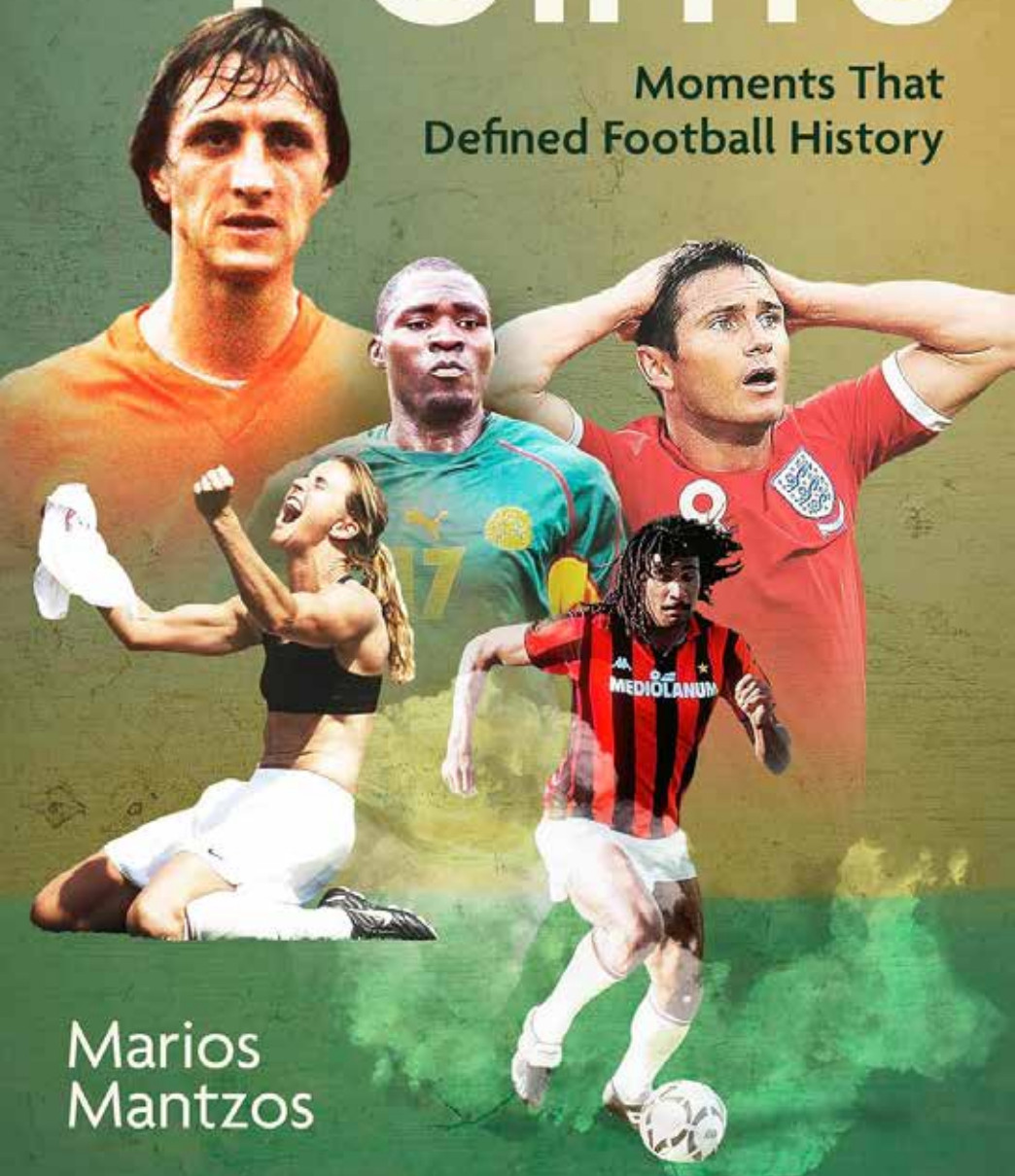
TURNING POINTS

Moments That Defined Football History



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An Unconventional Boxing Day

THAT CHRISTMAS was the first of the 'Roaring Twenties', a term which would come to be used to describe the music and fashion of the 1920s. In Great Britain, the decade following the First World War was one of economic prosperity, rapid social and cultural changes and general optimism that mainly concerned major cities such as London. In Liverpool, however, falling demand for traditional exports led to economic stagnation and eventual decline in the city, with unemployment rates well above the national average, while incidents of religious sectarian violence were on the rise.

In was in these circumstances that the cold morning of Boxing Day, 1920, saw thousands of people in Stanley Park and the surrounding area heading for Goodison Park. To an important extent, football had been a balm during the Great War years for the people of Great Britain, bringing them closer together and strengthening the feeling of unity, while also helping Britons find an escape from the daily hardships of wartime.

You might imagine that the crowd that day were heading to watch England's last pre-war champions, Everton. In fact, Everton had played at Goodison the day before, with Arsenal leaving Merseyside with a 4-2 win in front of 35,000 people. Almost double that number were there the next day trying to get into the ground. More than 53,000 made it inside, the terraces crammed, while around 14,000 were locked out for safety reasons. This was not a big First Division derby, not an FA Cup Final, not even an official game. It was a friendly football match between the greatest women's team at the time, the Dick, Kerr Ladies from Preston, and the admittedly second-best St Helen's Ladies.

Women started playing football around the same time that the sport came into existence. Until the middle of the 19th century, girls were excluded from physical exercise in schools, with the exception of those who attended private institutions. But over time, women began to take a role in noble sporting activities. In the latter part of the century, the first football teams began to be founded in Scotland and, later, in England, mainly by women activists who fought hard to secure basic rights for women including the right to vote[1].

The British football authorities, however, never supported the women's game, considering it a danger to the 'masculinity' of the sport and using the country's press to discredit women's efforts with disapproving columns

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1 The right to vote was granted to women over 30 with specific property criteria in February 1918, while full political equality was achieved in July 1928, when the right to vote was established by law for all citizens, male and female, over 21 years old.

and satirical illustrations. They usually spoke of the inactivity of those in the stands due to a supposed lack of spectacle, while claiming that fans were leaving the stadium before the end of the first half of games. The London evening newspaper the *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote in February 1895:

> 'Women may boat, women may ride – they can do both gracefully – but women may not, with an advantage to themselves, ride a bicycle or kick a football. These pastimes are beyond them. Let women "keep" books, write books, paint pictures, ride horses and row boats, but for the love of heaven stay them from making sights of themselves on the football field, or objects of ridicule on the bicycle saddle.'

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were even mixed football matches between women's and men's teams. However, in 1902, the Football Association banned its member clubs from participating in such matches, a decision which was adopted in the same year by the Scottish FA. There is evidence that the FA advised its clubs at the same time not to allow women to use their pitches, something it had warned against since the 1890s when women's football teams began to gain notoriety. The British Ladies' Football Club from Crouch End, London, are a prime example of a club that had been impressing since being founded in 1895 by Nettie Honeyball, averaging around 10,000 spectators at each of their games across the country.

Those objecting to the women's game attempted to substantiate their case by encouraging a long-standing medical debate that raised concerns about the dangers of contact sports to the physical wellbeing of females. It was argued there was a possibility that young girls might experience problems with their development, hindering their reproductive capacity, and that married women could become susceptible to miscarriage during a future pregnancy. The *British Medical Journal*, which continues to this day, also expressed its displeasure with the development of women's football, stating that: 'We can in no way sanction the reckless exposure to violence of organs which the common experience of women had led them in every way to protect.' Under these circumstances, women's football was unable to grow in the immediate years ahead and was put into isolation.

All that changed after 4 August 1914. With Europe in a state of limbo in the days following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by the Bosnian Serb student Gavrilo Princip, the Germans asked the king of Belgium, Albert I, to allow its troops to cross the country in order to launch an attack on France as part of the Schlieffen Plan, a strategy aimed at executing a swift defeat of France and then Russia. The king refused and the German army invaded neutral Belgium, violating Article VII of the 1839 Treaty of London. This was considered a *casus belli* by the British government, which declared war on Germany. With the fight escalating in the months that followed, the British government introduced general conscription for the first time in its modern history, requiring every unmarried man

aged between 18 and 40, with the exception of religious ministers and widowers with children, to enlist in the army and immediately enter the battle. This automatically meant that around six million British men left work and their everyday lives for the sake of national duty.

Therefore, the need for labour hands was imperative and it was women who took up these roles, as well as fulfilling other jobs that arose during the war years. More than 700,000 women were employed in munitions and other factories, about 500,000 became office workers, around 250,000 began working on the land, a similar number occupied government administrative positions and several thousand more found work in public transportation. Women essentially became the secret weapon of Great Britain. While trying at the same time to keep the family hearth standing, they faced their new responsibilities with courage in order to serve their country and, at the same time, claim a better position in society and higher salaries.

On the footballing side, although England entered the war in August 1914, the FA decided to kick off the season as normal in September, both because the prevailing belief was that the war would only last a few months and because football was considered a spectacle that could contribute psychologically to the people, helping them forget the problems of war during the games. At the same time, however, there were voices arguing that the football season should be suspended. It was argued that a football player, considered physically fit and strong, should be on the battlefield and not on the playing field. These objections

led to the creation of the Football Battalion in December 1914, with 122 players joining by March 1915. In order to compensate for the loss of squad strength, teams were allowed to select guest players and some players were even permitted to play for more than one club. The season ended with Everton being crowned champions of England and Sheffield United winning the FA Cup. However, growing criticism faced by the football authorities for playing on during wartime, coupled with the loss of so many players to the war effort, led the Football League to suspend football action at national level.

With women now a key part of the workforce, it was important to provide them with leisure activities which would keep up their morale and help maintain high levels of productivity. In the munitions factories in particular, emphasis was placed on the development of recreational activities, to the point that the government appointed women welfare supervisors to oversee the moral and physical condition of the workers. Gradually, the 'Munitionettes', as the women of the munitions factories became known, began to adopt football as their main interest during rest or meal breaks. With the blessing of the prime minister, David Lloyd George, who argued that football would improve the image and working performance of women, one team after another began to be founded, with the result that almost every munitions factory in Britain had its own women's football team.

Hundreds of football matches began to be organised throughout the country during the war, gradually attracting more and more fans. The first organised game was an 11-5 victory by Ulverston Munitions Girls against another group

of local women in Cumbria on Christmas Day, 1916. A combination of social change, the absence of men's teams and, at the same time, the need for entertainment and a morale booster contributed to a surge in the popularity of women's football across Britain. In turn, this led several factory groups to use football in a charitable way, raising money for a variety of worthy causes, mainly supporting soldiers on the front line, helping war refugees, buying equipment and financing medical facilities. All this created a sense of unity in local communities around a common cause and built incentives for attendances at women's football matches to keep growing, while the FA became noticeably more receptive to clubs' grounds being used for women's matches.

Football essentially became the official women's sport in the munitions factories during the First World War, although the activity remained only at the level of individual friendly matches and did not then develop into a widespread major competition. The only exception was the Munitionettes Cup, which was held twice between 1917 and 1919 and involved teams from the North East of England. It was the first organised women's tournament in the history of British football and featured a group stage and knockout matches. It marked the beginning of a new era and matches in the first Munitionettes Cup raised a total of more than £1,500, corresponding to over £31,000 today. Significantly, the first final – played on 18 May 1918 at Middlesbrough's Ayresome Park ground – drew a crowd of around 22,000 to watch the great Blyth Spartans Ladies thrash Bolckow Vaughan Ladies 5-0, with centre-forward

Bella Reay scoring a hat-trick and finishing the 30-match tournament with a total of 133 goals[2].

Approximately 230km south-west of Blyth, in Preston, Lancashire, a group of women dressed in black and white-striped jerseys, blue shorts and elaborate hats were tearing apart every football opponent in their path. The company Dick, Kerr & Co. was founded in the late 1890s with the amalgamation of the companies of William Bruce Dick and John Kerr and operated as a locomotive and tramcar manufacturer, also expanding into all manner of electrical machinery.

During the war, the British Navy and the War Office asked the company to take over the manufacture of missiles. Women workers had a prominent role at its factory in Preston and during breaks they found a chance to amuse themselves by kicking a ball around. Urban legend has it that, in October 1917, the women prevailed in a match played against the factory's remaining men and that this sparked an idea in the mind of a 35-year-old office employee.

Alfred Frankland was one of the noblest male presences in the factory and the football skills of the Dick, Kerr women particularly impressed him as he watched them from his office window competing with the male workers

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2 The Middlesbrough decider was a replay, as in the first meeting at St James' Park in Newcastle, the two teams drew 0-0. The official name of the Munitionettes Cup was the Alfred Wood Munitions Girls Challenge Trophy, as it was sponsored by businessman Alfred Wood, who hailed from Sunderland and was a shareholder in the Hartley Wood & Co. glass company based in Deptford. The competition continued the following season, with the Jarrow and Hebburn-based Palmer's Yard Women winning the trophy.

by marking small square windows with their feet. The bet stipulated that for every men's victory, the women would have to buy them a pack of cigarettes while, conversely, when the women had a better mark, the men were obliged to bring them chocolates.

It was Grace Sibbert who was the driving force behind the women's group, drawing them into football and deservedly earning the informal role of captain. Her husband took part in the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and was captured by the German army, leaving her in the dark about his fate, leading to her emotional exhaustion. Therefore, she used entertainment through football to ease her personal worries.

Frankland had been approached by the headmistress of the local Moor Park hospital, which treated wounded soldiers, for help in raising money in the run-up to Christmas 1917. The headmistress proposed a charity concert. Frankland, however, had a different vision in mind, which he communicated to Grace Sibbert. This involved the Dick, Kerr women playing in a charity football match. Spurred on by the women's great enthusiasm, the ambitious Frankland paid a not inconsiderable sum to allow the match to take place at Deepdale, home of Preston North End, on Boxing Day.

Frankland thus gave the newly formed Dick, Kerr Ladies a magical experience as they faced workers from Stockport's Arundel Coulthard Factory in front of 10,000 spectators who came to see football revived at Deepdale two and a half years after Preston North End's last home game, a 3-0 win over Arsenal in April 1915 on the penultimate

matchday of the Football League Second Division season. Dick, Kerr Ladies won comfortably, by 4-0, and, regardless of the real reason each person visited the stadium that day, the bottom line was that the match exceeded expectations and overachieved in its objective, raising about £600 for the wounded soldiers. In the bigger picture, this match sealed the vision of Alfred Frankland, who also secured Deepdale for three more games in February and March. The journey of the Dick, Kerr Ladies football team was now well under way[3].

With the blessing of Dick, Kerr & Co., the factory players gradually began to become well known throughout the country, steadily gaining new interest and attracting people who had for years been dismissive of women's football. They mainly faced teams from other factories in towns such as Barrow-in-Furness and Bolton and their increasing popularity further fanned the flames of Frankland's ambitions. He envisioned a powerful and invincible team and, in light of this, he did not hesitate in late 1918 to persuade four players from Lancaster Ladies to move to Preston just 24 hours after Dick, Kerr Ladies were beaten 1-0 by that team. Adding a few more players from Bolton and Liverpool, the Preston side hit the gas and swept away anyone they faced.

The guns may have fallen silent in November 1918, but the bloody cycle of the First World War only formally

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3 It is a tragic irony that captain Grace Sibbert was never able to play for Dick, Kerr Ladies due to health reasons. She remained, however, an active and warm supporter of the team in its early years and was a symbolic personality who enjoyed the respect of all the players.

ended on 28 June 1919, with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The end of the war and its outcome created a jubilant atmosphere in Britain, which celebrated peace on 19 July with the Victory Parade in London. However, the end of the war also marked the beginning of an era of social unrest, with thousands of soldiers returning from war mentally broken, a situation that worsened as they faced unemployment and a lack of state support. In this light, Parliament passed an Act on 15 August 1919 under which the country would return to its pre-war working situation. That is, the returning soldiers regained jobs they had left in order to participate in the war and, therefore, the women who had been called on to replace them were dismissed from those positions. More than 25 per cent of working women left the factories and returned to their households, with society's norms returning to the spectrum of conservatism, negating everything that seemed like a new reality for women. Fatefully, this development had an immediate effect on women's football, uprooting most teams and scattering most female players to different parts of Great Britain.

For the Dick, Kerr Ladies team, however, the new situation was not regarded as a deterrent but, instead, as a huge opportunity for reinforcement. While the company's owners ensured existing female workers would remain in their jobs, Frankland gathered the best fired female players from other factories and secured them jobs at Dick, Kerr & Co. and a place on his football team. The result was the building of one of the most powerful football teams of all time. Included in its ranks were great players such

as goalkeeper Annie Hastie, captain Alice Woods and goal machine Lily Parr, an uncompromising woman who broke all taboos by bravely declaring her homosexuality in an era of zero tolerance. This mighty team attracted large crowds, wherever they played, confirming that football was beginning to win the sceptre of sporting interest in Britain that had been largely held by cricket in the pre-war years.

While the FA saw the appeal of women's football as a significant threat to the popularity of its product, the government had to deal with pressure from the post-war Suffragette movement for gender equality. At the same time, however, it was of great concern to the Conservatives that a number of women's football games since the war had been used to raise money for the strengthening of working-class community movements which could be seen as a threat to the stability of the government. The most notable example of this came during the three-month strike of a million miners that began on April Fool's Day, 1921, when their union refused to accept new terms from the coal mine owners. It was then that the women took matters into their own hands again, notably Dick, Kerr Ladies, who played a series of matches in towns including Swansea, Cardiff and Kilmarnock to raise money to support the miners. These matches went down in history as the 'Pea Soup Matches', as their purpose was to raise money to ensure there would be soup in the kitchens of the miners' households to feed their families.

The peak for Dick, Kerr Ladies actually came in 1920 when Frankland, feeling that their ambitions had outgrown

the borders of Great Britain, attempted to catapult their fame overseas. He sent an invitation to the Paris women's team and between April and May, they played four matches in Preston, Stockport, Manchester and London's Stamford Bridge, marking the first international women's football matches in history. The first match at Deepdale attracted 25,000 spectators – which was, at the time, a record attendance for the stadium in its 42-year history – while the total raised from these matches in aid of the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers was more than £3,000.

Dick, Kerr Ladies had now spread their wings and in the autumn of the same year, they travelled to France after accepting an invitation from Femina Sport of Paris for a reverse tour. The British women played in Paris, Roubaix, Le Havre and Rouen, remaining unbeaten in four matches which were attended by a total of 62,000 spectators. Dick, Kerr Ladies' hugely successful tour in France created a buzz of excitement in Preston, with crowds cheering them through the streets of the town on their return.

The innovative ideas of Dick, Kerr Ladies had no ceiling and they did not hesitate to even knock on the door of the War Office, the government department responsible for the administration of the British army, in order to fulfil their great new ambition. They asked to borrow two anti-aircraft searchlights to illuminate the Deepdale pitch with 40 electric lamps for an evening match against a mixed team made up of the best players from the rest of the country. Approval was given by the secretary of state for war and air. His name? Winston Churchill. Indeed, on 16

December 1921, Dick, Kerr Ladies played a spectacular match under the floodlights, arriving by train at Preston on the eve of the match, and won 4-0 in front of more than 12,000 fans. The match, captured by cameras from production company Pathé News, raised more than £600, which was donated to the distress fund for unemployed ex-servicemen in Preston.

And so, ten days later, the infamous Boxing Day at Goodison Park arrived, with Dick, Kerr Ladies facing St Helens Ladies, whose players worked in the Merseyside town of the same name, just 16km from Everton's ground. The ritual of Boxing Day, combined with the spectacle of women's football, the purpose of raising money and the presence of Ella Retford[4], who made the opening kick of the match, made the morning of 26 December 1920 a landmark in the history of sport in general. In Liverpool, a city that has always lived and breathed for football, Dick, Kerr Ladies proved in front of more than 53,000 people that women's football was not just a one-off wartime fireworks display, but a dynamic new reality in sport.

Alfred Frankland's women found the way to the net in the first half thanks to a Jannie Harris goal. Harris played as a left-winger and possessed a wealth of technical skills and, with a height of just 1.5m (5ft), she perfectly used her low centre of gravity and was seen as a source of magic for

4 Ella Retford (1885–1962) was an English comedian, singer and dancer, who also worked as a stage and film actress. At that time, she was one of the biggest stars of the music scene and a very popular figure. In December 1920 she was headlining at the Liverpool Empire Theatre and was therefore invited to add even more glamour to the match by kicking it off. It was a rite that was observed in those years, with a famous person, starting a football match.

the Preston side. Dick, Kerr Ladies' heavy artillery, Florrie Redford, missed the train to Liverpool so her best friend, Alice Kell, who was the team captain and right-back, was recruited into the attack. The move proved golden as Kell scored an unforgettable second-half hat-trick to cap another great win for Frankland's side. The players received a trophy from the lord mayor of Liverpool and were showered with flowers from the delirious audience. The receipts from the match were £3,000, an astronomical amount for the time. It was more than double the amount that had been estimated in the days leading up to the match and equal to the amount collected in total in the tournaments against the Paris team, domestically and abroad combined.

The attendance of at least 53,000 spectators for the match at Goodison Park was not only a remarkable statistic but surpassed those at Wembley eight months earlier for English football's biggest game, the first post-war FA Cup Final between Aston Villa and Huddersfield Town at Stamford Bridge. This fact underlined the huge popularity women's football and especially Dick, Kerr Ladies enjoyed in that period. It was, however, also a frightening matter for the Football Association, which saw that the success of the women's game significantly threatened the recognition of its product. Also, the finances of women's matches were not under the FA's control. The match at Goodison Park was the loudest alarm bell yet for English football's administrators and from that day on, they became more sceptical of women's football and began to steer towards a decision-making process which would have dire consequences for the future of the women's game.

Women's football was, essentially, a contrast to the conservative atmosphere of British society; seeing women wearing shorts, smoking cigarettes and cutting their hair short conflicted with the norms of the time. In the wake of the match at Goodison Park, voices – mainly from within the press – expressing serious objections to women's football gradually began to grow louder and louder.

Publications such as *Football Bits* published satirical articles and cartoons about women's football, while even the *Football Special*'s 'Football Girl' column, which was theoretically written by a female editor, published an op-ed stating, among other things, that: 'Personally, I should hesitate to introduce football among very young girls. If football is to be introduced into schools, I think it should only be played at the colleges where the girls are usually in their late teens or early 20s.' The content of the text casts doubt over whether it was really written by a woman, although, of course, it is impossible to prove this.

In the frenzied attempt to decimate women's football, medical opinions from the Victorian era – claiming that football could prove particularly harmful to a woman's body and motherhood – were dragged up again. At a time when the understanding of female physiology was not as developed as it later would be, a lack of knowledge provided fertile ground for the patriarchal views. Interestingly, the same scientists never expressed similar views during the war when women were needed to work under heavy and unhealthy conditions in factories. As Dr Mary Lowry said on the sidelines of a Dick, Kerr Ladies match: 'Football is no more likely to cause injuries to women than a heavy day's washing.'

The football authorities took seriously the warring voices, whose objections served its own interests and purposes, and the Football League took its first measures, starting with the expansion of the men's Third Division, with 20 teams being added and the division being divided into two separate north and south sections. This, however, did not appear to have a negative effect on the popularity of women's football and in October 1921, the Football Association fired its own warning shot, introducing a provision which prohibited its member clubs from providing their grounds to women unless they themselves were able to take responsibility for all financial transactions and undertake the full accounting of the matches. This was, among other things, an attempt to create a burdensome atmosphere and damage the credibility of women's football as, in fact, the provision effectively called into question the transparency and financial management of those who organised the matches, including Alfred Frankland.

This justification gave further fuel to the fire for the conservatives of Great Britain to strengthen their rhetoric against women's football. It was a rhetoric that had been dormant during the war, when women also served an extraordinary purpose in the absence of men, but now found the right ground to be reactivated. Against this backdrop, the FA was quick to make its true intentions clearer than ever and at 3pm on 5 December 1921, immediately after an FA Council meeting at its offices in Russell Square in London, it issued the following announcement:

> 'Complaints have been made as to football being played by women. The Council feel impelled to express their strong opinion that the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and should not be encouraged.
>
> 'Complaints have also been made as to the conditions under which some of the matches have been arranged and played, and the appropriation of receipts to other than charitable objects.
>
> 'The Council are further of the opinion that an excessive proportion of the receipts are absorbed in expenses and an inadequate percentage devoted to charitable objects.
>
> 'For these reasons, the Council requests the clubs belonging to the association refuse the use of their grounds for such matches.'

The man who organised the meeting and put his signature to the ban on women's football was FA secretary Frederick Wall, who for 50 years was the iconic figure of English football administration. In his autobiography, published in 1935, he revealed that: 'I was asked to referee the first women's football match at Crouch End. I declined, but I went to see the match and came to the conclusion that the game was not suitable for them. Someone declared that one of the players was a "Tommy" made up as a woman. The Football Association have discouraged this invasion of the "eternal feminine", just as they have discountenanced Sunday football.'

Remarkably, the Crouch End match Wall refers to was played in front of 11,000 people in 1895, a full 26 years

before the FA banned women's football, which shows the obvious: that the FA and Wall, personally, were always biased against the women's game. However, the situation that had been created by 1921 led the association to take immediate and violent action. This is because, despite the fact that the end of the war and the return of men from the battlefields in 1919 led to the dissolution of many women's teams, the rise in popularity of women's football in 1920 and 1921 was shockingly spectacular. A typical example is that, in 1921, Dick, Kerr Ladies played 67 matches attended by a total of around 900,000 spectators, an average of 13,500 per game. The FA, therefore, identified what it saw as a problem and a major threat.

For the next 50 years, women's football was kept in isolation and stuck in obscurity. Although the Dick, Kerr Ladies continued to compete until 1963, further spreading their fame across the planet, and other teams such as Huddersfield Atalanta Ladies and Bradford-based Hey's Ladies had a significant presence, the effects of the decision of the FA were devastating. Women were forced to play football on rugby pitches or at other sports club venues, which limited the number of fans who could attend. As a result, attendances were now vastly inferior to those at men's matches and interest in women's football began to wane and die out.

In the decades that followed, and particularly after the end of the Second World War, there were persistent efforts by those involved in women's football to challenge the FA's decision and overturn it, but any progress was very slow until the end of the 1960s when a new social atmosphere

began to be created, making the ground suitable for such a discussion. Social beliefs regarding the participation of women in sport began to change and this more favourable environment was reinforced by the general change in the role of women in British society, with an increased defence of their rights and the dynamic emergence of the feminist movement.

In a clearly different Britain, in 1969, three years after England hosted and won the FIFA World Cup, the Women's Football Association was founded, with the catalytic participation of Arthur Henry Hobbs, a carpenter by profession and an amateur footballer, who went down in history as 'the father of women's football' and took over as honorary secretary. As early as 1967, Hobbs had organised a women's football tournament at Deal in Kent with the support of local miners from Betteshanger Colliery. The Deal Tournament was staged on the colliery pitches and was a celebration event, as well as a precursor to the Women's FA Cup, which would take place two years later.

The aim of the new association was to create a platform for female players, coaches and administrators to promote and develop the sport at all levels. At the same time as the WFA were applying pressure to promote the women's game, an unofficial women's European Championship was organised by the Federation of Independent European Female Football in which an unofficial England national team took part, playing two games in front of 25,000 and 80,000 spectators each.

Pressure on the FA began to grow stronger both inside and outside Britain, even if the bastion of sexism and

conservatism held firm. Faced with little alternative, it was recommended at an FA meeting in December 1969 that women's football should no longer be considered a separate sport. Therefore, on 19 January 1970 – some 49 years after it was passed – the FA Council voted to repeal the 1921 resolution and allow women to use its clubs' grounds for matches. It was also agreed that these matches could now be officiated by FA-affiliated referees.

This decision proved to be the catalyst for change at a wider level. At a UEFA Extraordinary Congress in June 1971, it was agreed that the running of women's football across Europe should be thoroughly examined. UEFA decided to take drastic measures to ensure the uniform organisation of women's football in all its member associations, which were called upon to officially recognise the sport within their borders and to develop an international football structure for women.

In England, however, progress towards the integration of women's football into the national sporting fabric was slow. During the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, the game was run solely by the WFA, which operated on limited resources and mainly thanks to the work of dedicated volunteers. In 1991, a significant landmark was achieved with the creation of a national league made up of 24 teams.

However, it took until 1993 for women's football in England to be transferred entirely into the hands of the FA, which marked the dissolution of the WFA and was the bravest step by the football administrators to actually support and take the initiative for development of the

women's game at all levels. As a result, all competitions – including the new Women's Premier League – were now under the control of the FA, which began to invest in infrastructure, development programmes and ways to promote the game and attract bigger audiences. The WFA being absorbed into the FA also marked a new page in the working status of female football players, who were now able to participate in professional leagues and had the opportunity to earn a living from the sport.

The steady and gradual growth of women's football in recent years is beginning to set new standards in the sport, yet it is impossible not to wonder what the general state of football would be like today if the Football Association had not stood in the way of women in 1921. That game on 26 December 1920 at Liverpool's Goodison Park was the final straw and a turning point that changed the course of world football history, condemning women's football to wither when it was in its prime.