

Association football

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An attacking player (No. 10) attempts to kick the ball past the opposing team's goalkeeper and between the goalposts to score a goal.

Highest governing body

FIFA

Nickname(s)

Football, soccer, footy/footie, "the beautiful game", "the world game"

First played

Mid-19th century Britain

Characteristics

Contact

Yes

Team members

11 per side

Mixed gender

Yes, separate competitions

Categorization

Team sport, ball sport

Equipment

Football or "soccer ball"

Venue

Football pitch

Olympic

1900

Association football, commonly known as **football** or **soccer**, is a sport played between two teams of eleven players with a spherical ball. At the turn of the 21st century the game was played by over 250 million players in over 200 countries making it the world's most popular sport.

The game is played on a rectangular field of grass or green artificial turf, with a goal in the middle of each of the short ends. The object of the game is to score by driving the ball into the opposing goal. In general play, the goalkeepers are the only players allowed to touch the ball with their hands or arms, while the field players typically use their feet to kick the ball into position, occasionally using their torso or head to intercept a ball in midair. The team that scores the most goals by the end of the match wins. If the score is tied at the end of the game, either a draw is declared or the game goes into extra time and/or a penalty shootout, depending on the format of the competition.

The Laws of the Game were originally codified in England by the Football Association in 1863 and have evolved since then. Association football is governed internationally by FIFA, which organizes the FIFA World Cup every four years.

Etymology

See also: Names for association football

The rules of football were codified in England by the Football Association in 1863 and the name *association football* was coined to distinguish the game from the other forms of football played at the time, specifically rugby football. The term *soccer* originated in England, first appearing in the 1880s as an Oxford "-er" abbreviation of the word "association".

Gameplay

Association football is played in accordance with a set of rules known as the Laws of the Game. The game is played using a spherical ball (of 71 cm (28 in) circumference in FIFA play), known as the football (or soccer ball). Two teams of eleven players each compete to get the ball into the other team's goal (between the posts and under the bar), thereby scoring a goal. The team that has scored more goals at the end of the game is the winner; if both teams have scored an equal number of goals then the game is a draw. Each team is led by a captain who has only one official responsibility as mandated the Laws of the Game: to be involved in the coin toss prior to kick-off or penalty kicks.

The primary law is that players other than goalkeepers may not deliberately handle the ball with their hands or arms during play, though they do use their hands during a throw-in restart. Although players usually use their feet to move the ball around, they may use any part of their body (notably, "heading" with the forehead) other than their hands or arms. Within normal play, all players are free to play the ball in any direction and move throughout the pitch, though the ball cannot be received in an offside position.^[10]

In typical game play, players attempt to create goal-scoring opportunities through individual control of the ball, such as by dribbling, passing the ball to a team-mate, and by taking shots at the goal, which is guarded by the opposing goalkeeper. Opposing players may try to regain control of the ball by intercepting a pass or through tackling the opponent in possession of the ball; however, physical contact between opponents is restricted. Football is generally a free-flowing game, with play stopping only when the ball has left the field of play or when play is stopped by the referee for an infringement of the rules. After a stoppage, play recommences with a specified restart.



A goalkeeper dives to stop the ball from entering his goal

At a professional level, most matches produce only a few goals. For example, the 2005–06 season of the English Premier League produced an average of 2.48 goals per match. The Laws of the Game do not specify any player positions other than goalkeeper, but a number of specialised roles have evolved. Broadly, these include three main categories: strikers, or forwards, whose main task is to score goals; defenders, who specialise in preventing their opponents from scoring; and midfielders, who dispossess the opposition and keep possession of the ball in order to pass it to the forwards on their team. Players in these positions are referred to as outfield players, in order to distinguish them from the single goalkeeper. These positions are further subdivided according to the area of the field in which the player spends most time. For example, there are central defenders, and left and right midfielders. The ten outfield players may be arranged in any combination. The number of players in each position determines the style of the team's play; more forwards and fewer defenders creates a more aggressive and offensive-minded game, while the reverse creates a slower, more defensive style of play. While players typically spend most of the game in a specific position, there are few restrictions on player movement, and players can switch positions at any time. The layout of a team's players is known as a formation. Defining the team's formation and tactics is usually the prerogative of the team's manager

History

Main article: History of association football



England playing Scotland in the first-ever international football game (The Oval, 1872)



The Royal Engineers team who reached the first FA Cup final in 1872

Games revolving around the kicking of a ball have been played in many countries throughout history. According to FIFA, the "The very earliest form of the game for which there is scientific evidence was an exercise from a military manual dating back to the second and third centuries BC in China." The modern rules of association football are based on the mid-19th century efforts to standardize the widely varying forms of football played at the public schools of England. The history of football in England dates back to at least the eighth century.

The Cambridge Rules, first drawn up at Cambridge University in 1848, were particularly influential in the development of subsequent codes, including association football. The Cambridge Rules were written at Trinity College, Cambridge, at a meeting attended by representatives from Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Winchester and Shrewsbury schools. They were not universally adopted. During the 1850s, many clubs unconnected to schools or universities were formed throughout the English-speaking world, to play various forms of football. Some came up with their own distinct codes of rules, most notably the Sheffield Football Club, formed by former public school pupils in 1857, which led to formation of a Sheffield FA in 1867. In 1862, John Charles Thring of Uppingham School also devised an influential set of rules.

These ongoing efforts contributed to the formation of The Football Association (The FA) in 1863, which first met on the morning of 26 October 1863 at the Freemasons' Tavern in Great Queen Street, London. The only school to be represented on this occasion was Charterhouse. The Freemason's Tavern was the setting for five more meetings between October and December, which eventually produced the first comprehensive set of rules. At the final meeting, the first FA treasurer, the representative from Blackheath, withdrew his club from the FA over the removal of two draft rules at the previous meeting: the first allowed for running with the ball in hand; the second for obstructing such a run by hacking (kicking an opponent in the shins), tripping and holding. Other English rugby football clubs followed this lead and did not join the FA, or subsequently left the FA and instead in 1871 formed the Rugby Football Union. The eleven remaining clubs, under the charge of Ebenezer Cobb Morley, went on to ratify the original thirteen laws of the game. These rules included handling of the ball by "marks" and the lack of a crossbar, rules which made it remarkably similar to Victorian rules football being developed at that time in Australia. The Sheffield FA played by its own rules until the 1870s with the FA absorbing some of its rules until there was little difference between the games.

The laws of the game are currently determined by the International Football Association Board (IFAB). The Board was formed in 1886 after a meeting in Manchester of The Football Association, the Scottish Football Association, the Football Association of Wales, and the Irish Football Association. The world's oldest football competition is the FA Cup, which was founded by C. W. Alcock and has been contested by English teams since 1872. The first official international football match took place in 1872 between Scotland and England in Glasgow, again at the instigation of C. W. Alcock. England is home to the world's first football league, which was founded in Birmingham in 1888 by Aston Villa director William McGregor. The original format contained 12 clubs from the Midlands and the North of England. FIFA, the international football body, was formed in Paris in 1904 and declared that they would adhere to Laws of the Game of the Football Association. The growing popularity of the international game led to the admittance of FIFA representatives to the International Football Association Board in 1913. The board currently consists of four representatives from FIFA and one representative from each of the four British associations.

Today, football is played at a professional level all over the world. Millions of people regularly go to football stadiums to follow their favourite teams, while billions more watch the game on television or on the internet. A very large number of people also play football at an amateur level. According to a survey conducted by FIFA published in 2001, over 240 million people from more than 200 countries regularly play football. Football has the highest global television audience in sport.

In many parts of the world football evokes great passions and plays an important role in the life of individual fans, local communities, and even nations. The Côte d'Ivoire national football team helped secure a truce to the nation's civil war in 2006 and it helped further reduce tensions between government and rebel forces in 2007 by playing a match in the rebel capital of Bouaké, an occasion that brought both armies together peacefully for the first time. By contrast, football is widely considered to be the final proximate cause in the Football War in June 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras. The sport also exacerbated tensions at the beginning of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, when a match between Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade devolved into rioting in March 1990.