
Inspired by a conference on ‘Football and Europe’ held in Florence in the spring of 1990, the thirteen essays assembled by the editors of this ambitious and thought-provoking book have two principal aims: firstly, to summarise recent trends in the world of British soccer and unravel the factors responsible for the sport’s sad decline into rampant hooliganism and the tragedies of Bradford, Heysel and Hillsborough during the 1980s; and, secondly, to consider what lies ahead for British soccer in the face of the new opportunities and challenges that will result from closer integration with Europe after 1992. On balance, the conclusions which emerge from this pioneering and instructive combination of historical analysis and prognostication make depressing reading and offer little comfort to those hoping to maintain intact most of the game’s traditional structures and practices. To judge from the lessons of its past, soccer will not find it easy to adjust successfully to the rapidly changing requirements of the future.

For economic historians, long accustomed to discussing the problems posed for economic growth by the survival of outdated attitudes and institutions, the story of soccer’s evolution in Britain will be uncomfortably familiar. From the saga of seemingly endless regional and class-based conflict between the Football Association and the Football League (Tomlinson) and the persistent hostility or, at best, apathy of the game’s authorities to the causes of cost efficiency and profit maximisation, ground improvement (Arnold), the greater active participation of women (Williams and Woodhouse) and a more intimate working relationship with supporters’ organisations (Taylor) to the blinkered, irrational belief of the game’s followers in the superiority of the British style of play (Crichter, Wagg) and their reluctance to countenance proposals for ground relocation and sharing (Bade), it is a story of an industry more hampered than most in its potential for responding to changing circumstances by long-standing traditions of conservatism and prejudice. In recent times, it is true, chiefly in response to the pressures of deepening financial crisis and the turbulent events of the 1980s, soccer’s capacity for critical self-evaluation and innovation has somewhat improved, an improvement attested by a revival of FA support for women’s soccer (Williams and Woodhouse), a decline in the extent of hooliganism (Williams) and a greater willingness on the part of its administrators to adapt to the demands of sponsors and the media and at least to consider what might be learned from the way the business of soccer is conducted elsewhere (Goldberg and Wagg). Much, however, remains to be done before British soccer can be considered adequately equipped to meet the demands of the modern age. So deeply ingrained are the game’s inherited structures and mentalities and so severe its current financial malaise that it is difficult to see how this can be easily
achieved. Certainly, it will not be achieved without radical alteration to the character of British football.

As Moorhouse observes in the one chapter in the volume specifically devoted to the Scottish experience, even in Scotland, where a sense of 'submerged nationalism' has endowed the game with a degree of popularity rarely found elsewhere, much of soccer's existing format, and the culture surrounding it, will disappear under the impact of the demands of the post-1992 world for better standards of facilities for spectating, increased player mobility, new types of international club competition and a continued growth in the influence of sponsors and the media. To date, only one Scottish club, Glasgow Rangers, has demonstrated an ability to respond effectively to such demands. It remains to be seen whether others prove as capable of overthrowing those forces of conservative tradition and financial constraint which together threaten the survival of Scottish soccer as a viable, internationally competitive activity.

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Many historians might be forgiven for thinking that Scottish sociology, like the fairy at the bottom of the garden, is a figment of a wild imagination. Yes, there are important sociological works which have made important contributions to the understanding of Scotland's past – names like Ian Carter, Allan MacLaren, Gordon Marshall, Geoff Payne and David McCrone himself spring to mind. But many of these contributions have been to the past, to social history and not to a distinctive, connected and substantive corpus in sociology. Maybe this is too harsh, but a year ago I heard a very eminent professor of sociology say (albeit after a well-lubricated meal in a Greek restaurant) that Scottish sociology needs to be rescued from oblivion.

So the first question posed by a book like McCrone's must be, is there a Scottish sociology to report on? For McCrone sets out to provide a well-digested, readable textbook on the state of understanding of Scotland past and present. His chapter titles are 'What is Scotland?', 'Understanding Scotland's development', 'Is Scotland different?', 'Getting on in Scotland', 'Who runs Scotland?', 'Politics in a cold country', 'Scottish culture: images and icons' and 'The sociology of a stateless nation'. The vast body of the content of these chapters is made up of a guide to the literature, with substantive quoting at length from published research. And what strikes the reader immediately is the sheer dominance of historians amongst those quoted, especially for the empirical evidence. One is almost tempted to