campbell warned his old friends, ‘I think that if you do away with it [kicking an opponent] you will do away with all the courage and pluck of the game, and I will be bound to bring over a lot of Frenchmen, who would beat you with a week’s practice.’

Campbell’s caustic warnings of international humiliation were met with raucous laughter. All these men agreed there was no possibility of any foreigner, let alone a lot of Frenchmen, beating them at football. The entente cordiale was some years off for these men of imperial Britain. Hacking or no hacking, football was a true English sport. Over the next few decades, others begged to differ. Little did the founders of association football realise but, as a matter of national humiliation, the English were there to be beaten at their own game.

Developing an international team sport went along at a gentlemanly pace. Nobody was in a hurry to be beaten by the French. Football, however it was played, remained a leisure pursuit of the British ruling classes. Soccer showed little sign of being transformed into what future Stoke City FC manager, Tony Waddington, termed a ‘working man’s ballet’. Events of 1871 arguably led to the association game of football becoming a sport for the masses, not just in Britain but worldwide.

The lads from Blackheath FC and their mates formed the Rugby Football Union. Their sport grew in success, especially in Scotland and the north of England. The Football Association answered the early threat posed by their old friends’ rival code of football with radical innovations. It introduced the Football Association Challenge Cup (FA Cup). International football also began. Both can be viewed as the brainchild of the FA general secretary, Charles Alcock.

As an instrument to help advance or democratise the game of football, spreading it to the masses, the FA Cup did

little in its earliest years. It was never quite Alcock's intention anyway. For the first decade of its existence, the FA Cup Final was contested by university, military or public school old boys' teams. Alcock enjoyed the privilege of captaining his Old Harrovian side called Wanderers against Royal Engineers in the first FA Cup Final on 16 March 1872 at the Kennington Oval. It helped that Alcock just happened, among his multiple duties, to be secretary of Surrey County Cricket Club. Wanderers won 1-0. For Alcock, it was his competition, his ball and his trophy. Alcock became the first captain to lift the FA Cup.

Following this success, Alcock persevered with his plans to internationalise the game of football. International cricket was already in its infancy. An England cricket team toured North America in 1859. The USA and Canada were already credited with playing the first cricket international. As the fabled 'Ashes' series of games between England and Australia began almost a couple of decades later, Alcock turned his attention to India. His organisational skill proved vital in welcoming the first party of Indian cricketers to England. Alcock recognised the value of international sport, especially within the British Empire. He inevitably wanted to promote regular international football matches. Forget overseas opposition. He wanted games between England and Scotland.

The Kennington Oval had staged a match nominally between England and Scotland on Saturday, 19 November 1870. An estimated 600 curious souls turned up for the game. England won 1-0. The idea of promoting international sporting rivalry received a polite but lukewarm response. Undeterred, Alcock sent a letter to *The Field* on Saturday, 29 July 1871 stating, 'I shall be glad if you will allow me a few lines in your paper to notify to all whom it may concern that two matches annually played between England and Scotland have been already fixed for the coming season. The first will take place at the Oval on Saturday, Nov 18. 1871, and the return on Saturday, Feb 24. 1872, at the same ground.'

The *Scotsman* newspaper is to blame for the generally accepted view that the first ever football international just happened to be Scotland versus England on 30 November 1872. This blithely ignores the previous three ‘internationals’ between nominally England and Scotland teams at the Oval. On Saturday, 5 October 1872, the *Scotsman* offered the following gem to its readers: ‘We learn from a good source in London that it has been decided to abandon the two matches which have hitherto been played every year between England and Scotland, according to the rules of the Football Association in London on the Surrey Cricket Ground.’

Instead, the FA committee decided to send a team to Glasgow to play a Scottish XI. The first game in this new series would be in Glasgow at the end of November and the return match in London, the following spring. Scottish rugby followers viewed this as a blatant attempt to usurp their sport. It was arguably as strong as, if not stronger than, soccer in Scotland. Alcock later recalled, ‘The very suggestion of such a contest under association rules was quite enough to raise the ire of the rugby union players north of the Tweed.’

The match went ahead on St Andrew’s Day, Saturday, 30 November 1872, at the West of Scotland cricket ground in Partick on the outskirts of Glasgow. The *Scotsman* opined, ‘For the first time since its inauguration has the match really earned for itself the title of international, both teams being bona fide players in each country, and the wisdom of the committee of the association in deciding to play the match in Scotland was shown by its great success, judged either by the play or the attendance.’ Unfortunately, it was a goalless draw.

International football had arrived. England and Scotland played out their annual fixture for more than the next century. The Scottish Football Association took over the running of the game in its country in 1873. The Irish Football Association and Football Association of Wales were founded soon after. Football, under the association rules, grew in popularity in the industrial cities of northern England and Scotland.



Once Blackburn Olympic had beaten the Old Etonians in the 1883 FA Cup Final, the days of former English public schoolboys dominating football ended. International football, albeit a strictly British domestic affair, settled into the football calendar.

As it did so, the curious insular and arrogant approach of England's FA soured relations with its Celtic neighbours. Changing the name of the Football Association in April 1881 to the National Football Association hardly helped. It seemed impertinent to the other British associations. After a game between Queen's Park and Old Carthusians on Saturday, 7 January 1872, future Scottish FA vice-president Don Hamilton ostensibly stood to offer a toast to the English association. Instead, he denounced them.

The *Athletic News* reported, 'In the course of his remarks he, in his usual outspoken language, and evidently labouring under a sense of duty, said it was true that the English association was the parent association, and by it we taught the association game. This fact, however, gave that body no right whatsoever to call itself the National Association. It had no control over the Scotch, Welsh, or other associations, but was merely an individual and distinct association. The pupils, he said, could now teach the masters the art of football.'

On 2 June 1886, the 'pupils' and the 'masters' met at the offices of the FA near Holborn Viaduct in London. The FA agreed to drop its insistence on being called the National Football Association. Instead, all the UK associations agreed to form the International Football Association Board (IFAB). It was to be the sole arbiter of the laws of association football. The FA, Scottish Football Association (SFA), Football Association of Wales (FAW) and Irish Football Association (IFA) would each have equal voting rights. The IFAB remains to this day the sole arbiter of the laws of the game. At its foundation, nobody considered countries from outside the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland worthy of inclusion. This soon

changed and the English masters of football, along with their pupils from the Celtic nations, met the notion of a world governing body for football with emotions ranging from plain indifference to outright hostility.

In the meantime another innovation occurred outside the direct control of the FA. William McGregor, the well-heeled owner of a drapery business in Birmingham, became president of Aston Villa FC. Decades later Aston Villa Football Club would play an important role in the controversy over the delivering of Nazi salutes at German sports grounds. Unlike the club’s ownership of the 1930s, Villa’s founders proved a lot more enlightened and progressive. McGregor was among those acknowledging the need to allow players to earn money, with a formal contract. Professionalism also made it easier for him to bring some order to the game and play regular competitive fixtures. There needed to be a league.

Cricket provided a model with its County Championship. Charles Alcock did help to push through professionalism. As an administrator of professional sport at Surrey CCC, it would have been surprising for him to have done otherwise. Alcock convened a special general meeting of the Football Association on 20 July 1885 at Anderton’s Hotel on Fleet Street in London. Scores of delegates turned up from clubs and county associations. They agreed to legalise the employment of professional footballers. For international matches, games back then between the home nations, it was left to the competing national associations to decide on whether to pay their players.

Three years later, representatives of 12 clubs gathered at the Royal Hotel in Manchester on 17 April 1888 to form what was then known as the National Football Association League. McGregor chaired the meeting. Aston Villa were one of six Midlands clubs in attendance, the others being Derby County, Notts County, Stoke, West Bromwich Albion and Wolverhampton Wanderers. The other six were all from Lancashire: Accrington, Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers,

Burnley, Everton and Preston North End. Late requests from Sheffield Wednesday and Nottingham Forest to join the league were rejected. No southerners were invited to the party, at least not for the time being.

Football changed forever. Excluding the rest of the world, let alone English southern softies from the inaugural league, was never going to work. Missionaries, religious, secular or otherwise, took the sport of cricket across the British Empire. Devotees of association football demonstrated more ambition. They took their sport to the entire planet, most notably to continental Europe and South America. Germany, intriguingly, demonstrated an early interest in rugby rather than soccer. More of that later.

Football, the round ball version rather than the egg-shaped ball version, was becoming the global game, the world's largest team sport. It was vital for English prestige that they maintained mastery of their precious sport. For the first few decades, they implausibly succeeded, but then the creation of FIFA cast doubt on British football supremacy.

French journalist Robert Guérin is credited with being the driving force behind the founding of the International Federation of Association Football or, in French, *Federation Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA). A journalist at *Le Matin* newspaper and head of the football department of the *Union des Societes Françaises de Sports Athletiques*, Guérin floated the idea with the Football Association in London. It rejected it. He went ahead anyway.

On 21 May 1904, delegates from Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland met in Paris to form FIFA. A seventh nation joined belatedly. Germany's football association, the German Football Association (DFB), sent a telegram in the evening signalling its intention to join. Football in the country was strictly amateur, in every sense of the word. For decades to come, the DFB barred payments to players. Germany's first international against England on 20 April 1908 is recognised by the DFB. It is not recognised by

the FA. England fielded its amateur team in a 5-1 victory as a warm-up for the Olympics. As Great Britain, the English players won Olympic gold six months later.

By then the Football Association had reluctantly decided to join FIFA. It did so despite the Scottish, Welsh and Irish associations being denied entry. Germany, under the rule of Kaiser Wilhelm II, was among those vigorously objecting to the inclusion of the Celtic nations. Only the FA, the founder association of the sport, had the right to represent the United Kingdom, according to FIFA statutes. England joined FIFA; Scotland, Wales and Ireland were left out.

The FIFA president then changed and so did its statutes. Robert Guérin resigned after failing in the initial attempt to establish a World Cup. An Englishman, former Blackburn Rovers director Daniel Woolfall, took over as the boss of FIFA. His first success was organising his sport’s inaugural global competition: football at the London Olympics of 1908. His next was inviting Scotland, Ireland and Wales to become FIFA members.

German objections were dismissed. The UK was granted an exemption, reading, ‘Each of the four British associations shall be recognised as a separate member association of FIFA.’ Finally, Woolfall also ensured that the IFAB remained as the international body solely responsible for the laws of football by putting two FIFA members onto its board. The British reasserted mastery of their game, a lead role in organising what was turning into the world game.

Future FIFA president Sir Stanley Rous praised his English compatriot’s role in developing FIFA and improving relations between the British associations and their foreign counterparts. ‘He [Woolfall] played a decisive part in giving FIFA a harmonious start and ensuring that the British and European game developed in concert, not in opposition,’ commented Sir Stanley in his 1978 autobiography *Football Worlds*. As for Woolfall succeeding in persuading FIFA to join the IFAB, Sir Stanley wrote, ‘That was typical of European

willingness to accept guidance and to acknowledge that Britain was then the “master” of the game. Had we not been so aloof in attitude we could from the start have been leaders of this new movement. But we were slow to appreciate its importance.’

Unfortunately, the British remained aloof. At first, they cited a reasonable excuse. In the aftermath of the industrial carnage of the First World War with an estimated eight million killed, sport was trivial. Legendary tales of Christmas football matches between British and German troops did emerge. Using sport, particularly football, as a unifying force in any peace settlement proved elusive. FIFA wanted the defeated nations of Germany, Austria and Hungary invited back into the international fold. British nations refused to play them. Football became embroiled in geopolitics. A pattern was set for decades to come.

French war hero Jules Rimet became president of FIFA. He pursued an apolitical stance. He wanted Germany and nations of the defeated Austria-Hungarian Empire in the FIFA fold. His French, Belgian and Dutch colleagues harboured doubts. The FA in London adopted the most hawkish approach with minutes noting, ‘The Football Association could not entertain any association, official or unofficial, with the Central [German and Austro-Hungarian] Empire’s associations.’ England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland left FIFA. Four years later they were back but not for long.

Professional football thrived in Britain throughout the 1920s. Tens of thousands turned up for games every Saturday afternoon. The clubs gave local businessmen a mechanism to make even more money. Yet the issue of professionalism and the definition of amateurism ended up being cited as a reason for yet another split with FIFA. The other reason given by Sir Stanley Rous just happened to be nationalist politics, specifically who ran football in Ireland.

After Ireland’s war of independence and partition of the island in 1921, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) happily ran its sport on an All-Ireland basis. Those keen

on association football or soccer thought otherwise. There was a split. This rather insular spat was not enough to keep the British associations out of FIFA for long. The uneasy compromise of Belfast’s IFA and Dublin’s Football Association of Ireland (FAI) selecting players from all over Ireland for their international teams oddly helped. Some played for both Ireland and Éire. This unique practice remained in place until qualification for the World Cup of 1950.

Rows over professionalism proved more significant for the founders of the game of football. To be specific, the loose Olympian principle of amateurism proved difficult to resolve. FIFA approved the practice of broken-time payments to compensate players for taking time out from their regular jobs while competing at the Olympics in the Amsterdam Games of 1928.

It neatly circumvented the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC’s) insistence on amateurism. The FA objected.

As athletes prepared for the 1928 Olympics, the British football associations once again turned their backs on FIFA. ‘I certainly had no thought that this was splendid isolation,’ moaned the FA secretary Sir Stanley Rous. ‘To me it was a matter of regret and a constant cause of difficulty that we were not more closely associated with FIFA. It was ridiculous, for instance, that special arrangements had to be made to allow us [the Great Britain amateur football team] to enter the Olympics.’

England’s grip on the mastery of international football seemed tenuous. FIFA and international football under the stewardship of Jules Rimet thrived. Football being excluded from the Los Angeles Olympics of 1932 proved a blessing. Rimet introduced his own World Cup with both professional and amateur national teams being allowed to participate. The British stayed at home as the first World Cup kicked off in Uruguay’s capital of Montevideo in 1930. Uruguay won the tournament on home soil, enjoying the title of world champions.

English football supporters considered this to be a hollow title. Amazingly, others in international football, not just the Welsh and the Irish, thought much the same. Scotland fans with their Wembley wizards beating England 5-1 in 1928, naturally backed their players as the best on the planet. Throughout the 1920s such a notion was rarely, if ever, put to the test. Aside from meeting the other home nations, England just played France, Belgium and Sweden, easily beating them. There was also a one-off match against Luxembourg.

But just prior to the inaugural World Cup, the title of 'masters of football' was put to the test with games against Spain, Germany and the *Wunderteam* of Austria. Spain beat England 4-3 in Madrid on 15 May 1929. It was a shock. Little did the insular figures of the Football Association realise until the defeat in Spain, but their sport was changing radically. English football coaches, former players from the English and Scottish clubs, sprang up in a number of different countries with the early growth of league and cup football internationally.

Then, again, the geopolitical picture once again deteriorated. A decade after mocking FIFA's apolitical efforts, FA bosses appeared to be oblivious to changing geopolitical times. Even the Nazis warmed to what Germans had decried as the English disease of football.