

Football

by Steve Flinders

(Adapted book. Elementary level)

Chapter 1. The big match

Today's the day of the big match. And you have a ticket. There are a hundred thousand people there and the noise is getting louder every minute. The players are on the pitch. The game begins.

It's hard, fast and exciting. Both teams are playing well. Your team scores first - a beautiful goal, just before half time: 1-0. Then the other team scores: 1-1. You are afraid to watch but you can't stop yourself. Now the end is ten minutes away. The star of your team falls. He is badly hurt. He is carried off.

And then you hear your name. You are wanted in the changing room. The next thing you know, you are wearing your team colours and you are running onto the pitch.

You feel light and free. The ball is at your feet. You run with it past one player, past another, and then another. The goal is wide open in front of you. The goalkeeper moves to your left. You shoot to the right.

It's a goal! The score is 2-1 and it's the end of the match. Now you are holding the cup above your head. You hear the noise of the crowd, and then ... you wake up and remember: today's the day of the big match.

Millions of people have had this dream. Football is the number one international sport today. What is the magic of football?

This book tries to answer the question.

Chapter 2. What kind of football?

In different parts of the world, people play different kinds of football.

In some countries, people play Rugby Football. In France and Britain, both Rugby and Association Football are played. Rugby

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Football is played with a different ball. Players can kick the ball with their feet and use their hands to pass the ball to another player.

In the USA, a lot of people play and watch American Football. The players wear different clothes. As in rugby, American footballers can pass the ball with their hands.

But usually football means soccer. The name 'soccer' comes from the official name for the game: Association Football. One hundred years ago, some English students took the 'SOC' in 'Association Football' and started calling this new game soccer.

Soccer is easy to understand. There are only seventeen rules.

It is played with a round ball on a football field or pitch. Each team has eleven men (or women) on the field: if a player is hurt and has to leave the field, another player - a substitute - can take his place.

A game lasts for ninety minutes. At half time the players have a rest for fifteen minutes and when the game starts again, the teams change ends.

Each team tries to score goals. The team with the most goals after ninety minutes is the winner, the other team is the loser. Teams do not usually score more than three or four goals in one match. If both teams get the same number of goals, or if neither team scores, the game is a draw.

Chapter 3. How to play soccer

What happens during the game? Before the match starts, the two teams run on to the pitch, each team wearing a different strip.

The game is controlled by the referee, helped by two assistants. The referee starts the match by blowing his whistle.

If the ball goes out (off the side of the pitch), the referee's assistant holds up his flag. When this happens, there is a throw-in.

When the ball goes across the goal line, there is a goal kick if a player from the attacking team touched the ball last. There is a corner if a player from the defending team touched the ball last.

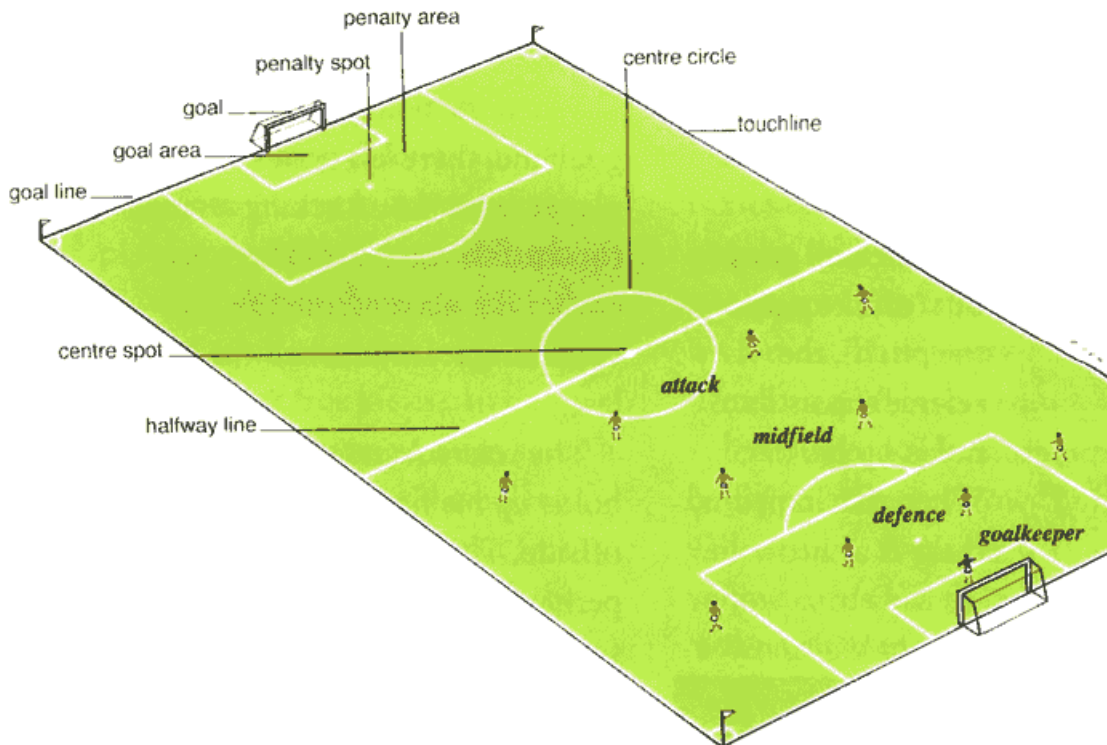
The referee's assistant also holds up his flag if a player is offside. The offside rule is perhaps the most difficult rule in soccer. It says that

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usually an attacking player must have more than one player from the other team between him and the goal.

The referee blows his whistle to stop play when there is a foul. A foul is when a player does something wrong, for example when one player kicks another player or pushes him over or pulls his shirt. When there is a foul, the referee gives a free kick to the other team. Direct free kicks can be dangerous because you can score a goal without passing the ball to another player. If the direct free kick is not far from the goal, the other team will make a wall between the ball and the goal to stop the player taking the free kick from scoring.

If the foul is in the penalty area (look at the picture of the football field), the referee gives a penalty to the other team. The ball is kicked at the goal from the penalty spot and only the goalkeeper can try and stop it with his hands. This is very difficult and usually a goal is scored.



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If a player fouls another player badly, the referee shows him a yellow card. A player with two yellow cards has to leave the field. When a foul is very bad, the referee shows the player a red card and he has to leave the field immediately.

Chapter 4. Soccer yesterday

Soccer is very old. A kind of football was played in China and Japan nearly two thousand years ago. In 1314, the English king, Edward III, said that football was bad and dangerous; any number of people got hurt. Some years later, another English king, Richard III, said that all football must stop.

But the modern game comes from the Football Association - the FA - which was started in London in 1863. In 1872, the FA decided to give a cup to the best team. Fifteen teams played against each other and the Wanderers won the first FA Cup Final. This was the beginning of modern soccer.

At first players were not paid to play football. They were amateurs: either they had other jobs and played in their free time or they were already rich and did not need the money. But by the 1880s, football clubs were paying men to play: these were the first professionals. And in 1888, the English Football League was started with twelve clubs: Accrington, Aston Villa, Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers, Burnley, Derby County, Everton, Notts County, Preston North End, Stoke City, West Bromwich Albion and Wolverhampton Wanderers. Eleven of these twelve teams are still playing today.

Men began to play football in other countries. The Danish Football Association - the first outside England - began in 1889. And in 1904, FIFA - la Federation Internationale de Football Association (the International Federation of Association Football) - was started. FIFA makes the rules of football.

Football was played at the Olympic Games for the first time in 1908. But only amateurs could play, so in 1930 the first World Cup - for professional footballers - was played in Uruguay. Thirteen teams played in Uruguay. In 1998, 173 countries entered the World Cup and

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thirty-two teams went to the Finals in France. Soccer is now a 250 billion dollar business.

Chapter 5. We won the cup

League competitions

There are two main kinds of game that a football team can play: league games and cup games. Most teams play in a league. The teams are usually in groups of about twenty, called divisions. Each team plays every other team twice - once at home and once away. If there are twenty-two clubs in a division, then each team plays forty-two games during the football season. (In England, the football season is from August to May so there are only two months when the players can rest.) Teams get three points when they win a game and one point when they draw. The team with the most points at the end of the season is the winner.

In England, there are twenty professional clubs in the FA Premier Division and seventy more in the First, Second and Third Divisions of the Football League.

In Italy, the top clubs are in the Italian Serie A and in Germany the top clubs are in the German Bundesliga.

Cup competitions

Most teams also play in one or two cup competitions during the football season. In a cup competition, a lot of teams can enter at the beginning but only the winners of each game can play again. If there are thirty-two teams at the start, only sixteen teams play the next time, then there are eight in the quarter finals, four in the semi-finals, and two in the final.

The World Cup

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There are international club competitions for some of the best teams, like the European Cup. There are also competitions between countries. Some of the most famous, like the European Nations Championship and the African Nations Championship are watched by millions of people. The most famous is the World Cup.

The World Cup is every four years. There have been sixteen World Cups since the first in 1930 and three countries have played better than all the others: Brazil, who have won four times, and Germany and Italy who have won three times each. The greatest World Cup final - and one of the great football matches of all time - was in 1970 between Brazil and Italy, when Brazil won 4-1. In 1994, Brazil won again. A British manager, David Pleat, said: The big difference is that Brazil love the ball more’.

When the World Cup is on, the whole world goes football-crazy for a few weeks. The 1990 final between Germany and Argentina was watched on TV by 1.2 billion people: 76 per cent of all Argentinians saw it! The 1998 final between Brazil and France was seen by more than two billion people.

Some other competitions

The European Nations Championship and the South American Championship are played every four years. For the best European clubs, there are two big cup competitions: the European Champions’ League and the UEFA Cup. The winner of the Champions’ League plays the winner of the South American Club championship in the World Club Championship. These club competitions are played every year.

Chapter 6. Watching football

You are a soccer supporter and you are going to today’s big match.

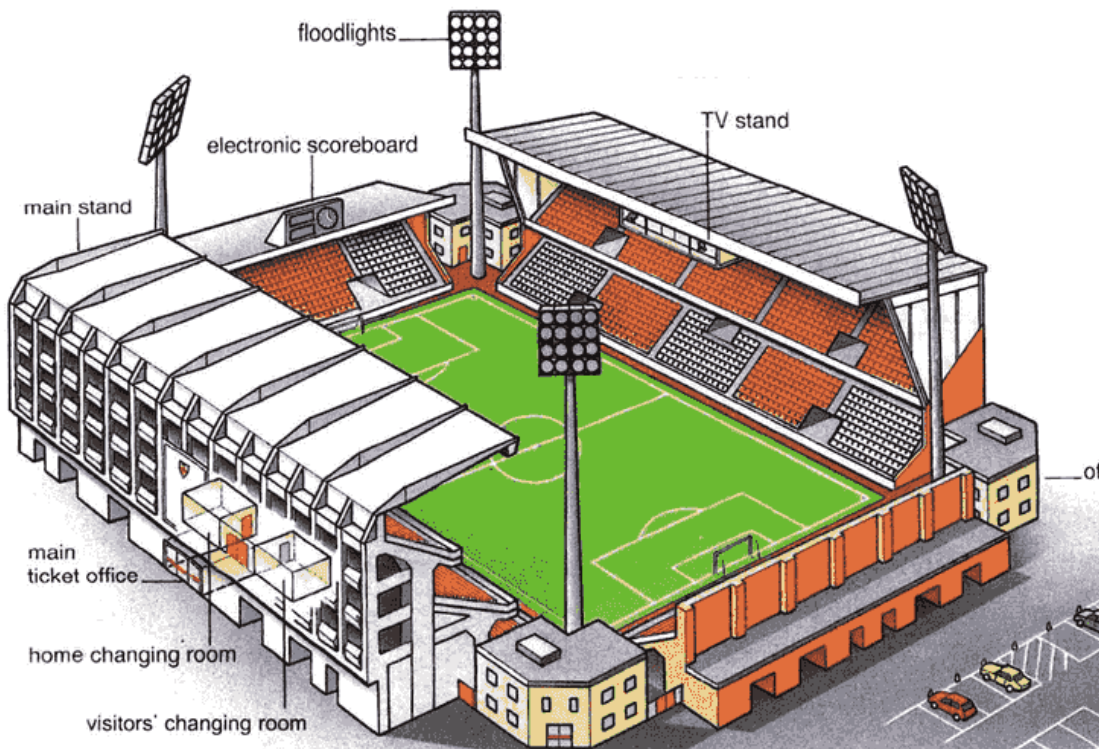
You love football.

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You put on your supporter's colours and you leave your home for the stadium. Perhaps it takes ten minutes on foot or perhaps it takes ten hours by train and bus and plane: you must be there on time.

It is always exciting to see the lights and the top of the big stand of the stadium for the first time when you turn the corner. There are a lot of other people walking with you now. Some of them are singing the name of your team and the players. You buy a paper and read the latest news about the team. The player you like best did not play last week. This week he is back.

You are next to the stadium now. You show your ticket and now you are through, you are inside the stadium and the crowd is taking you to your seat. You go up some stairs, up some more, and you are there. The match can begin.



Soccer can be boring. Soccer can be wonderful. Sometimes the weather is bad, the game is terrible, and there are no goals. Sometimes

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your team plays beautiful football, they score three goals and they win! When they play well and win, you are happy. But if they lose, you think about the next game. Soccer teams need good players. But they need good supporters like you too.

Chapter 7. The stars of soccer

You are a professional soccer player. You wear a brightly-coloured strip with your own name and team number on the back of your shirt and the name of your club's sponsors on the front. Your shorts are shorter and your boots are much lighter than a hundred years ago. The ball you play with is also much lighter.

You are a top player in the top division in your country. You have a lot of money and you are famous: when people see you in the street, they ask you for your autograph. But life is not always so good. You have to play a lot of matches and at the end of the season you are very tired. Your legs hurt from the kicks you have had during the last six months. Two years ago you had a bad injury to your left leg and you did not play for more than three months. Now it is more difficult to play really well. Some newspapers write terrible things about you which make you unhappy. You don't enjoy the game so much. You don't know what you are going to do when you are too old to play football any more. You would like to be a manager but lots of other players want to be managers too. Perhaps you will get a job talking about football on TV.

Many players feel like this. For some players - sometimes great players - the pressure is too much. Diego Maradona of Argentina was a wonderful player, but he had problems with drugs and FIFA told him to leave the 1994 World Cup after a drugs test. George Best started playing for Manchester United when he was only seventeen. Many people think he was the best player United ever had. But soon life was so difficult for him that he began to drink a lot and he stopped playing when he was only twenty-six. Perhaps he missed ten years as a player because the problems of modern football were too much for him.

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But, of course, most players learn to live with the problems. The real stars play exciting football, winning football, week after week. They want to win and they make the other players in the team want to win too. They play differently. Who are your stars? Who are the players in your all-time world team?

Chapter 8. The dark side of soccer

On 22 June 1994, Andres Escobar of Colombia scored a goal in the World Cup match against the United States. But he put the ball into the wrong goal: he scored for the USA. The USA won the match and the Colombian team went home early. On 2 July, Escobar was leaving a restaurant in Medellin with his girlfriend when two men came up to them. They were angry about the goal. One man had a gun. A few minutes later, Escobar was dead.

Soccer has a dark side. The story of soccer has always been a story of problems. People feel very strongly about the game, sometimes too strongly. There are billions of dollars in the game. Some of the dollars come from crime. Soccer can mean danger.

Crowds

One big problem in soccer is crowds. Large numbers of people want to see the big matches but sometimes not everyone has a ticket, the crowd begins to push, the police cannot control everyone, and people die. In 1964, 301 people were killed at a match between Argentina and Peru in Lima. Sixty-six people were killed at Ibrox Stadium, the home of Glasgow Rangers, when crowds of people began pushing down the stairs after a match in 1971. In 1982, 340 people were killed at a match between Spartak Moscow and Haarlem of Holland. Ninety-five people were killed at a match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at the Hillsborough stadium in Sheffield, England in 1989. Most stadiums in England now have seats for everyone because when people stand at football matches they can begin to push and make other people fall.

Hooligans

Hooligans go to football matches to drink and to make trouble. They try to fight the supporters of the other team inside and outside the stadium. The problem of hooligans is not new. There were already hooligans a hundred years ago. An angry crowd stopped the players from leaving the pitch at a game in England in 1885. There are hooligans in other countries, but they have always been worst in England. They were a very big problem there in the 1980s. Hooligans broke glasses in bars and shop windows in the streets of the towns where their teams were playing. They went to the matches by train and broke everything in the trains. Many people in England were afraid to go into the street on the day of a football match. Today things are better. Games now are not so dangerous because the police understand the problem better and because of all-seater stadiums. Families have started to go to soccer games again. In England we can see the bright side of soccer again.

Chapter 9. Soccer tomorrow

Soccer has changed a lot in the last hundred years. How will it change in the next twenty-five?

Africa and Asia

More and more countries are playing good football. Zaire was the first black African country to go to the World Cup in 1974. They played three matches and lost all of them. In 1990, Cameroon were in the last eight teams. In 1998, five African countries played in the World Cup in France, and Nigeria was one of the last sixteen.

Soccer is also getting more important in Asia: North Korea has been to the World Cup once (in 1966), Japan went for the first time in 1998, and South Korea five times (in 1954, 1986, 1990, 1994 and 1998). Twenty years ago it was just not possible to think that the World Cup would be in the USA. But in the summer of 1994 the World Cup went to

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America, and there were big crowds at all the matches. Will China and India start playing World Cup football? Will the World Cup Final in 2010 be in Beijing - between Nigeria and South Korea or Japan?

Women's soccer

There is another big change in soccer: it is no longer a game only for men.

At one time, women could not play soccer. It was against the rules in England for more than fifty years and in Germany women could not play until the 1970s. Even then, games were only thirty minutes, the ball was lighter, and they could not play if it rained. Now, more than twenty million women across the world play soccer. In the USA, 40 per cent of the children who play soccer are girls, and many countries today have a national women's team. In the 1999 Women's World Cup Final, the USA beat China 5-4. In Japan, companies give money to help women's teams and buy women players from countries like Norway and the USA. Women's soccer can only get stronger.

Soccer in the USA

In the USA, people have always played and watched American football much more than soccer.

Businessmen and players often tried to make soccer a big TV sport but it never worked. People said: 'Soccer is the sport of tomorrow in the USA- and always will be.'

But now thousands of American schoolchildren play soccer. The 1994 World Cup was held in the USA and the US team reached the last sixteen. Millions of Americans watched soccer for the first time. This could change the game a lot.

New rules for soccer?

There is more and more money in football today from TV and sponsorship. Before the 1994 World Cup, the Americans wanted to

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change some of the rules. They said soccer would be more interesting with more goals. They said the goal should be bigger. They said the offside rule was too difficult. They said there should be more time for TV advertising during the game. FIFA said no. But perhaps one day they will have to say yes. People who watch TV like lots of action. Perhaps one day football will be a no-contact game: players will not touch each other at all. Perhaps the score in the year 2010 will be South Korea 11, Nigeria 9 ...?

Technology

Computers are coming to football. In 1994 the US manager used a computer to look at the way the Colombians passed the ball. He saw a place where the Colombians were not so strong. The US team won the match.

Superclubs and superleagues

Club football will change as well. British people watch Italian football, as well as British on TV. More and more players play for foreign clubs. In the 1998 World Cup many teams had most of their players from clubs outside their country; none of the Nigerian team played for Nigerian clubs! In a few years, there could be not just a European Cup but also a European superleague. Who do you think would be in it?

There could also be another superleague for North and South America.

But superleagues could be bad for smaller clubs. The big money would go to the big clubs and the money problems of the small clubs would get worse.

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So don't forget: football is always full of surprises. A game with a hundred spectators can be just as interesting and exciting as a game watched by a hundred thousand.

So next time you can, go and watch a game of football. Support your local club, big or small.

Enjoy the magic of football for yourself.

- THE END -

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