

SOCCER IN SOUTH ASIA

Empire, Nation, Diaspora



Editors

Paul Dimeo and James Mills

Foreword by Keith Cooper

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Sport in the Global Society

General Editor: J.A. Mangan

SOCCER IN SOUTH ASIA

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General Editor: J.A. Mangan

The interest in sports studies around the world is growing and will continue to do so. This unique series combines aspects of the expanding study of *sport in the global society*, providing comprehensiveness and comparison under one editorial umbrella. It is particularly timely, with studies in the cultural, economic, ethnographic, geographical, political, social, anthropological, sociological and aesthetic elements of sport proliferating in institutions of higher education.

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Tony Collins

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The editors thank a range of individuals and organizations for their help in putting together this volume. The book grew out of the conference 'Football India: the Past, Present and Future' that they hosted at University College Northampton in July 2000. It was at this event that the necessity of bringing together papers on football in south Asia became obvious, and so the staff at UCN who helped to organize the day and ensure its success are chief among those that ought to be thanked. Penny Hubbard was absolutely indispensable as she thought of all the important details that were missed by the editors, such as the need to book rooms, arrange parking, feed delegates and so on. She then made sure that these details were attended to as the editors could in no way be relied upon to do this themselves. All of the staff in the administration and support services at UCN that Penny persuaded to help or who succumbed to the pleading of the editors spared no effort and made the event look well-planned and effortless. We gratefully acknowledge their assistance.

Among the delegates at the event were a number of individuals whose enthusiasm for many of the issues discussed here convinced the editors that it was a significant project. The editors are grateful for the contributions of Chima Okorie, Jas Bains and Arunava Chaudhuri at the event and for the insights of Kash Taank and Salim Siddat. The editors hope that this volume will be just one of the ways of putting the energy generated at the event into practice. The sponsors of the event were important since they ensured that delegates from India could attend and, as such, thanks are due to ForIndia.com and the Marketing Department at UCN. FIFA, the 'Kick It Out' campaign and the English Football Association are also to be thanked for their contributions to the day. On this note the editors would like to acknowledge funding from the British Academy, the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland and the University of Strathclyde, who have met the costs of research trips to India on which the ideas behind this compilation first took a hold.

Our trips to India have been made all the more enjoyable and profitable thanks to a number of individuals who offered their time, advice and resources with generosity. We especially thank Sharda Ugra, Sanchita Sen, Amitabha das Sharma, Anthony and Jyoti Botelho, Alberto Colaco, Arnab Ghosh and Sabanayakan. However, one man stands out as making a singular contribution: Brahmanand Shankwalker took us to our first Indian match at the Fatorda Stadium in Margao in Goa, in May 1995. We are grateful for this kind invitation and his continued influence on our work.

This collection of papers has been brought together, been put through several stages of editing and revision, and then has been peer-reviewed and finally published in little over a year since the original conference. The editors express their gratitude for the professionalism of the contributors who have met every deadline and promptly responded to every query no matter how trivial. We would also like to thank Jon Manley at Frank Cass who has been excellent to work with.

Foreword

The FIFA records, like most statistics, tell only half the story. The fact is that the All India Football Federation (AIFF) was founded in 1937 and joined FIFA 11 years later – quite late, one might think, for a country with such particular British connections. After all, those ubiquitous British merchants, sailors and assorted missionaries had successfully exported the game and implanted it in South America and other less colonial corners of the globe almost a century earlier.

The reasons for the delay in the formal establishment of the game in India are many and invariably more complex than the self-evident, secondary role the sport had traditionally played – and, without doubt, still does – to that of cricket. Also, the formal date of affiliation to the world body masks the fact that the AIFF had in the Indian Football Association (West Bengal) a forerunner that dates back, somewhat more plausibly and still very proudly, to 1893.

No doubt the authoritative contributors to the following pages will trace many of the factors dictating the course of development of Indian football from a political and sociological point of view. But generally it may be said that this evolution from foundation to the present has seldom been easy. In consequence, there is still a temptation to classify this, the world's second most populous nation, in the familiar category popularly and vaguely known as 'sleeping giants'. The term has been applied, with varying degrees of justification, to many other countries, especially to those in Africa, where the giant has woken and has startled others into doing so. In China, to take another example, the giant appears to be awake but is seemingly incapable of getting out of bed.

The Indian colossus remains mostly in slumber, despite intermittent bouts of insomnia, reacting to the occasional attempts to rouse it. But such awakenings have seldom had sufficient effect as to transcend regional frontiers.

While the domestic game has, of course, mobilized millions at one time or another, especially in isolated hotbeds such as Calcutta, Bombay or Goa, neither India nor, for that matter, any of its neighbours in the subcontinent has ever made any impact of note on international competition. This sobering record of under-achievement applies to the game at all levels, from junior to senior, not to mention the very specific conditions that apply to women's football.

Invited to take part in the 1950 World Cup, India declined the opportunity to travel to Brazil for the first post-war tournament because its players were not allowed (under FIFA regulations) to play without boots or shoes. The invitation – in retrospect, a once in a lifetime opportunity – was never repeated and since then no team from the subcontinent has ever made it through the regional qualifying process to the finals of any FIFA world competition.

For many countries elsewhere participation in the FIFA competitions has proved to be an essential element in the development of the game. Exposure to competition at the highest level educates and motivates. Africa's youth players (particularly in Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon) are striking examples of this reality.

Another reflection of modest accomplishments may be found in the FIFA World Ranking, introduced in 1993, where the best position ever achieved by India is 94th in 1996. Bangladesh's best is 111th in 1996, Sri Lanka's 122nd in 1998, Nepal's 124th in 1994 and Pakistan's is 141st in 1994.

FIFA cannot be fairly said to have neglected India and its neighbours over the past quarter of a century. During this time, for example, different development courses

have been held in the subcontinent as elsewhere in the world. Scores of countries and hundreds of thousands of individuals in all continents have benefited from this scheme, not only players and coaches but also referees, administrators and sports doctors. Again, the direct comparison with Africa is unavoidable: there is justification in attributing a large part of the several African countries' World Cup success to the concerted coaching work done under the umbrella of these FIFA programmes.

The reason why the success rate has not been the same in both regions may be the subject of a more detailed study. But the impression is sometimes inescapable that Indian football does not always recognize the value of such programmes, as appeared to be the case with the cancellation of a course scheduled for India in June 2000. Such cancellations by the host nation are as regrettable and incomprehensible as they are rare, for the recipients are customarily only too grateful to be offered assistance of this kind.

But FIFA's assistance to India and other countries continues on other levels. There is, for example, the straightforward financial aid programme that sees one million dollars put at the association's disposal over a four-year period, such funds being made available in response to coherent and approved plans and budgets, to avoid wastage or misappropriation.

In addition, the new *Goal* project is set to benefit countries in this as in other regions, the particular characteristic of the *Goal* approach being to provide countries with tailor-made assistance according to their own specific needs. Nepal, for example, has already benefited, and there is no reason why India should not do so in the near future.

These remarks should not fail to mention another important way in which FIFA is currently involved in India, and, indeed, also in neighbouring Pakistan. In early 1977 FIFA co-sponsored the Atlanta Agreement, which laid the basis for a concerted programme to eliminate the exploitation of child labour from the football-producing industry in these two countries. The programme brings together the big names of the sporting goods industry, chambers of commerce, trade unions, the International Labour Office and children's organizations such as UNICEF and Save the Children. It aims systematically to abolish child labour in sweatshops and to provide educational opportunities instead. This is not an easy programme to implement, for it encompasses not only labour but also sociological and cultural aspects, but it is one to which FIFA, and the sport of football in general, remains committed.

FIFA is also, of course, highly conscious of the situation of Asians living in Britain who are confronted with social barriers to the full enjoyment and participation in football. Applying the word as well as the spirit of the FIFA Statutes, which clearly reject any form of discrimination on racial or any other basis, is an undertaking fraught with all manner of complications. But the will remains to achieve this, ideally through the co-ordination of practical actions based upon experience – much of the latter, sadly, bitter.

FIFA's slogan, 'For the Good of the Game', is sometimes considered a little trite. Most slogans are. But it reflects a genuine ambition to improve the game on a global scale, and the Indian subcontinent and its people, at home or abroad, remain a priority target for these efforts. In helping south Asian football to develop, however, FIFA needs unequivocal signs that these nations are also anxious to help themselves.

KEITH COOPER

Director of Communications, FIFA

Series Editor's Foreword

J.A. MANGAN

In November 2000, *The Daily Telegraph* ran a story on an Englishman, Tim Grandage, former Rugby schoolboy and Calcutta Hong Kong Bank executive, his Indian Future Hope school and his street children internationals at the first Asian Rugby Championships in Sri Lanka. For these hugely disadvantaged children, under the compassionate Grandage and with the unostentatious support of the Harlequins Rugby Club, 'a previous alien sport [had] become the cornerstone of their lives'.¹ The lambent spirit of Cecil Earle Tyndale-Biscoe, the earlier English humanitarian schoolmaster, clearly remains alive and well on the Sub-continent.²

In one sense, Grandage is the past; his boys are the future. Unquestionably innovatory, *Soccer in South Asia* is both the present and the future, while future volumes in Sport and the Global Society on Asia will represent an important aspect of the future. *Soccer in South Asia* is a 'stepping stone' over a hitherto, sometimes occasionally polluted, historical stream. It is a link between European comment on Asia and Asian comment on Asia.

A triadic approach is overdue: Western voices on Asia, Asian voices on Asia, Eastern and Western voices on Asia. This is fully recognized here by the volume editors and Series Editor.

In *Europe: A History*, published in 1996, which incidentally does scant justice to the significance of sport in recent European cultures, Norman Davies was briefly concerned about Eurocentrism in historical writing. He defined as a matter of attitude, not content, the traditional tendency of European authors to regard their civilization as superior and self-contained, and to neglect the need for 'taking non-European viewpoints into consideration'.³ The editors of *Soccer in South Asia*, of course, know better than to do this and have put this dated approach⁴ behind them, and the series Sport in the Global Society can, and will, go further in due course. Gathering corn in foreign fields, as is made clear in *Soccer in South Asia*, is a thing of the past. In the future the harvest will be shared.

In *The Search for Africa: A History in the Making* published in 1994, Basil Davidson wrote hopefully of future African history:

In this new epoch, perhaps, 'their' reality and 'ours' – again from whichever side you take it – may begin to converge: not in the singularities of culture, remaining as these will as richly various as human nature, but in their ever more evident requirement of conjoint acceptance. 'They' will begin to be 'there' as much as 'we' are – from whichever way you come in forms and intensities never before possible in consciousness

and he added, optimistically, that,

As they take shape there, and as we begin to see them in their reality and all the lineaments of their condition, and as the same perception arises in reverse, so in that measure can we and they approach and stand on common ground and in doing that, find the synthesis which can realize conjoint potentials.⁵

This gentle blast on a neoteric post-imperial trumpet has loud resonances for an adjoining continent to the east. Davidson, who has devoted all his professional life to the 'task of recovering and reinstalling Africa within the equalities of world consciousness',⁶ stated also in 1994 that the task was by no means near its end. All this is true of Asia now.

In its combination of European and Asian analysts on the Indian subcontinent, with contributions at once original and illuminating, *Soccer in South Asia* brings together Western and Eastern perspectives that jointly enrich our understanding of an Eastern world too often in the past viewed from a narrow Eurocentric angle. They step out of the dark into the light.

Forthcoming publications in *Sport in the Global Society* will add a further 'stepping stone' over what once was sometimes a less than limpid historical stream – thus three judiciously placed 'stepping stones' will be in place ensuring breadth and depth of analysis – European, European and Asian, and Asian.

With specific reference to Asia, D.G.E. Hall, in *A History of South-East Asia*, in the fourth edition published in 1981, observed that 'the work that has been done by European scholars in the discovery of South East Asian history is beyond praise'.⁷ Much the same can be said with regard to this importantly innovative study of soccer in South Asia, especially in view of the editors' action in bringing together analysts of East and West.

Hall went on to remark that the 1980s witnessed 'signs of dissatisfaction on the part of European scholars with their previous approach to the subject, which, it is felt, has been too much influenced by certain preconceptions inherent in their own training and outlook'.⁸ He added that it was appropriate that the revolutionary change that characterized South-East Asia after 1945 had led inexorably 'to much reexamination of the other conceptions of its history, and to attempts at a re-orientation of outlook'.⁹ This re-orientation is a pleasing feature of *Soccer in South Asia*. In Western sports studies, which have come late to the Asian historical field, this radicalism *should* be built on, and this is the intention of this Series.

Hall also stated something that the initiated know only too well, that the literatures¹⁰ of the peoples of South-East Asia 'abound in writings which are ... or connected with historical events! Their number is legion ... Relatively few have as yet been used by historical writers. The great majority still await exploration and comparative study.'¹¹ My visit to Chengdu University Sports Institute in Sechuan Province in the mid-1990s brought this home to me dramatically. The impressive large library filled with Chinese monographs, collections and journals produced in me a post-imperial missionary impulse not to take the West to the East but to bring

the East to the West – through the mediums of English and Cass. Sport in the Global Society will ensure that Asian academics will be encouraged not only to contribute to, but to edit and author books on history, sociology and other disciplines, in the Series in the future – to the benefit of East and West. They have the cultural and linguistic tools to ensure a valuable balance to European perspectives.¹²

This makes good sense. Asian voices in English on modern sport are still in too short supply in academia. Both this ground-breaking volume on Asian soccer, and in particular its sub-continental contributors, are therefore especially welcome. The editors are to be congratulated on their perspicacity in this regard. And in pursuit of what Davidson has called the 'essence of purposive study', as mentioned briefly above, Sport in the Global Society will shortly ensure then that the voices of Asians themselves are heard more fully and not only as contributors to collections, but as editors and authors. A start will be made soon with the innovative collections, *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present* and *Confronting Conservatism: Women, Sport, Asia*, and the seminal monograph *Women, Sport and Society in New China: Holding up More than Half the Sky*.¹³

Simultaneously, a triadic approach, therefore, will characterize the Series; the analytic approach will be multicultural; balance, breadth and depth will be the ambition; completeness of perspective will be the aim.

Regional involvement, of course, has been the sensible policy in earlier Series volumes on the Nordic world, the Australasian world and the Latin American world and it will continue to be the policy for future volumes involving other world regions, including shortly North America and Eastern Europe.¹⁴

Thus with *Soccer in South Asia* an invaluable start has been made, a 'stepping stone' has been put in place, and more 'stones' will soon be set down. In Sport in the Global Society in the new millennium, the East will increasingly come to the West; Eastern voices will speak for themselves; Eastern commentators will advance Western perspectives on Asia.¹⁵ Thus with three 'stepping stones' spanning what in the past has been a sometimes less than crystal clear historical stream¹⁶ Rudyard Kipling's well-known 'Eurocentric' couplet:

Oh, East is East, and West is West,
and never the twain shall meet
Till Earth and Sky stand presently
at God's great Judgment Seat.¹⁷

will prove to be an ever more dated vision of events – temporal and celestial!

J.A. MANGAN
*International Research Centre
for Sport, Socialisation and Society
University of Strathclyde
July 2001*

NOTES

1. B. Gallagher, 'Rugby Hope', *Daily Telegraph* (Sport), 25 Nov. 2000, 1.
2. See J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* originally published by Penguin/Viking in 1986 and recently republished by Frank Cass in 1999. Note especially Chapter Seven which deals in more detail than *Soccer in South Asia* in which he also appears, with Cecil Earle Tyndale-Biscoe who in 1895 took English games to Kashmir in the interests of its youth. There were many others of his ilk, most not quite so determined, including notably Alexander G. Fraser, who made an outstanding contribution to Trinity College in Kandy, Ceylon, now, of course, Sri Lanka, a little later. Equally fascinating in his way, he will be the subject of a chapter in the forthcoming *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present* to be published in the Series Sport in the Global Society, and edited by J.A. Mangan and Fan Hong.
3. N. Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.16.
4. For an Asian pointed and forceful criticism of a particularly inadequate Eurocentric approach, in marked contrast to the approach in *Soccer in South Asia*, see Fan Hong, 'Two Roads to China: The Inadequate and the Adequate', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 18, 2 (June, 2001), 148–67.
5. B. Davidson, *The Search for Africa: A History in the Making* (London: James Currey, 1994), p.14.
6. *Ibid.*, p.8.
7. D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South East Asia* (fourth edition) in the Macmillan Asian History Series (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.xxviii.
8. *Ibid.*, p.x.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. For an excellent example of this, see Fan Hong, 'Two Roads to China', *passim*.
13. Reference has already been made above to *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present. Confronting Conservatism: Women, Sport, Asia* will be edited by Keiko Ikeda, Dong Jinxia and J.A. Mangan and *Women, Sport and Society in New China: Holding up More than Half the Sky* will be authored by Dong Jinxia.
14. See H. Meinander and J.A. Mangan (eds.), *The Nordic World: Sport and Society* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998), J.A. Mangan and J. Nauright, *Sport and Australasian Society: Past and Present* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000), *Sport and Latin American Society: Past and Present* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2001) and the Cass volumes in preparation. V. Girginov and J.A. Mangan, *Sport in Eastern European Society: Past and Present* and J.A. Mangan and M. Dyreson, *Sport in North American Society: Past and Present*.
15. Of course, Fan Hong's *Footbinding, Freedom and Feminism: The Liberation of Women's Body in Modern China* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998) provided a firm footing on the bank of the 'stream' a little while ago.
16. For evidence of this see, for example, Hall, *A History of South East Asia*, p.xxviii and his reference there to the self-confident savant, F.W. Stapel's 'ponderous five-volume *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch Indie*, in which the 'Hindu period' of Indonesian history is treated as if it were a sort of prelude or introduction to the history of Dutch activities'. Immediately afterwards, Hall provides a valuable caveat, however, when he writes caustically of those Indian writers, who may be accused of an Indian-centric approach! We all need to be sensitive to the need for balance.
17. Quoted in Davies, *Europe*, p.17.

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4. I.M. Vijayan in action for FC Kochin
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6. Syed Nayeemuddin gives instructions to his East Bengal team
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10. The East Bengal team, 1995
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12. The Salgaocar team, 2000

All photographs are reproduced courtesy of Mohammed Shafiq.

Introduction: Empire, Nation, Diaspora

JAMES MILLS and PAUL DIMEO

Football is, almost without question, the most popular game in India.¹

In 1911 over 60,000 Indians thronged to the Calcutta Maidan to witness an Indian team beat a British regimental eleven to win the IFA Shield. During the 1930s Muslims travelled across the country to watch Mohammedan Sporting during the period in which they won the Calcutta League five times in a row. The British presence on the FIFA committee deliberately obstructed the invitation of the Indian national football team to the World Cup of 1950.² By the 1990s a brewery owned all of the top Calcutta clubs and a TV company had bought its own team in the National Football League.

Football and the historical changes that have shaped modern south Asia have been closely related for over a century. Football and society in parts of the region are also intimately linked. While the major clubs were founded by the English-speaking elite, an observer could declare by 1959 that 'soccer in India is a poor man's game'³ and that, as such,

if a vote were to be taken among all the millions of Indians from all parts of the land who have any interest in or connection with sport, I feel certain that football would easily top the list of their preferences.⁴

An interest in the game often becomes a passion in south Asia that has broader social implications that affect even the minutiae of behaviour. For example, the game can determine the diet of its supporters so that in Calcutta Mohun Bagan fans always eat prawns, known as *chingri*, when they beat their local rivals East Bengal, whose own fans will consume only the local river fish, the *hilsa*, when their team has triumphed. This passion can fuel extreme personal and social behaviour. For example, a teenage fan in Calcutta in the 1970s committed suicide as his club slumped to another defeat by local rivals. By the end of the decade a riot at a derby match had resulted in the death of 16 supporters.

This volume will provide a comprehensive introduction to these stories from south Asian football and to a range of figures, moments and events in the history and recent development of the sport in India.⁵ However, as the paragraphs above suggest, football in south Asia has been closely linked to the processes that have shaped the societies and histories of the region since the nineteenth century. Colonialism, the rise of nationalism and communalism, the establishment of nationhood in a post-colonial world, the challenge of the regions and the effects of globalization and economic liberalization have all left their mark on the

development of the game. At the same time, however, football has often had an important role to play in the emergence and impact of these processes and has been a powerful vector for those forces. Quite simply, south Asian history and society have transformed football in the region while simultaneously the game has shaped the history and society of south Asia. This volume will therefore not simply act as an encyclopaedia of football in the region, it will instead begin to analyse these relationships and will draw conclusions both about the history and the sociology of football and about the histories and societies of the region.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH ASIAN SPORT

Since football has been embedded in south Asian society and history for over a century it comes as a surprise that the game in particular and, indeed, sport in general in the region have not received sustained academic analysis to date. Serious social historians of south Asia, who should know better than to ignore evidence of any sort, prefer to dismiss the game even where it is central to the events that they are analysing, 'already during pre-riot days there were instances of self-mobilization along communal lines over trivial issues. For example, reverses suffered by the Mohammedan Sporting Club in football matches enraged Muslim feelings which were expressed in sporadic violence against the Hindus.'⁶

The suspicion lingers that sport and football have been neglected as they are viewed with apprehension as 'western' or 'un-Asian' activities. Of course, sports such as football were introduced by Europeans, but they have long been indigenized. Indeed, any assumption that such activities are not enjoyed by, and practised with considerable skill by, south Asians is a curious echo of the attitudes of the colonial period when the British constructed Indians as non-sporting as part of an Orientalist strategy to represent them as moral and racial inferiors.⁷

Studies of indigenous sports and games are few and chief among these is J. Alter's *The Wrestler's Body* published in 1992. This book takes an anthropological approach to *Bharatiya kushti* or Indian wrestling in north India, an activity that is a fusion of Hindu sporting traditions dating back to the eleventh century and Persian martial skills introduced by the Mogul armies of the sixteenth century. His concern in examining the activities of the wrestlers is, in part, the concern of this volume too, to step outside of the conventional categories preferred by south Asian studies, which he identifies as 'caste, economics, politics, agriculture, land tenure, marriage, kinship, ritual and religion'.⁸ None of these, so often studied in isolation from one another, satisfactorily acts as a tool of analysis for wrestling, which, he observes, 'transcends the categories that anthropologists and others have traditionally used to interpret Indian society and culture. It is a sport, but it is also an elaborate way of life involving general prescriptions of physical culture, diet, health, ethics and morality.'⁹ The importance of the sport lies in its providing an arena for Indians to challenge, ignore and reinterpret the rules of social and moral engagement, and Alter concludes that 'wrestling only contingently reaffirms