

FOOTBALL: THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

What's the most exciting word in the English language? If your answer is 'Goal!', then you're already a fan of the beautiful game.

And you are not alone. There are millions of people like you all over the world – playing football, watching it, wearing the football shirts of their favourite team, travelling hundreds of kilometres to watch their club or their country play, or just kicking a football around on a beach or in the street.

So here is the story of the beautiful game – from its beginnings thousands of years ago to the international game of today. The rules, the players, the cups, the clubs, the stars, the fans – this is football, from Argentina to Zidane.

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Football: The Beautiful Game



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1 The beautiful game

On 30 July 1930, 93,000 people went to the Estadio Centenario in Montevideo, Uruguay, to watch the final of the first FIFA World Cup. Uruguay beat Argentina 4–2, and was the first country to have its name on the World Cup.

There was no television then (the first World Cup on TV was not until 1954). There were forty-one countries in FIFA (from the French for International Federation of Association Football), the international organisation which controls football, but only thirteen countries played in the competition. The USA, Mexico, and seven South American countries sent teams to Uruguay, but only four teams came from Europe. Three of those teams – Belgium, France, and Romania – travelled across the Atlantic together in the same boat. The Brazilian team got on the boat in Rio de Janeiro.

The eighteenth World Cup final, seventy-six years later, was very different. On 9 July 2006, Italy played France in the Olympiastadion in Berlin, Germany. Italy beat France to win the World Cup for the fourth time. But the 2006 World Cup started with teams from 198 countries. At the finals in Germany there were fourteen teams from Europe, six from Africa and the Middle East, four from South America, four from North and Central America and the Caribbean, three from Asia, and one

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from Oceania (Australia). There were sixty-four matches in the competition, and 3.3 million tickets for the fans who came to watch. Fewer people – 74,000 – were in the stadium than for the final in 1930, because modern stadiums have to have seats for all the fans. But 400 million more watched the game on television. Perhaps eight out of ten people *in the world* watched part of a World Cup match this time.

Football is the world's favourite sport. There are more than 1.5 million football teams in the world and 300,000 football clubs – and then there are school teams and children's teams too. More than 240 million people play football in more than 200 countries, and more than 20 million of them are women. There are football teams for people who cannot see, and since 2003 there has been a Homeless World Cup for teams of people who have no homes. There are football newspapers and magazines, and radio and television stations just for football. There are millions and millions of football fans. Football is an international language.

Why do so many people love football? Because the rules are easy to understand and because the game is fast and exciting. It does not cost a lot to play – all you need is a ball and some players. Anyone can start a game of football, anywhere, any time. Football is not just about big teams and famous players. It is about small teams, about the fans, the stadiums, the cups, and the referees. For millions of people all over the world, football truly is 'the beautiful game'.

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2 What kind of football?

Football, for most people, is association football or 'soccer'. A hundred years ago, some English university students took the 'soc' in association football and started calling this new game soccer. Soccer is one kind of football. In different parts of the world, people play other kinds of football.

In some countries, people play rugby football. The name comes from Rugby School in England, where it was first played around the 1840s. Rugby is played with a different ball; players can kick it, and they can also use their hands to pass it to another player. There are two kinds of rugby: rugby league, with thirteen players in a team, and rugby union, with fifteen players. For a long time, rugby union was an amateur game, and none of the

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players got paid, but in the professional game of rugby league, clubs paid their players. In 1995 this changed, and now the top players in rugby union are professional too. In some countries rugby has more supporters than football. South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand always have strong rugby union teams and they play against one another every year in the Tri-Nations championship.

In the USA, a lot of people play and watch American football. In February each year 100 million people watch the Super Bowl, which is the final of the National Football League. American football is not played much outside the USA, but more and more people in other countries watch the Super Bowl. American football uses a ball like a rugby ball, and American footballers can kick the ball but also pass it with their hands. Teams are bigger too. It is a hard game and can be dangerous.

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In Ireland, people play Gaelic football. In this game, the ball is round and players can catch it but do not throw it. In Australia, there is a game called Australian rules football which has eighteen players in each team. Players can kick or hit the ball but not throw it. Australians like this kind of football best of all.

In this book, football means association football. Football is easy to understand, and there are only seventeen rules. It is played with a round ball on a football field or pitch. Each team has eleven players on the field. If a player is hurt and has to leave the field, another player – a substitute – can take his or her place. The team manager can also use a substitute if a player is tired or is not playing well. Usually a team can use three substitutes in a game.

A game lasts for 90 minutes: there are two halves of 45 minutes. If the referee stops the game because a player is hurt, they add more time – injury time – at the end of the 45 minutes. At half time the players have a rest for 15 minutes and when the game starts again, the teams change ends.

Each team tries to score goals, and at the end of the game the team with the most goals wins. If both teams get the same number of goals, or if neither team scores, the game is a draw. If there is a draw in a cup match after 90 minutes, the teams often go on playing for longer. This is called extra time. Sometimes they play for 30 minutes, and sometimes they stop when one team scores a goal: this is called a ‘golden goal’.

You can play football in a team of eleven players on a football pitch with a referee. You can play with your

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friends in the street or on the beach. You can play five-a-side football or futsal. These games are shorter and the pitch is smaller so the games are very fast: the South Americans are very strong at five-a-side.

And if you don't feel like running around, you can play football games at home with your favourite teams and players. There is table football (Subbuteo); good Subbuteo players can play in a world championship every year. Or you can play your favourite computer football game, like Pro Evolution Soccer, which has sold over 12 million copies around the world.

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