
Women's football in Britain during the 1880s

Ariel Hessayon

In autumn 1894 a British Ladies' Football Club was established. It flourished until about October 1897. A 'huge throng of ten thousand' gathered at the Nightingale Lane Ground, Crouch End to see the first match on 23 March 1895 between two women's teams called 'North' and 'South'. To quote a contemporary report, 'the idea of woman taking up a sport essentially designed for man' had been the brainchild of Miss Nettie Honeyball.¹ It seems that Honeyball – who served as the club's secretary – saw this as a business opportunity, but was also keen on turning young middle-class women into professional footballers. Honeyball was assisted in her endeavours by Lady Florence Caroline Dixie (1855–1905), who took on the role of non-playing club president. She was the youngest daughter of the eighth marquess of Queensberry and sister of John Sholto Douglas, ninth marquess of Queensberry (whose famous trial, on a charge of libel brought by Oscar Wilde, began less than two weeks later at the Old Bailey). As for Florence, she was the author of *Across Patagonia* (1880) as well as *Gloriana, or, The Revolution of 1900* (1890). Using her privileged background to speak out on a range of topical and social issues – including home rule for Ireland and Scotland; amendment of the divorce laws; family planning; and suitable women's attire – she not only denounced the cruelty of blood sports but also saw the promotion of women's football as one of several stepping stones towards complete sex equality. Thus, given a column in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (8 February 1895), she declared:

There is no reason why football should not be played by women, and played well, too, provided they dress rationally and relegate to limbo the straight-jacket attire in which fashion delights to clothe them ... I cannot conceive a game more calculated to improve the physique of women than that of [Association] football ... In that school of the future, which, looking ahead, I see arising on the golden hill-tops of progress above the mists of prejudice, football will be considered as natural a game for girls as for boys, as will also cricket, athletics, and all national games, in pursuit of which the hideous fashions which crush women with their barbarous and unnatural rule will receive their severest checks and final dethronement.²

The British Ladies' Football Club has been the subject of a book by James Lee which explored, among other things, how dominant representations of masculinity and femininity were challenged at a moment of social upheaval as well-bred women footballers were afforded the opportunity of donning rational dress and improving their health through vigorous exercise. Another theme was predominantly hostile press coverage which sometimes emphasised troubling questions of gender identity: the North's short-haired tricky left-winger Miss Gilbert, for example, was unkindly nicknamed 'Little Tommy'.³ Robert Lewis has also written a study of female football spectators in Britain from the formation of the Football Association in 1863 until the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴ By comparison, however, until very recently women's football in Britain during the 1880s has received considerably less attention.⁵ So here I want to provide a narrative of developments beginning with the so-called women's 'international' football matches of 1881 and concluding in 1888 with the formation of the men's English Football League.

Using more than 350 digitised newspaper accounts – space does not permit citation of all but a handful – as well as some other sources, the first part of this article reconstructs the games of 1881 and reactions to them in greater detail than has previously been possible. As we shall see, initially the dominant motivation for those involved was money. Seemingly drawn from urban areas and of low social status, several female footballers appear to have been stage performers and may also have adopted pseudonyms. Certainly the athletic physiques of these supposed 'Amazons' were frequently remarked upon, leading to occasional complaints about the masculinisation of women. Their eye-catching, colourful kit, doubtless intended to enhance the spectacle, permitted unencumbered movement. Yet it also caused outrage among moralists aghast that young women could indecently expose themselves in tight-fitting clothing. As for the standard of play, observers generally considered it to be of very low quality; a travesty of the men's game rather than an exciting innovation. The female footballers had minimal preparation, lacked skill, speed, effective teamwork and tactical awareness. As for the umpires, they were reportedly even more ignorant of the rules of Association football than the players. All the same, through a combination of effective publicity and considerable press attention – at least at the outset – matches were attended by large crowds. Because prices were relatively high many spectators succeeded in watching without paying. This resulted in unruly elements attending several fixtures and there were even some unnerving pitch invasions – one of which necessitated a police baton-charge to protect the players. A noticeable number of spectators, moreover, amused themselves at the women's expense, treating them as objects of ridicule. Anxious to avoid the taint of bad publicity, many men's football clubs too swiftly disassociated themselves

from these sporting spectacles. Whether these 'international' matches advanced the cause of women's rights rather than setting them back is therefore debatable.

Part two likewise draws upon several hundred more digitised newspaper accounts. Here it has not been possible to present a single narrative covering the period between July 1881 and April 1887. Rather, the geographical scope has been extended to look at comparable developments in Australia and the United States. Five interlinked strands can be identified. First, there were generally uncomplimentary memories of the 'international' contests which may have partly shaped public attitudes towards subsequent female football games. Second, a ladies' football club was formed in Sussex and perhaps also South Wales. The subject was also discussed facetiously in the Australian press. Third, there was a noticeable female presence at matches of Association and American football as well as Australian rules. Hostile accounts, however, criticised some female spectators for their vulgarity and, in one instance, threatening behaviour towards a referee. Others were upbraided for using sporting occasions as an opportunity to invite appreciative male gazes and engage in flirtation. There were even occasional sexual liaisons with players. Fourth, a couple of women's football matches were linked to village communal celebrations, while there was also an apparent example of participation in traditional folk football. Fifth, in one sense, there was a reprise of the original 'international' fixtures with matches in spring 1887 between women's teams representing Edinburgh and Grimsby. Cumulatively this indicates that female football culture – whether as players or spectators – was more widespread, varied and resilient than the 1881 matches alone might suggest. Significantly, the issue of women's rights can also sometimes be discerned running through these interlinked strands.

I. Women's 'international' football matches, 1881

In March 1881 there was a men's international football match played between England and Scotland at the Kennington Oval (London) which was attended by an estimated crowd of 4,000–5,000 spectators. The Scots were victorious 6-1. Afterwards someone described as 'an enterprising advertising agent' looked to cash in by staging an equivalent women's fixture. Accordingly, two teams were assembled for the 'purpose of popularising football as a feminine pastime' and, it was stressed, financial gain. Those representing England were said to originate mainly from London while their Scottish counterparts apparently came mostly from Glasgow. Even so, it was hinted that their nationalities may not have been given in good faith. All of them were estimated to be aged between 18 and 24, the majority described as 'well-built, athletic-looking girls'. Their physique was explained in some accounts as a consequence of many being ballet dancers and the like. The *Liverpool Echo* even referred to them as 'a female football troupe'.⁶

In addition, there was speculation as to their true identity, with several newspapers commenting upon the 'simple', 'splendid' or 'romantic' nature of the players' names.⁷ Nevertheless, preparation was minimal – reportedly no more than a fortnight. Although it was rumoured that a couple of well-known male players belonging to a leading Glasgow club had been approached to coach the women, reportedly 'nobody would have anything to do with the matter'. So instead both teams trained indoors, practising their dribbling in 'a certain drill hall' close to Glasgow Cross.⁸ Although several reports suggested that the English team had never played outdoors, together with their Scottish opponents they had 'a full dress rehearsal' in a field in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park (Glasgow) the day prior to their debut.

While both sides had familiarised themselves with the laws of the game, the same could not be said of the two umpires: Mr G. F. Charles of London (for the English team) and Mr Alec Gordon of Edinburgh (for the Scottish team). Given their ignorance of Football Association rules, they may well have been part of the show. This has prompted speculation as to their identities and the nature of their involvement. According to several newspaper reports there was a G. F. Charles, who for many years was the lessee and manager of the Theatre Royal, St Helens. This G. F. Charles, however, was actually an alias of George Imbert (c.1822–1891). Imbert alias Charles was an acquaintance of Charles Scholes (c.1831–1883), alias Charles Henry Duval of Blackburn. Scholes alias Duval was likewise the lessee and manager of several theatres in Lancashire. He had been declared bankrupt in 1870 and in June 1880 a petition was filed for the liquidation of his affairs. Scholes's liabilities were estimated at £2,500 and the stage effects and scenery at St Helens were auctioned to pay his creditors. Whether following the collapse of Scholes's business Imbert/Charles together with Gordon hit upon the idea of women's football as a money-making scheme is difficult to say. Assuming that the umpire G. F. Charles was not a namesake but one and the same as the theatre manager, then he would have been nearly 60 at the time. Moreover, Imbert/Charles can be placed at St Helens between January 1878 and January 1881, and then again from October 1881 – but not, to my knowledge, in the spring and summer of 1881 when the women's football matches took place in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lancashire and Yorkshire. In short, the involvement of Imbert/Charles and his associates in this business is an intriguing if as yet unproven suggestion.

7 May. Hibernian Park, Edinburgh: Scotland 3–0 England

Several Glasgow clubs were approached as a potential venue. None granted it, however, with the possible exception of Rangers F.C., whose ground at Kinning Park was to have hosted the fixture. That is, until a drawn charity game was replayed there instead.⁹ As a consequence, Edinburgh not Glasgow became the

stage for the first women's 'international' football match. The 90-minute contest was played according to Football Association rules at Hibernian Park, Easter Road on Saturday, 7 May 1881. Attendance for this 'athletic novelty' was estimated at about 2,000 people, although with 'hardly any ladies present'.¹⁰ As a gimmick, the players arrived shortly after 3.00 pm in an omnibus drawn by four horses. They were colourfully dressed in kit 'essentially similar to that worn by male football players'. Both teams of eleven ladies were provided with woollen cowls (not unlike hooded tops); blue and white for the Scots, crimson and white for the English. The Scottish players wore blue jerseys with a crimson waist sash and a lion rampant badge on the breast. Their English opponents wore crimson jerseys with a blue waist sash and a badge featuring two Union Jacks.¹¹ In addition, both teams wore knickerbockers; hose (blue and white for the Scots; crimson and white for the English); and high-heeled boots.¹² Kick-off was about 3.30 pm with the match split into two 45-minute halves. Both sides lined up with a goalkeeper, two backs, two half-backs and six forwards.¹³ The ball was made of leather.

Playing against the wind in the first half and with the advantage of it in the second, the supposed Scotswomen won 3-0 (goalscorers: Miss Lilly St Clair; Miss Louise Cole; Miss Maud Riverford). Bella Oswald (Scotland) and Maud Hopewell (England) were said to have played well along with some of the forwards, while Isa Stevenson set up the last goal. Yet this 'mild kind of football' was not an entirely gentle affair. Although there was 'an appearance of bashfulness and hesitancy' at the outset, the two teams soon began playing 'with all the enthusiasm of boys'. Besides running and dribbling, there were also some rough passages of play, 'frequent scrimmages' and 'a tumble or two'. Even so, sections of the crowd made 'sarcastic or personal remarks', loudly guffawing at the standard of play which, except for some frantic goalmouth action, was noticeably slow. These rowdy elements also criticised the appearance of the players – some of whom had 'retained such feminine ornaments as frillings, bracelets, &c.', although others had their arms bare to the shoulders. There was also amusement when these 'Amazonian maids', to quote the *Carlisle Express*, began shrieking whenever there was danger of conceding a goal. Before the end, more than half the spectators had gone – reportedly either with their curiosity satisfied or else in disgust.

Press coverage was largely hostile. *Bell's Life* judged the standard of football to be 'of the most primitive order'. The *Dundee Courier* called it 'a most disappointing spectacle'. The *Glasgow Herald* considered it 'a failure'. The *Scotsman* declared it 'a most unfeminine exhibition', while the *Weston Mercury* declared it a 'senseless, shameless parody on manly sport'. So too the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, which pronounced it 'infinitely worse' than a recent burlesque on the national summer sport by a team of 'clown cricketers'. Moreover, the *Glasgow*

Evening News thought it neither sporting to witness women getting 'violently knocked about a field' nor particularly healthy – 'either physically or morally'. The *Aberdeen Evening Express* was equally condemnatory, lamenting that young ladies should make 'a spectacle for the vulgar' by publicly displaying themselves 'in a semi-nude condition'. Similarly, the *Glasgow News* worried about the impact of this 'outrageous exhibition' on public morals. The *Jedburgh Gazette* was equally unequivocal: this was 'women's rights with a vengeance' and such 'pretensions to public notoriety' had no place in Scotland. The *Aberdeen Journal* on the other hand, praised the young women's 'excellent physique' and thought their 'somewhat fantastic costumes' made the scene 'very charming and effective'.

16 May. Shawfield Recreation Grounds, Glasgow: Scotland 0–0 England (match abandoned)

After the Edinburgh show another performance was planned at Dumbarton on Thursday, 12 May. But there is no indication that this took place. So on the evening of Monday, 16 May a second fixture was played at Shawfield Recreation Grounds, on the banks of the River Clyde near Rutherglen Bridge in Glasgow. Mainly used as a running and horse-trotting venue, it had been secured as a last resort by the match promoter because the members of all the city's major football clubs had refused to allow their pitches to be used for such an 'unseemly exhibition'. Ahead of the game several newspapers carried advertisements for this 'Grand International Football Match' featuring 'Lady Players'. As a consequence of this publicity by 7 pm Rutherglen Bridge was lined with a large crowd, mostly people from Bridgeton and Saltmarket. Reportedly, more than 3,000 mostly 'rowdy' male spectators attended. Indeed, few were of the 'class' that normally patronised the game. Hundreds more got in without paying.¹⁴ Admission was one shilling; double the normal price for watching a men's match. Once again the teams were paraded onto the field in an omnibus. The line-ups were unchanged and presumably the players were kitted out the same as before.¹⁵

Play began about 7.30 pm and was soon accompanied by sounds of laughter, joking, cheering, occasional hooting and swearing as well as shouts of 'Go it, Fanny' and 'Well done, Nelly'. Indeed, the match was described as 'a very tame affair'. It was also abandoned, scoreless, after fifty-five minutes following a pitch invasion – the ropes keeping back the crowd were cut, whereupon the 'rougher elements' rushed onto the field. The players were 'roughly jostled' and 'rather badly treated by the mob'. One, or perhaps as many as four, reportedly fainted. They were saved from potentially serious injury after police came to their rescue, baton-charging the 'infuriated ruffians'. Thereupon the players retreated to the omnibus which was then driven rapidly from the ground by a team of four grey horses while the crowd jeered and hurled wooden stakes at them.¹⁶ Outside the ground local girls from the Bridgeton mills joined in the chorus of derision. As

the omnibus crossed over Rutherglen Bridge some hooligans attempted to drag the players from their vehicle. But they were prevented by a number of onlookers (there were too few policemen present, who were 'powerless to quell the disturbance').

Unsurprisingly, this 'disgraceful scene' prompted a great deal of further press hostility. *Bell's Life* bemoaned the players' 'utmost ignorance of the game', not to mention the 'umpiring', which was 'even more ignorant of the simple rudiments of the Association rules'. Hence there was encroachment at throw-ins. Nor were there any corner kicks, despite the defending side repeatedly sending the ball behind the goal line. There was also criticism of the players' lack of ball control and tactical awareness. The *Glasgow Herald* deemed the standard of play 'most amateurish', while the *Greenock Telegraph* called it 'a pure farce from beginning to end'. The *Warfedale and Airedale Observer* went further, opining that these 'enterprising "merry maidens"' must have learned from their unfortunate experience in Glasgow that there was insufficient appetite among the British public for 'female football matches' and that, as yet, these exhibitions were not suitable for making money. Similarly, the *Paisley Daily Express* declared that the football field was 'not the place for the fair sex except as spectators'. Indeed it was:

against our chivalric notions that such creatures should expose their dainty limbs to the gaze of the vulgar crowd, and be seen kicking and sprawling about like so many windmills gone mad.

For its part, the *Sheffield Independent* wished that the female players – if they had the 'slightest trait of womanly modesty' – would not perform again in public. In the same vein, the *John o' Groat Journal* declared that respectable people would not go near women disgracefully dressed in 'ordinary male football costume'. Likewise, the *Ulster Examiner* denounced it as a 'sad', 'humiliating', 'shocking and disgusting sight' that should not be repeated. Accordingly, it expressed the hope that 'the evil example which the immoral Scotch have just exhibited will find no imitators'. Turning to the *Dundee Courier*, it maintained that 'the doctrine of women's rights is not to be recognised as including the right to appear in public places in knickerbocker suits for the purpose of playing football'. Furthermore, a football match played by women was not merely an oddity but an objectionable and potentially indecent spectacle. As such 'it ought to be suppressed' by the police. This sentiment, however, was not universal for another Dundee correspondent defended the right of women to play whatever lawful game they wished – including football. For good measure, this person rebuked the spectators for their 'unmanliness and want of self-respect' which was 'altogether unworthy of the name of Scotchmen'.

17 May. Hamilton Park, Kilmarnock: match cancelled

The next day the female footballers intended to go and play at Hamilton Park, the ground of Kilmarnock Portland F.C. (1873–1883). A crowd gathered outside, ‘expecting to see the Amazons’. But they did not appear. This was because on the recommendation of the magistrates the club withdrew their permission, so as to avoid ‘scandal’. Almost at the last minute ‘bills were circulated stating that the match had been postponed’. The teams’ managers were also telegraphed with a message that seemed to spell the end for women’s ‘international’ football north of the border.

Once again press coverage was overwhelmingly condemnatory. Reportedly the proposed match at Kilmarnock had been looked upon with ‘considerable disfavour by the public’ and no football club ‘with any regard for their good name’ wanted to be associated with such a ‘humiliating spectacle’. Furthermore, the *Irvine Times* was thankful that ‘an insult to womanly modesty’ and ‘a disgrace to the national pastime’ had been avoided. Similarly, the *Birmingham Mail* advised the ‘muscular young ladies’ to give up their ‘project’ since they had little hope of ‘enlisting public sympathy’ south of the River Tweed. But like the *Sheffield Independent*, which thought it probable that ‘nothing more would be heard of the gyrations of the Amazonian football players’, it was wrong. For the show continued in Blackburn, Lancashire.

21 May. Hole-i’-th’wall, Blackburn: England 1–0 Scotland

On Saturday afternoon, 21 May some 4,000 spectators turned out in fine weather at the ‘Hole-i’-th’wall’ ground of Blackburn Olympic Football Club to watch another women’s fixture of ‘England’ v ‘Scotland’.¹⁷ This time it was reported that all the players came from Glasgow, which was fortunate since it meant they could not understand the broad Lancashire accents of the spectators who teased them mercilessly. After two goals had been disallowed and with just a few minutes remaining, there was ‘an exciting scrimmage in front of the Scotch posts’ from which the English scored the winning goal. According to *The Manchester Guardian*, however, there was little effective teamwork with each player ‘striving to kick the ball’ as the opportunity arose. The *Blackburn Standard* said much the same: ‘there were no half-backs or any halves whatever about the game, each lady being in full possession of her position, and playing her own game whenever she got the chance, without much regard to the result’.

As before, in addition to commenting upon the game several newspapers raised issues of public decency and women’s rights. The *Newry Reporter* decried the ‘masculinisation’ of women and thought it ‘quite revolting’ that the ‘well-built’ ladies wore tight-fitting clothes, while the *Saturday Review* sarcastically suggested that the recently founded ‘Rational Dress Society’ could borrow hints

from the players' costume. Regarding women's rights, the *Rhyl Record* opined that there 'can be no doubt as to the desirability of the physical as well as the moral and intellectual development of the female portion of the community'. But it questioned the wisdom of publicly playing women's football as a way of achieving this.

28 May. Fairfield Athletic Grounds, Liverpool: match cancelled

30 May. Queen's Grounds, Sheffield: England 2–1 Scotland

Staying in Lancashire, the lady footballers travelled from Blackburn to Liverpool. Here another match was advertised the following Saturday, 28 May at Fairfield Athletic Grounds. Kick-off was scheduled for 3.30 pm. But after nearly two hours' waiting the expectant crowd gradually dispersed because neither team showed up. No explanation was provided for the abrupt cancellation. Instead, the players went to Manchester where they searched fruitlessly for a pitch. Afterwards they travelled to Sheffield to play at the Queen's Grounds, Hillsborough – usually a running venue – on Monday, 30 May with a 6.00 pm kick-off. Nearly 1,000 spectators watched this 'football farce', which the 'English' won 2–1.

3 June. Stanley Athletic Grounds, Liverpool:

England 1–1 Scotland

Thereafter the lady footballers returned to Liverpool, where they secured the Stanley Athletic Grounds on the outskirts of the city for an evening fixture. This game was played on Friday, 3 June with a 7.30 pm kick-off. *Athletic News* provided a detailed report. The match was 'well contested' with some of the players showing 'remarkably good form'. In particular, the English goalkeeper was praised for her shot-stopping, while several of the forwards were also commended for their dribbling and making 'splendid runs'. It ended 1–1 (goalscorers: Miss Eva Davenport for England, Miss Louise Cole for Scotland). Altogether it was judged 'a great success', although the attendance was smaller than expected.

6 June. Halifax: score unknown

From Liverpool the lady footballers went back to Manchester. There during the Whitsuntide holiday period, that is between 5–7 June, they arranged to play three more 'international' fixtures at Salford F.C.'s ground. But unfortunately 'their guide and cashier bolted with all the money that was left in the treasury'. Lacking any spare cash to pay the farmer in Salford to whom the ground belonged and who demanded advance payment of rent, the lady footballers were forced to

abandon these matches. So on Monday, 6 June they journeyed just over 30 miles to Halifax, where they played on the Free Wanderers' ground (a local rugby team). This 'rather novel spectacle' attracted a large crowd, although the proceedings were 'of a somewhat tame character'. As in previous matches, the players were sometimes subjected to ridicule. But the score in this game is unknown.

13 June. Windhill, Bradford: England 2–3 Scotland

A few days later they were reportedly in Leeds, although it is unclear whether this was to play or publicise a fixture. Then on 13 June this 'not altogether prepossessing band of females' travelled by train from Manchester to Bradford for a Monday evening kick-off at Windhill. There a large crowd turned out to see the 'Amazonian leather hunters'. The game itself was 'well played' and lasted more than an hour, with nothing that could cause any great objection. Indeed, the spectators were not rude but boisterous, occasionally laughing but more often 'uproariously' cheering as Scotland beat England 3-2.

20 June. Cheetham F.C., Manchester: England 0–0 Scotland (match abandoned)

21 June. Cheetham F.C., Manchester: England 0–0 Scotland (match abandoned)

The following Monday evening, 20 June the female footballers put in another appearance, this time at Cheetham Football Club, Tetlow Fold in Manchester. This match, together with a further two fixtures on consecutive days, had been advertised on placards around the city. As a result there was a large crowd, with many managing to evade paying an admission fee of one or two shillings. Kick-off had been scheduled for 7.30 pm but the teams arrived about half an hour late. After about 30 minutes of 'indifferent play' there was a pitch invasion and the fixture abandoned. The next day a second game took place at the same venue. As before, very few among another large crowd paid for admission. Many of these spectators gathered either on the road or else on high ground on the other side of the field so as to view proceedings. This time, however, there was a large police presence to maintain order. They succeeded for about an hour before those occupying the 'higher land' rushed onto the pitch. At which point the players, mindful of the rough treatment they had experienced elsewhere in the country, hastily retreated to a waggonette that had transported them to the ground. Condemning the 'disorderly scene', *The Manchester Guardian* blamed the young women footballers for gratifying the 'vulgar curiosity' of uncouth youths by kicking a ball about the field in unbecoming attire. For good measure, Cheetham F.C. publicly distanced itself from the spectacle, with a letter from the club secretary published in the *Manchester Courier*.

**25 June. Stanley Athletic Grounds, Liverpool:
England 1–2 Scotland**

**27 June. Stanley Athletic Grounds, Liverpool:
England 0–2 Scotland**

Undeterred, the women footballers went from Manchester to Liverpool to play two scheduled matches at the Cattle Market Inn Athletic Grounds in Stanley on Saturday, 25 June and Monday, 27 June. Tickets were priced at one shilling. Failure to fulfil their fixture on 28 May combined with the costly admission fee likely put off many from coming. So only a small crowd watched 'Scotland' dominate their opponents, winning the first encounter by two goals to one. Curiously the *Manchester Evening News* added that the Scottish team 'succeeded in making several touchdowns'. A larger number of cheering spectators attended the next fixture, a 'very spirited' contest in which the Scots triumphed over the plucky 'English' 2-0. A third match at the same Liverpool venue was announced for Tuesday, 28 June with a 7.30 pm kick-off. Yet there is no indication that it was played. This may have been because the women footballers were reportedly the victims of theft: according to the *Leeds Mercury* a gatekeeper tasked with collecting admission fees had made off with 'all their hard cash'. The same newspaper concluded with the hope that this 'calamity' would have the effect of 'sending these females, who have been so eager to unsex themselves' back to their homes.

What happened to these lady footballers afterwards is unclear. Certainly there are no more match reports. Rather it was said that two or three English grounds had rescinded their permission for these 'damsels to exhibit their unfeminine powers'. Moreover, negotiations to hire London grounds had proved 'wholly unsuccessful'. At the end of July the *Aberdeen Evening Express* recoiled from the prospect of a cricket match between schoolgirls in Birmingham by recalling:

with what bitter contempt the public and press treated not long ago the promoters of the female football tournaments at Edinburgh and elsewhere, and how the feelings even of those who were most likely to tolerate the vile exhibition revolted against the unusual and unseemly exhibition.¹⁸

Prejudice had won. Women's football did not become 'a national institution' – at least in the short term.

Commentary

Clearly, as a number of contemporary newspapers intimated, money was the main reason for playing women's football in 1881. This was frowned upon since during this period gentleman amateurs embodying the 'Corinthian Spirit' were resisting the increasing professionalisation of sport – including football. As for the female players, they were likely recruited because of their suitable physiques and many may also have been professional performers on stage. Moreover, besides the managers (who may have doubled up as umpires) there was also a match promoter. Indeed, games were publicised through an assortment of techniques including small advertisements in newspapers and placards. There was even a photograph of the 'female football players' team' available from a Glasgow company with premises on Sauchiehall Street.¹⁹ High ticket prices and reported thefts of the match takings on two occasions reinforce the financial motivation of all involved as well as the female performers' vulnerability to opportunistic stealing. Yet as contemporary newspapers also remarked, albeit disapprovingly on the whole, the lady footballers were seen as advancing the cause of women's rights. Here advocates for equality had to contend with prevailing views as to what constituted femininity and masculinity. Tied up with this were deep-seated notions regarding appropriate physical exercise for girls and women, which varied according to social class. Anticipating a notice in *The British Medical Journal* (1894) regarding the possibility of sustaining injuries to the breasts that would prevent the nurturing of infants, there was even concern for the players' physical well-being. As far away as Boston, Massachusetts a correspondent wrote that football, with its 'violent scrimmages', was 'too rough a game for girls to indulge in'.²⁰ A further dimension was religion. Muscular Christianity – exemplified by patriotism, self-sacrifice and athleticism – was all very well for men. But was it suitable for women too?

Turning to where matches were played or scheduled, these were well-chosen locations. Indeed, Scotland (Edinburgh, Dumbarton, Glasgow, Kilmarnock), Lancashire (Blackburn, Liverpool, Manchester) and Yorkshire (Sheffield, Halifax, Bradford) were then the heartlands of football. So much so that when the English Football League was founded seven years later in April 1888, six of the twelve clubs were from Lancashire, with the other six from the Midlands. As for the social composition of the crowds who attended, those who got in without paying seem to have been of a lower social status than the usual spectator at a men's match. This was a point made by a number of contemporary journalists who, together with the bulk of their readers, doubtless looked down upon people they considered their social inferiors. Yet it must be emphasised that the rowdy scenes at several of the women's matches (three were abandoned because of pitch invasions) were not unique for the period. For as one historian has

commented, 'riots, unruly behaviour, violence, assault and vandalism appear to have been a well-established, but not necessarily dominant pattern of crowd behaviour at football matches at least from the 1870s'.²¹

Afterlives

Charles Scholes, alias Charles Henry Duval, theatrical manager, died at Blackburn on 5 February 1883 owing money to various creditors. George Imbert, alias G. F. Charles, theatrical lessee and manager, followed him to the grave at Blackburn on 8 May 1891. As for Lilly St Clair, scorer of the first 'international' goal in a women's football match, someone using that name performed as a singer at the 'Palace of Varieties' in Bethnal Green, London in October 1882. Miss Lilly St Clair, 'Burlesque Vocalist', also performed at the 'Amphitheatre', Portsmouth in February 1885. Yet Lilly St Clair was also one of a number of aliases used by Lilly Cohen (others included Tottie Fay, Lillian Rothschild and Violet St John). Aged 30 in 1887, this woman was frequently in trouble with the London police for drunkenness, disorderly conduct, using obscene language and perjury. At one of her many court appearances in May 1892 (by then she had been charged more than thirty times at one court alone), Lilly appeared in a 'peculiar' costume. 'On her breast were four large silver-plated balls', about the 'size of small oranges'. They were said to be "badges of honour". Did they represent footballs?

What became of the other female footballers is largely unknown, although Stuart Gibbs has outlined the biography of Constance Cole, alias Louise Cole, second goalscorer at Easter Road in May 1881.²² Given their social status, gender and likely precarious financial situation, it will require a great deal of detective work to piece together fragments of these footballers' lives beyond whatever appearances they may have made on stage as well as on the pitch. Nonetheless, as we shall see, there is sufficient surviving evidence to partially fill the previously missing gap in accounts of women's involvement with football in Britain and beyond between July 1881 and April 1887.

II. Women's football, July 1881 to April 1887

Recollections of women's 'international' football and ladies' football clubs

Although women's 'international' football came to an abrupt end in late June 1881, the matches were not entirely forgotten. For despite these performances becoming the butt of jokes, in March 1882 an advertisement was placed in a

theatrical newspaper asking the female football players to make contact. There were also occasional references in the press recollecting the dates and locations of certain matches, not to mention the 'ferocious bullies' who had disrupted the game at Glasgow on 16 May 1881. These 'rowdies' had caused a breach of the peace without caring a fig for the 'unseemly' show:

They broke the palings of the enclosure, they assaulted the doorkeepers, tried to get at the cash box, and mobbed, hustled, and injured the women.²³

Unsurprisingly, the tour of Scotland and northern England by a 'professional team' of lady footballers was therefore remembered as an unsuccessful venture, indeed as a 'disgraceful gate money exhibition', 'unedifying spectacle', 'burlesque' or 'fiasco'.²⁴ In the same vein, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* recalled 'the experiment of organising a team of female football players, which ... was so repulsive to good taste, and met with such emphatic denunciation on all sides, that it was soon abandoned'.²⁵

Just over two years later, in August 1884, the *Naracoorte Herald* (South Australia) observed that 'in this age of women's rights there are lady footballers'. Musing on the prospect of female footballers in every town, it provided sketches of two women playing in a fictitious match between Giggleton and Stayville Rise. One was depicted as angered by an unfavourable umpiring decision. But in an attempt at humour, the journalist supposed that when the game was over she would soon get 'peaceable and kissable'.²⁶

Staying in Australia, as early as May 1862 the *Tarrangower Times* (Maldon, Victoria) had printed a facetious letter to the editor concerning a 'Ladies' Football Association'. Poking fun at the recently formed gentleman's football club in Maldon, which permitted no pushing, tripping or kicking an opponent, it asked to 'give us girls a chance for a good romp in the open air' since this courteous type of football was intended to be 'a very lady-like game'.²⁷ Some eighteen years later, in August 1880, it was reported that a large number of young ladies in Sandhurst, Victoria had recently received initialled postcards inviting them to attend a meeting 'for the purpose of forming a ladies' football club'. Not enough invitees, however, attended this gathering at which it was decided that the idea of a 'team of lady footballers' was 'a little too advanced'.²⁸ So the matter was dropped. Yet within a couple of years an unspecified inland town claimed the 'glory of producing the first Female Football Club' in Australia.²⁹

Nor was this an isolated innovation for as early as autumn 1874 female students at Vassar College, New York reportedly played football – although which form of the game is unclear from a flippant remark that it was 'an inspiring sight to see one of them miss the ball and land on her head in the grass'.³⁰ Perhaps this prompted increased feminine interest, for several months later it was reported that 'Female football clubs' were the 'newest thing' in America.³¹

Whether this account was meant seriously, however, is difficult to say since it is doubtless connected with a tongue-in-cheek story in June 1875 that a match at St Louis had been arranged between twelve brunette lawyers and a similar number of 'blonde damsels' belonging to the same profession.³² But what is certain is that a number of the 'fair sex' attended the opening game of the college football season between Princeton and Harvard in autumn 1877.

Across the Atlantic, at the beginning of January 1880 it was said that a ladies' football club had been established in England. Rumour of such a venture doubtless circulated, for the pseudonymous authors of a satirical publication associated with the magazine *Judy* insisted that 'somewhere or other' there were doubtless 'maids' of merry England frolicking and gambolling about in 'rapturous enjoyment of the football pastime'. Indeed, they mockingly continued, 'muscular, lithe yet fascinating, flannel-clad, football-playing damsels *must* exist'.³³ These jibes became reality in autumn 1886 when, after a successful summer season of women's cricket, a 'ladies' football team' began 'astonishing' the inhabitants of Burgess Hill, Sussex.³⁴ Their intention, reportedly, was to begin by playing matches among themselves before 'challenging ladies' teams from afar off to kick the festive football'.³⁵ As to their prospective opponents, although the *Barrow Herald* said there were none to be found in their town, there was reason to believe that a ladies' football club was being formed in South Wales.³⁶ For the *Buckinghamshire Advertiser* the notion of picturesque 'Amazonian teams on the war-path' was undoubtedly 'a sign of the times', even if it might be some while before every town and village boasted their own Ladies' football club.³⁷ Nonetheless, some journalists belittled this 'latest craze', remarking that it was undecided whether the 'fair Amazons' were to 'play under Rugby or Association rules'.³⁸ Others, however, linked this 'latest startling novelty' to the issue of women's rights on the principle that 'what is good for man is good for woman'. Ultimately such societal trends would bring about 'a perfection of things that there shall be at last no difference whatever between the two sexes'.³⁹ But in the meantime there were practical considerations: could young ladies of limited financial means afford football boots in addition to maintaining a respectable appearance in society?⁴⁰

'Fair sex' spectators

Besides forming female football clubs, women also attended men's matches. As far back as May 1859 'lots of ladies' had attended a couple of matches between Sheffield F.C. (the world's first football club) and the local army garrison.⁴¹ Again, in March 1873 a 'great number' of ladies were among the 5,000 or so spectators that braved the elements to watch Sheffield triumph against London.⁴² So it is unsurprising that the president of a Dundee boys' club voiced his

preference for local girls to take a greater interest in the game by watching it rather than playing.

Sometimes women were admitted free of charge (particularly to the terraces rather than the grandstands), while men normally paid between threepence and sixpence in the late 1870s and early 1880s.⁴³ This was often the case not only for football but also for rugby matches in South Wales and West Yorkshire. Yet it was not always so. For at Bramall Lane, Sheffield in January 1879 a parsimonious 'admirer of athletic sports' was astonished to discover that he had to pay admission not only for himself but for his wife and young children as well.⁴⁴ On another occasion, however, namely at Annbank, Ayrshire in 1882, the policy of 'Ladies Free' backfired, for it precipitated an influx of 'slovenly-looking, petticoated, and extremely vulgar' women who swore profusely.⁴⁵ Similarly, in January 1884 when Preston North End played at Great Lever (near Bolton) the referee was abused and threatened by a section of home supporters for appearing to favour the away team. After the match he recalled in a letter to a friend:

I was tackled by a flock of infuriated beings in petticoats supposed to be women, who without doubt were in some cases mothers ... They brandished their umbrellas and shook their fists in my face ... Before I had got away ... a female struck me on the back with her gingham ... I then was struck on the right shoulder by a clinker, when some gentlemen came to my rescue.⁴⁶

That same year in Horbury, Yorkshire a visiting team from Batley were, to quote a modern historian, 'pelted with red-hot coals by a woman' after defeating their hosts.⁴⁷ All the same, as a correspondent for the *Bradford Daily Telegraph* maintained, it would have been a 'mistake to abolish the privilege of free admittance to ladies entirely'. Indeed, he suggested that their presence as spectators would incentivise the male players to 'distinguish themselves' on the pitch.⁴⁸ An English mother living in Ballarat, Victoria took the notion further. Writing to the local newspaper in September 1883, she suggested that just as the 'presence of females incited combatants to victory or death' in the Roman gladiatorial arena, so ladies attending 'half-civilised' games of football would goad the players into 'a reckless state of excitement' and, ultimately, violent conduct.⁴⁹ By contrast, in a column on 'Football Enthusiasts' a writer for the *Cardiff Times* focussed on the reason why so many ladies attended football matches. Jokingly, he accounted for their presence either as an opportunity to engage in public display during the winter months or, alternatively, for those who had been jilted, as a way to vent their spleen by watching men knock each other about.⁵⁰ Similar sentiments were expressed by a sketch writer for the *Weekly Times* in July 1886 concerning certain female spectators at a 20-a-side three-hour Australian football match played at Melbourne cricket ground. Hence one tall, 'stately-looking' lady had come not so much to see as to be seen. Indeed, among the 'galaxy of beauty'

on show were several 'belles in tailor-made gowns' engaged in 'mild flirtations' with their 'numerous gentlemen acquaintances'.⁵¹

Whatever the motivation, there is plenty of evidence that lots of women watched professional fixtures in Lancashire during the early 1880s. Thus a 'number of fair sex spectators' usually attended Blackburn Rovers' home fixtures 'in great force' on big match days.⁵² Moreover, at an F.A. Cup tie played between Preston North End and Upton Park in January 1884, a local journalist reported that spotted among the 12,000-plus crowd at Deepdale were:

slim-waisted girls as fresh as daisies, and sprightly and full of life and vivacity ... adorned here and there with bright flowers, but, whether or not, exercising a wonderful effect wherever they turn in reviving seedy spirits.⁵³

Following the tacit introduction of professional football – formally recognised in July 1885 – Preston North End scrapped free admittance for women after about 2,000 turned up for an Easter Monday game. The policy no longer made economic sense. Nonetheless, it has been estimated that during this period between 5–10% of the crowd at run-of-the-mill professional matches were female, with more still coming to watch local derbies and important cup ties.⁵⁴

For some women, however, watching did not suffice. Indeed, in a handful of cases they crossed the boundaries of decorum by flirting or even having sexual relationships with male players. Thus there are reports in 1886 of a junior Glasgow team getting drunk after a game in Oban and chatting up 'unsuspecting Highland barmaids'.⁵⁵ A few years later it was even alleged that in Glasgow's Southside the pavilions of certain football clubs were being used as brothels, with some members 'letting themselves and young women in by means of pass-keys at untimely hours for improper purposes'.⁵⁶ Although the matter was dropped for lack of evidence, before the turn of the century two Celtic players were separately pursued in the courts for damages on the charge of seducing women – in one case reneging on the promise of marriage.⁵⁷

Female players

But ultimately for a few determined young women there was no substitute for playing. Thus three females and a male sibling played football together on a street in Chester. The ball, however, hit a neighbour's window, resulting in 'wordy warfare'.⁵⁸ More orderly was a woman's football match in May 1886, which concluded the annual village tea party at South Littleton, Worcestershire. Similarly, at Duffield, Derbyshire in June 1887 the jubilee festivities celebrating Queen Victoria's reign featured a 'football contest for women'.⁵⁹ Elsewhere in Derbyshire, at Ashbourne, the famous folk football match played on Shrove

Tuesday and Ash Wednesday in February 1885 was witnessed by a 'very large number of the gentler sex'. This prompted a local journalist to remark that it was a 'great mistake' that a Ladies' ball had not been provided for their 'special amusement':

No doubt some first-rate play would be witnessed, as some of them now can be seen in the thickest of the fight having a kick, as well as encouraging the men to 'go in' and play for their respective sides.⁶⁰

One of the longest descriptions of women's football during this period concerns a game supposedly played at Lanarkshire in November 1885. It claimed to be 'no fancy sketch', but rather a genuine eye-witness account of a 'stirring contest' between brawny-looking mill-workers and the like.⁶¹ There are too many resonances, however, with reports of the 1881 women's 'international' matches to believe it a completely 'veracious narrative'. Nonetheless, since several newspapers reprinted it either in its entirety or in summary, it merits discussion because it evidently reflected widespread contemporary attitudes. According to the author, the match was played 'not for love but lucre', with spectators charged sixpence. Yet the pitch – a field lent for the occasion – was in a 'sloppy state' and the weather inclement. The teams were kitted out in knickerbockers and jerseys, one wearing 'Red and White', their opponents 'Blue and Yellow'. Even so, it was only ten-a-side, each team being a woman short. As for the game itself, it was 'a very fast one', featuring scrimmages, charging, corner kicks, 'pretty' dribbling, 'beautiful' running, 'excellent' passing, heading, tussles, foul play and face scratching. There was also shooting in the wrong direction, sitting on the ball, running aimlessly without it, not to mention a disallowed goal which resulted in the umpire being removed from the ground. With fifteen minutes remaining, the score at 1-0 to the 'Blue and Yellow', and most of the players 'red with heat, white with passion, blue with dismay, or yellow with jealousy', the match was abandoned following a pitch invasion. The unfortunate 'combatants' were roughly treated by the excited spectators and borne off to the pavilion in 'a fit of manly indignation', forcing the local authorities to intervene by putting a stop to future fixtures.⁶²

Within a couple of years several charity matches were played between 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen': at Fleetwood (Lancashire) for the benefit of Preston Infirmary; at Blackpool; and at St Arnaud (Victoria) in aid of the Ladies Benevolent Society. But on all occasions the 'Ladies' were actually young men in female attire, mostly without beards or moustaches. Moreover, the 'extraordinary costumes' worn by the 'Gentlemen' at Fleetwood were reminiscent of the 'Zulu' footballers who, with blackened faces, had played a series of charity matches at Sheffield and elsewhere from November 1879 to raise money for the widows and orphans of British soldiers killed during the Anglo-Zulu War.⁶³

Madam Kenney's Edinburgh team v Madam Wills' Grimsby Town team

Besides men in drag, there were some well-publicised women's football matches in spring 1887. These were ostensibly between Madam Kenney's 'famous' Edinburgh team and Madam Wills' Grimsby Town team. Their first known fixture was played at an unnamed north-country town (possibly Grimsby) for the prize of a silver cup. What was intended as a humorous account of this event was printed in the *Cardiff Times* on Saturday, 2 April. According to the sketch writer, many of the male spectators went along merely out of curiosity. Prior to kick-off there was also much speculation as to what the ladies would wear. Eventually, after much waiting and joshing, the two teams were escorted onto the pitch flanked by policemen. Upon discarding their outer garments – 'by gum ... like a transformation scene' – the ladies revealed themselves to be attired in the ordinary garments of male footballers, 'nothing more nor less'.

Cruelly, some of the pioneers of this 'new era of female muscularity' were described as fat; their bulk better suited to an agricultural show than a football field. Nor were they 'fair to gaze upon' with their 'snub noses, toothless gums, and frowsy hair'. As for the game, it was 'uncommonly slow', provoking a 'verbal fusillade' of playful humour laced with imprecations from the crowd. Indeed, it became so 'wearisome' that interest was maintained only through 'tooth and nail contests'; i.e. watching opposing players scratch and pull each other's hair. Eventually, having had his fill of this 'unedifying exhibition', the reporter left early as did some of the disillusioned spectators.⁶⁴

Undeterred, large posters were used to advertise a follow-up match for Good Friday, 8 April at East End F.C.'s ground on Holderness Road in Hull. Club officials had agreed beforehand to let their ground for the small advance payment of £1 to a Mr G. Soule, manager of a music-hall called the Alhambra Palace. Soule had led them to believe that the fixture was to be played between two theatrical companies then in Hull. He had omitted to mention, however, that it was to be a ladies' match. On realising that they had been duped, the club officials confronted Soule, but he reacted in a most ungentlemanly manner. Accordingly they took legal advice, only to be told that they could be sued for damages if they prevented the match from going ahead. At the same time Soule claimed that he had also been negotiating with the honorary secretary of Southcoates F.C., who apparently had been prepared to let their ground in return for a third of the gate money.⁶⁵

Meanwhile a rumour spread that the female footballers were actually ballet dancers, prompting a columnist for the local press to express surprise that a 'decent' club like East End could be associated with such a 'low and demoralising' spectacle. He therefore hoped that the 'football-loving' public of Hull

would withhold their support from a match that would doubtless bring the 'noble game' into disrepute. For good measure, at their annual general meeting the Hull and District Rugby Football Union passed a motion proposed by Southcoates F.C.'s secretary condemning the upcoming 'Ladies Football Competition'.⁶⁶ What happened next can be pieced together primarily from correspondence printed in the *Hull Daily Mail*.

Although the match went ahead, it was unceremoniously abandoned after the players were 'mobbed by roughs'. Thousands had turned up, the vast majority out of 'idle curiosity'. But after only two or three minutes a 'physically powerful' section of the crowd broke down the barriers and began encroaching on the pitch. Amidst 'derisive laughter' and with players and spectators compressed into 'one inseparable, screaming mass of excited men and fainting women', play was stopped. As with the 'international' match played at Glasgow on 16 May 1881, so at Hull on 8 April 1887 the teams had to be escorted off the pitch by the police 'in a high state of nervousness and damaged condition'. Indeed, it was subsequently remarked that the match promoters should have thought themselves highly fortunate if the 'contestants' had escaped without serious harm. To add insult to injury, and again evoking the fate of the women footballers of 1881, the 'indignant crowd' reportedly demanded their money back only to discover that the gatekeeper had absconded with the match takings. Remarking upon the incident, one commentator suggested that the ill-starred young ladies were 'mere tools' in the hands of unscrupulous impresarios, who acted only from 'mercenary motives'. Another eye-witness called it a 'distinctly disgraceful scene', but likewise considered the players largely blameless. There was nothing reproachable about their costumes. Rather, the rowdy elements within the crowd were responsible for creating a 'dangerous hullabaloo' that was 'utterly unwarrantable'.⁶⁷

Afterwards both the honorary secretaries of East End and Southcoates distanced their clubs from the match promoter in communications to the *Hull Daily Mail*. Yet relations between the clubs became strained. So much so that a planned fixture was scratched following a 'scandalous statement' made by an East End official at that club's dinner.⁶⁸ Less than a week after the Good Friday debacle, the Grimsby team's agent wrote to the secretary of a club in Batley (Yorkshire) asking if a ground could be procured in the neighbourhood for a women's football match. Thornes F.C. near Wakefield agreed to host the fixture, which was played on Saturday, 16 April. Because of its novelty, a large number of people went along 'out of curiosity'. Yet the few 'respectable' individuals among them were soon shocked by the 'disgusting' and likely lewd remarks directed at the players. Unsurprisingly, this 'pitiable' exhibition prompted disapproval in the press with one commentator bemoaning that it served only to disgust 'right thinking people'. Another strongly condemned the sight of

women publicly 'unsexing themselves' by dressing in male garb. Coupled with the unseemly manner in which the female players had sought to make money from the affair, he opposed anything that had 'a tendency to lessen or destroy the innate delicacy of the female character'. As for the match result, it barely merited a mention: the so-called 'Scotch' team won 1-0.⁶⁹

On the occasion of their next known contest, Grimsby rather than Edinburgh were reportedly the holders of the 'Ladies' Silver Cup'. So it is likely that there had been at least one intervening fixture before what appears to have been their final game. This 'Grand ladies' football match' was played on Saturday, 14 May 1887 at Soothill Wood Gardens near Batley. There are differing accounts, however, of the proceedings. Hence one report indicated that the attendance was much smaller than expected. Alternatively, there was a large body of spectators, come to witness something perhaps unprecedented in their district. Shortly after 3.30 the players began to arrive. Dressed in old skirts, they presented a 'wretched appearance'. When all had assembled they commenced, 'amid great laughter', to remove their outer garments revealing underneath the usual attire worn by footballers generally. The *Densbury Chronicle* derided this exhibition of association football as being of the 'most meagre description', with no rule observed, careless play and aimless kicking. *Batley News*, on the other hand, thought it had gone well; the ladies playing an 'interesting and plucky' game. Indeed, the spectators seemed to thoroughly 'enjoy the fun'. All the same, neither newspaper recorded the result. Nor, at present, can anything more be said about these particular lady footballers.⁷⁰

By the time of the formation of the English Football League in April 1888 two types of women's football had begun to emerge. One was played for money and essentially an offshoot of the music hall. Indeed, newspaper descriptions of well-built young ladies with athletic physiques, several of whom looked like ballet dancers, suggest an overlap between performances on the pitch and stage. Moreover, although tickets to see these advertised shows were relatively expensive, fixtures were generally well-attended – even if a disconcerting number of spectators were considered by many contemporary observers to have been socially undesirable troublemakers. The large crowds are partly explicable because of the novelty. In addition, since matches were played in the warmer spring and early summer months there was less chance of them clashing with the professional men's football season, which extended from September to April. Even so, as we have seen, the standard of play was often criticised.

By contrast, the other type of women's football taking shape was largely played for both enjoyment and exercise. Ranging from participatory spectating at folk football contests and kickabouts on the street to organised games on festive occasions, some of these lady footballers – particularly those who had informally formed female football clubs – were striving to make women's

football more socially acceptable. This goal of placing women's football on a par with women's golf, cricket, tennis and other more established female sporting recreations was a gradual process. Played out against a backdrop of ongoing debate as to the suitability of various forms of female physical activity, not to mention anxiety as to the risks to health and childbearing, sometimes this goal was linked to advocacy for women's rights. A notable example was a proposed tour of Australia in 1891 by two New Zealand women's rugby teams just a couple of years before their government gave women the right to vote.⁷¹ Furthermore, like their financially motivated counterparts, all women footballers had to contend with ridicule and prejudice. Accusations of indecency were also common, depending upon the extent to which players disrobed and whether their kit was tight-fitting. Yet even negative press and crowd taunts served to publicise the phenomenon. As a forthcoming article will show, further publicity for female football was provided by the donning of fancy dress costumes, popular songs, comedic characters, visual depictions, literary representations and growing historical knowledge about the game's origins. All the while, it must not be forgotten, women continued watching football. Indeed, there would soon even be female football reporters, agents and shareholders. In short, there is still more to say about women's football before the establishment of the British Ladies' Football Club in autumn 1894.

Notes

- 1 *The Sketch*, 9 (27 March 1895), pp.444-445.
- 2 Dorothy Middleton, 'Dixie [née Douglas], Lady Florence Caroline (1855–1905)', ODNB; *Pall Mall Gazette* (8 February 1895), p.10.
- 3 James Lee, *The Lady Footballers: Struggling to play in Victorian Britain*, Abingdon 2008; see also Patrick Brennan, 'The British Ladies' Football Club', https://www.donmouth.co.uk/womens_football/blfc.html.
- 4 Robert Lewis, *Female Football Spectators in Britain 1863–1939. A Historical Analysis*, Abingdon, 2023.
- 5 Patrick Brennan, "'England" v "Scotland" – 1881', https://www.donmouth.co.uk/womens_football/1881.html; Tim Tate, *Women's Football. The Secret History*, London, 2016, pp. 6–17; Jean Williams, *The History of Women's Football*, Barnsley, 2021, pp. 5–9; Suzanne Wrack, *A Woman's Game. The Rise, Fall, and Rise Again of Women's Football*, London, 2022, pp.15-21; S. Gibbs, 'The First Tour of Women's Association Football – 1881', in Fiona Skillen, Helena Byrne and Gary James, eds, *Histories of Women's Football in Britain and Ireland*, Oxford, 2025, pp.25-40.
- 6 Stuart Gibbs has argued that the players were 'surplus to requirements' of a theatrical company that performed *Les Cloches de Cornerville* at Glasgow in April 1881. One part of this company was trained by Mr Charles Bernard, the other by Lizzie Gilbert who had previously toured with her 'Juvenile Ballet Troupe', <https://www.playingpasts.co.uk/articles/football/and-i-mean-that-most-sincerely-theatre-and-the-birth-of-womens-football>. But these 'little performers' were children, whereas the majority of newspapers described the footballers as young women in their late teens or early twenties. It should be added that a later report claimed that they were waitresses working at the Grand Café Parisien on Buchanan Street, Glasgow. This, however, was emphatically denied by the manager, resulting in an apology from the newspaper that had printed the story.
- 7 Genealogical research has suggested that at least two of the players were actors.
- 8 It is possible that the drill hall was adjacent to the Tron Church near Glasgow Cross.
- 9 This replay was watched by an estimated crowd of 10,000. Queen's Park defeated the home team Rangers 3-1.
- 10 It is not known how many paid for admission, but ticket prices were likely one shilling.
- 11 It was reported that the English players wore the lion rampant badge. But since the royal banner of Scotland is a red lion rampant, I have assumed this was a mistake.
- 12 Some accounts have 'high-laced boots'. But high-heeled boots are in keeping with contemporary representations.

- 13 **Scotland:** Ethel Hay (goal), Bella Oswald, Georgina Wright (backs), Rose Rayman [Raynham], Isa Stevenson (half-backs), Emma Wright, Louise Cole, Lily St Clair, Maud Riweford [Rimeford / Riverford], Carrie Baliol, Minnie Brymner (forwards); **England:** May Goodwin [Godwin] (goal), Mabel Bradbury, Maud(e) Hopewell (backs), Maud(e) Starling, Ada Everstone (half-backs), Geraldine Vintner [Ventner], Mabel Vance, Eva Davenport, Minnie Hopewell, Kate Mellon [Mellor], Nelly Sherwood (forwards).
- 14 Some newspapers reckoned there were only 400 or 500 paying spectators, while others estimated that more than 5,000 people attended.
- 15 It was said their 'costume was suitable, and at a distance the players could scarcely be distinguished from those in ordinary football matches'.
- 16 The stakes had been used to attach the ropes to the ground.
- 17 Blackburn Olympic were a team with working-class roots that would win the FA Cup in 1883.
- 18 *Aberdeen Evening Express* (29 July 1881); *Cornishman* (11 August 1881).
- 19 Horatio Paterson and Co., 346 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. The photograph may still be extant, although I have been unable to find it.
- 20 *Glasgow Evening Citizen* (30 June 1881).
- 21 J. Hutchinson, 'Some aspects of football crowds before 1914' (1974), quoted in W. Vamplew, 'Sports Crowd Disorder in Britain, 1870–1914: Causes and Controls', *Journal of Sport History*, 7 (1980), p.6.
- 22 S. Gibbs, 'Constance Cole – The Second Scorer', *The Hive Journal*, 2 (2024), pp.1-10.
- 23 *Dundee Courier* (30 May 1882).
- 24 *Aberdeen Weekly News* (2 August 1884); *Bury and Norwich Post* (28 August 1888); *Scottish Referee* (4 August 1890); *Coatbridge Express* (6 August 1890); *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* (24 March 1891).
- 25 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (7 October 1882).
- 26 *Naracoorte Herald* (12 August 1884).
- 27 *Tarrangower Times* (13 May 1862).
- 28 *Bendigo Advertiser* (2 August 1880); *The Herald* (2 August 1880); *Tarrangower Times* (4 August 1880); *The Mercury* (6 August 1880).
- 29 *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* (4 March 1882).
- 30 *New York dispatch* (1 November 1874).
- 31 *Darlington & Richmond Herald* (26 June 1875).
- 32 *The Graphic* (19 June 1875).
- 33 Greendragon and Dandelion [pseud.], *Sports spiced and pastimes peppered*, London, 1884, p.36.
- 34 *Glasgow Evening Post* (8 October 1886); *Mid-Sussex Times* (12 October 1886); *Devizes and Wiltshire Advertiser* (14 October 1886).
- 35 *Mid-Sussex Times* (19 October 1886).
- 36 *Barrow Herald* (30 October 1886); *South Wales Daily Telegram* (30 October 1886).
- 37 *Buckinghamshire Advertiser* (16 October 1886).

- 38 *Dublin Evening Mail* (18 October 1886); *Belfast News-Letter* (19 October 1886).
- 39 *Watford Mirror* (21 October 1886); *Nuneaton Advertiser* (6 November 1886); *Queanbeyan Age* (12 March 1887).
- 40 *Alfreton Journal* (22 October 1886); *Heywood Advertiser* (22 October 1886).
- 41 Graham Curry and Eric Dunning, *Association Football. A study in figurational sociology*, Abingdon, 2015, p.92.
- 42 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (17 March 1873).
- 43 Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863–1915* (1982; revised edition, Abingdon, 2023), pp.122, 126–127, 128; R. Lewis, “‘Our Lady Specialists at Pikes Lane’: Female Spectators in early English Professional Football, 1880–1914”, *International Journal of Sport*, 26 no. 15 (2009), p.2169.
- 44 *Sheffield Independent* (2 January 1879).
- 45 John Cairney, *A Scottish Football Hall of Fame*, Edinburgh, 1998, p.243.
- 46 *Preston Herald* (12 January 1884); Lewis, “‘Lady Specialists’”, p.2174.
- 47 Tony Collins, *How Football Began. A Global History of how the world's football codes were born*, Abingdon, 2019, p.66.
- 48 *Bradford Daily Telegraph* (29 September 1884).
- 49 *Ballarat Courier* (20 September 1883).
- 50 *The Cardiff Times* (12 November 1887).
- 51 *Weekly Times* (3 July 1886).
- 52 *Athletic News* (1 February 1882); *Crickets and Football Field* (24 September 1887); Lewis, “‘Lady Specialists’”, pp.2169–2174; R.W. Lewis, “The female football spectator in England, 1870–1914: a *Flâneuse* made visible?”, *Soccer & Society*, 21 (2020), pp.121–136.
- 53 *Preston Herald* (23 January 1884); Mason, *Association Football*, p.128; Lewis, “‘Lady Specialists’”, p.2170.
- 54 Mason, *Association Football*, p.128; Lewis, “‘Lady Specialists’”, pp.2165–2166; Lewis, ‘Female football spectator’, p.7; Lewis, *Female Football spectators*, pp.3–4.
- 55 Matthew McDowell, *A Cultural History of Association Football in Scotland, 1865–1902. Understanding Sports as a Way of Understanding Society*, Lewiston, 2013, p.235. For a member of the Glasgow College team ‘mashed on the pretty barmaid’ at the Caledonian Hotel, Carlisle see *Scottish Referee* (7 January 1889).
- 56 *Motherwell Times* (5 January 1895); *Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser* (12 January 1895); *Banffshire Advertiser* (17 January 1895); McDowell, *Association Football in Scotland*, p. 236. The three most prominent Glasgow clubs on the south side of the River Clyde were Queen’s Park, 3rd Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers and Rangers. All three strenuously denied the allegation.
- 57 *Grimshy Daily Telegraph* (13 August 1898); *Dundee Advertiser* (3 February 1899); *Dundee Courier* (3 February 1899); *Nottingham Evening Post* (4 February 1899); *Dundee Courier* (7 March 1899); *Liverpool Weekly Courier* (11 March 1899); McDowell, *Association Football in Scotland*, p.236.
- 58 *Chester Chronicle* (10 December 1887).
- 59 *Derby Mercury* (29 June 1887).

- 60 *Derbyshire Advertiser* (20 February 1885).
- 61 Players named in the report: Lucy Carmont, Milly Carmont, Lucy Coombes, Maggie Green, Mary Hackett, Polly Hubbard, Kate Jackson, Helen Montgomery, Jane Rodgers (captain), Sarah Thoms (captain), Jenny White and Jane Wyatt.
- 62 *St James's Gazette* (28 November 1885), pp.6-7; *Hull Daily Mail* (30 November 1885); *Boston Guardian* (5 December 1885); *Leeds Times* (5 December 1885); *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph* (5 December 1885).
- 63 Andrew Ward, *Football's strangest matches* (Glasgow, 2000), pp.1-2.
- 64 *The Cardiff Times* (2 April 1887); *Empire News & The Umpire* (10 April 1887).
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