

**THE FOOTBALL
ASSOCIATION
1863-1883:
A SOURCE BOOK**

**The Development of the
Laws of the Game**

The member clubs

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A Soccerdata Publication

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A SOURCE BOOK

This is a fact book for students of the game of association football. It shows the changes to the laws of the game each season from 1863 to 1883 and provides lists of clubs who were members of the Football Association. Fourteen complete sets of laws of the game are included, so that the reader should find it possible to compare any match report with the laws that were in use at the time. The lists of members should help identify which set of laws governed any particular match, something that is not always easy to determine in the early years of the Association.

The book includes commentary and speculation by your author, but remains true to the original minute book of the Football Association and press reports of the time. Such contents could lead to a rather 'dry' and unreadable book. I have included match reports and other snippets that will hopefully lend some colour to the account. When the F.A. Challenge Cup was introduced in 1871-72 I have also included the entries for the competition.

The source of much of the material to 1873 is the first Minute Book of the Football Association. It contains handwritten minutes and newspaper reports that have been pasted into the book. It is necessary to rely on newspapers and periodicals from 1874 to 1883 since no minute books have survived from this period.

Most of the text is "as reported at the time", including spelling, grammar and punctuation, with only minor editorial changes on my part. Comments in square brackets [...] are mine, and are used when it is necessary to distinguish them from the original account.

Tony Brown
Nottingham
November 2011

PREAMBLE

The laws of association football never stand still, so that even today the body responsible for them, the International Football Association Board, is kept busy discussing changes proposed by the member associations of F.I.F.A. However, decisions in recent times can all be described as “fine tuning”, even if some of them (for example, stopping the pass-back to a goalkeeper) can have a significant effect on the way the game is played.

Matters were not so straightforward in the early years. The (English) Football Association, formed in 1863, attempted to establish a common set of rules for a sport that, by and large, had not needed them. Other worthy books have described the many forms of the sport we can define loosely as “moving a ball about with hand or foot, with the aim of achieving a goal”. It was a sport where there were often no guidelines as to the number of players, the size of the ball, where it was played, and how long it lasted.

So, it is not surprising that the members of the Football Association took some time to agree the framework for playing the game we know today. It is my view that the development phase was over by 1882, when the International Committee was formed. Of course, many significant and important changes to the laws continued to be made afterwards, but I am content to limit this book to the period from 1863 to 1883.

Hand in hand with the development of the laws is the question “did anyone care?” It looked for a while in the 1860s as if the answer was firmly negative. Those who preferred a handing or more-physical game resigned their membership of the Association. For many provincial clubs, the Football Association became labelled as the “London” Association. This was not due just to a *not in my backyard* attitude; the game in Sheffield was well-established prior to 1863 and there was no obvious reason at the time for them to change their rules.

Many authors have concluded that the introduction of a national tournament, for the Football Association’s Challenge Cup, was the significant milestone. This book reveals a slow growth in membership until the Cup found its feet in the late 1870s. 1883 is again a useful place to end this study, since entries for the competition increased rapidly after this date, so that by 1888 a qualifying competition became necessary.

EARLY DAYS

November 1856. Football at Westminster. Handsome v. Ugly. This match was played at Fields, on Wednesday the 29th ult, and, after a fine game, ended in the Ugly gaining three games to two. The sides were – Ugly: T. Waters, R. Armistead, F. Comyn, W. Henty, A. Balfour. G.C. Robinson, A. Walker, S. Stanhope, T. Betham, A.S. Harington, T. Thorpe. – Handsome: S.G. Freeman, E.O. Berens, R.A. Eden, H.L. Thompson, H.G.Green, H.M. Marshall, A. Hamersley, W.V. Vaughan Williams, W.F. Spencer, S. French. Luckily for the Ugly, this match was played in the fog. (Bell's Life, November 16, 1856)

It would be a mistake to assume organized football started in England in 1863. There were many inter-village games before then, which served two purposes: a little bit of condoned violence and the opportunity to place a few wagers on the outcome. Much of this went unreported; the papers concentrated on school matches at Charterhouse, Eton, Westminster and Rugby, where rules had developed independently, often taking physical constraints of the playing area into account (the wall at Eton, the cloisters at Charterhouse).

Although not exactly a set of rules, an early description of the village game can be found in Francis Willughby's "Book of Games" published in the late 1660s:

They blow a strong bladder and tie the neck of it as fast as they can, and then put it into the skin of a bull's cod and sew it fast in. They play in a long street, or a close that has a gate at either end. The gates are called Goals. The ball is thrown up in the middle between the goals, the players being equally divided according to their strength and nimbleness. Players must kick the ball towards their opponents' goal. They that can strike the ball through their opponents' goal first win. They usually leave some of their best players to guard the goal while the rest follow the ball. They often break one another's shins when two meet and strike both together against the ball, and therefore there is a law that they must not strike higher than the ball. "Tripping up of heels" is when one follows one of his opponents and (to prevent him from striking the ball) strikes that foot as he runs, that is from the ground, which – catching against the other foot – makes him fall. The trick is to hit that foot that is moving and just taken from the ground, and then a little touch makes him fall. The harder the ball is blown, the better it flies. They used to put quicksilver into it sometimes to keep it from lying still. The players must first all stand at their goals, the ball lying just in the middle between them, and they that can run best get the first kick.

The momentum to develop a common set of rules started in the 1850s. In 1859 Fred Lillywhite wrote to the editor of Bell's Life: *Mr Editor: It is my intention to publish, in the next edition of the Guide to Cricketers, the laws and rules of all the sports of athletic games which are enjoyed in this country. Among them, of course, will be football: therefore, if Eton and Rugby, as well as other colleges and schools, would form themselves into a committee and arrange that one code of laws could be acknowledged throughout the world, it would be a great benefit to all, as is the case with cricket. Yours, etc, Fred Lillywhite. 2 New Coventry Street, Leicester Square.*

It is around this time that we begin to see football played by sporting clubs such as Sheffield, Richmond and Barnes, each of whom would look outside of their own membership for matches, when tired of playing "Short v. Tall", "Married v. Unmarried", and other unlikely groupings of members. Here is a report from a Sheffield game of 1860:

Sheffield v 58th Regiment. This match, which had been delayed for some time, owing to the unfavourable state of the weather, was played on Monday last at the barrack ground at Hillsborough. Considerable interest was caused by the fact that the regiment has amongst its officers several gentlemen who were formerly noted players at the public schools, and it was thought the townsmen had at last met with their match. The game was throughout conducted in a thoroughly good-tempered and friendly manner, and the pluck and stamina exhibited on both sides was undoubted. For some time the garrison had a slight advantage, but after an exciting struggle of more than two hours, the civilians scored a hard-won victory, the result being as follows: Sheffield one goal and 10 rouges, 58th Regiment one goal and five rouges.
(*Bell's Life*, December 23, 1860)

[A set of rules for games played by the Sheffield club was first published in 1858. Rouges were similar to touchdowns in today's rugby code.]

The interest in London in establishing a common set of rules began to gather pace. In November 1861 an anonymous correspondent wrote to *Bell's Life*:

Mr Editor: will you give me a small space in your valuable paper to say a few words about football. The various public schools play this game according to their respective rules. These differ so much as to render it impossible for many of the schools to play matches with each other. Why should not football, like cricket, have one code of laws, which all should be bound to observe? This might be settled by a meeting of captains of the football elevens of the several schools: previous to which perhaps they would communicate, through your columns, the rules observed by their schools on those points in their game on which the greatest difference exists, such as holding and running with the ball, hitting the ball with the fist, etc.
Yours, etc, A Westminster.

The letter produced a swift and informative reply from "D.D":

Mr Editor: Although almost every game of skill is played according to fixed and definite rules, football is so far an exception that its rules are as various as the number of places where it is played. Thus, at Eton a player is not allowed to touch a ball with his hands, and the goal must be kicked. At Harrow, a player catching a ball before it reaches the ground is entitled to a fair kick and, under certain circumstances, the goal may be thrown. At Westminster, the ball may be caught under any circumstances, but the catcher takes his chance of a kick. At Rugby, the game is an indescribable medley, approximating closely to fives, wrestling, racing, and football, but not fairly entitled to lay claim to any game in particular. In some places the ball must be kicked over the goal, and in others under. In provincial towns no rules are observed usually, and each player acts as seems to him best. The consequence of all this diversity is, that when two clubs play a match, the first thing to be determined is what rules shall be observed, and the discussion usually ends in each side giving up some peculiar characteristics of its own, and the game is played according to an amalgamated set of rules of the two clubs. At the match, however, each side inadvertently makes mistakes, through playing with unusual rules, and the result is that much ill-feeling is created. Now, sir, all difficulty would be obviated if fixed rules were agreed upon by, say, three or more of the public schools, which

could be altered from time to time, as might be thought requisite. In anticipation of such an occurrence, I will state what I think ought to be the principles of such rules, and my only apology for thus obtruding my opinions must be, that I have played football from my youth up, that for years I have constantly played matches, and that I have always, with others, found great inconvenience from the absence of certain and definite rules.

First, then, football is essentially a game for the feet: hands, therefore, ought to be used no more than is strictly necessary.

2. The game is of itself dangerous enough, and all such practices as tripping up, pushing with the hands, "hacking", and wild and indiscriminate kicking, ought to be carefully avoided.

3. When a ball is kicked out of bounds it ought to be returned, so as to alter the state of the game as little as possible. It ought, therefore, to be kicked back from the point at which it left the ground, and in a direction perpendicular to that side of the ground.

4. All sneaking and standing off one's side ought to be strictly prohibited.

I think, sir, that the above fundamental principles are quite sufficient to base a proper set of rules upon, for it follows from No. 1 that the ball must never be stopped by the hand when it can be stopped in any other way; that the ball must never be picked up, struck, carried, or guided by the hand; and that when the ball is so high that it cannot be stopped in any other way, it may be stopped with one hand or two, but ought to be dropped at once to the ground. Moreover, the goal must be kicked under, and not over, the string, as there would be otherwise no chance of kicking a goal at all. Nos. 2 and 3 speak for themselves. No. 4 may be enforced by requiring a certain number of players of the opposite side to be between a kicker and the goal which he is endeavouring to reach, or by not allowing a man to kick a ball which has last been kicked by one of his own side, unless either he was standing behind the kicker at the time the kick was made, or someone of the opposite side first touches the ball. Football is becoming so popular in England, and is so thoroughly manly, and, therefore, English, that every facility and every encouragement ought to be given to the practice of the game; and I think that the movement ought to be taken up by the public schools, they are the nurseries of the game, and, in fact, the only places excepting the Universities where the game is regularly and systematically played. I have no doubt that any set of rules agreed upon by the public schools would be at once adapted by all clubs, and it would be easy for the captains of the elevens to communicate with each other and make the necessary arrangements.

Yours, etc, D.D.

(Bell's Life, December 8, 1861)

Needless to say, there was a quick response from "An Old Rugbean" in the following edition, taking strong objection to D.D.'s description of football at Rugby school as an "*indescribable medley*".

So, with the preliminary skirmishes out of the way, we can turn our attention to the events of November and December 1863. The first stage was a "captains meeting", just as suggested by D.D. two years before. The F.A. Minute Book contains only brief handwritten accounts of the decisions taken at the first meeting, but includes a newspaper report on which the following paragraphs are based.

MEETING ONE, OCTOBER 26, 1863

On Monday evening a meeting of captains and other representatives of several of the metropolitan and suburban football clubs was held at the Freemasons' Tavern, Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, for the purpose of forming an association with the object of establishing a definitive code of rules for the regulation of this game of football. The meeting was numerous and influential, lacking, however, it will be observed, the presence of "The Schools," with the exception of the Charterhouse. That school was represented by Mr BF Hartshorne, captain, and the other clubs and their officers present were: Perceval House, Blackheath, Mr G Shillingford, secretary; Kensington School, Mr W Mackintosh, captain; Crystal Palace, Mr F Day, secretary; Barnes, Mr EC Morley, captain, and Mr PD Gregory, secretary; Blackheath, Mr FH Moore, captain, and Mr FW Campbell, secretary; Blackheath Proprietary School, Mr WH Gordon, captain; the Crusaders (old public schools men); Forest, Leytonstone, JF Alcock, captain, and Mr AW Mackenzie, secretary; N.N. Kilburn, Mr A Pember, captain; W.O., War Office, Mr GT Wawn; and Charterhouse School, Mr BF Hartshorne, captain. There were several other gentlemen present interested in the subject, who, although players, did not definitively represent any club.

Mr Pember (N.N., Kilburn) was requested to take the chair, and in doing so said that it had been felt to be desirable to form some set of rules which the metropolitan clubs should adopt among themselves, as there were so many different ways of playing, in order that, when they met in friendly rivalry on other grounds the existing exceeding difficulty of "getting a goal" would be more easily overcome. It had been proposed to form an association, which should meet once a year and correct anything that was wrong if it should be necessary to do so.

Mr EC Morley (Barnes) had hoped to have seen some of the schools represented, but their absence was attributable in all probability to the want of publicity of the fact that the meeting would take place. They were, however, sufficiently strong as football players to carry out the objects in view. He, therefore, proposed "That it advisable that a football association should be formed for the purpose of settling a code of rules for the regulation of the game of football."

Mr AW Mackenzie (Forest, Leytonstone) seconded the resolution, and hoped that the gentlemen present would form themselves into a committee to affect the purpose of the association.

Mr BF Hartshorne (Charterhouse) could not consent at present to put his name down as a member of the association, as he thought it desirable that the public schools should be adequately represented, and take a prominent part in the movement. It was certainly most desirable that some definite set of rules for football should be generally adopted, yet, as a representative of the Charterhouse School, the only public school represented, he could not pledge himself to any course of action until he saw more clearly what the other schools did in the matter. Speaking on behalf of the Charterhouse School, he would be willing to coalesce if the other public schools would do the same, and probably at a more advanced stage of the association the opinion of the generality of the other great schools would be obtained. It certainly would be advisable, if possible, to obtain the cooperation of Rugby, Harrow, Winchester, Eton, Marlborough, Cheltenham, and other public schools.

The Chairman thought their silence probably arose from no one in particular liking to take the initiative, and put himself prominently forward. The object of the meeting was to form an association to adopt and carry out a set of rules, in doing which of course the aid of the opinion and counsel of the public schools would materially benefit them. The resolution was then put and carried.

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