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**Abstract**

The popular impression of British soccer’s relationship with the rest of the world until the late 1950’s was one of selfish, arrogant, isolation. The reality however, was quite different with frequent and multi-dimensional contact between the ‘Home Nations’ and the rest of the soccer world.

This paper acknowledges their self-imposed absence from the FIFA and as a consequent their non-participation in the first three World Cups. However, it demonstrates that at almost every other level Britain remained at the centre of world soccer; as regards the laws, playing international matches, club tours and the migration of players and referees.

It reflects on the circumstances that helped to substantiate the myth, focusing on an attitude of superiority, the ban on foreign professionals being ‘employed’ in British soccer and the alleged inferior style of foreign soccer and refereeing standards. This is in contrast to the globalised product that is today’s English Premier League.

**Key Words**

FIFA, Football, World Cup, Isolation, Globalization, English Premier League.

 **“The British isolation from world football in the middle decades of the twentieth century– a myth?”**

In a recent interview with BBC Radio 5 Live, the incoming FA Chairman Greg Dyke identified that one of his biggest challenges is to increase the number of young English players being represented in the English Premier League (EPL). Opta statistics show that in the 2012/13 season only 36% of the players in the EPL were actually English which compares very unfavourably with the other top European leagues. In Spain, the previous World and current European champions, their top league ‘*La Liga’* had a significantly higher proportion of Spanish players at 61% whereas in Germany the figure was 47% and in Italy it was 46%.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Data on the nationalities for the 64% of the overseas players (overseas meaning non-British) reveals that there were sixty nine different nations represented in the EPL including players from every continent and all the major footballing nations. The highest representation was from France with 31, Spain at 25, followed by Holland 13 and 12 each from Belgium and Brazil but also one each from the historically weak footballing nations of Iran and the Philippines.[[2]](#endnote-2) This compares with the first week of the Premier League in 1992 when there were a total of 11 players from countries outside of the four home nations and the Republic of Ireland.

The global links between the British game and the rest of the world are equally apparent in terms of exporting the ‘product’, with EPL TV rights having been agreed with countries in every continent providing the league with an income of over £1.4bn in the period 2010 to 2013.[[3]](#endnote-3) British teams, and those from the EPL in particular, frequently travel around the world for high profile and highly lucrative friendlies in countries that previously had very little footballing pedigree or culture. This allows the EPL and the clubs to interact with supporters in these countries in a much closer relationship than ever before, enabling them to generate an international fan base. This is evidenced by Manchester United who have been reported to have over 50 million supporters around the world.[[4]](#endnote-4) Most overseas supporters will now have either seen them play live or have watched their games on TV rather than just having heard about the exploits of Charlton or Best as they would have 40 years ago.

These examples demonstrate the current cosmopolitan nature of the EPL and how football in Britain has come to reflect the globalization of football. This essay will demonstrate how the current situation contrasts with the past, when football in Britain for large periods isolated itself from the rest of the world. However a further intention of this essay is to show that this position can be misleading or over exaggerated and how British football was always collaborating with countries around the world in different ways in terms of dissemination, governance, competition and through player and coaching migration.

As identified by Hill, the term ‘globalization’ has been applied to a wide range of international developments including sport.[[5]](#endnote-5) This essay examines the concept of ‘globalisation’ with reflections on the political, economic and cultural approach that Britain has taken towards football at home and abroad since the FA was formed over 150 years ago. This will support the views of other writers, that these globalization developments are significant and on a scale never before experienced in the history of the game.[[6]](#endnote-6) Yet there are those including McGovern who challenge the statement that true globalization has occurred, preferring to suggest that while the market for professional footballers has become more international, football remains a number of steps short of being fully globalized.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Although there are many examples of ball games that were played throughout the world, it is accepted and summarized by Kitching that the originators of what we now know and accept as modern football were the British.[[8]](#endnote-8) How and why the British came to export the game is the subject of considerable debate amongst historians. All agree that the British were instrumental in the early development and establishment of the game at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sport was often used by the British to provide a certain measure of influence over other countries either by direct or indirect means, even if these countries were independent in political terms like Argentina. There was a significant British trading presence in Argentina and certain sports like polo, football and rugby became popular with the ‘local’ population after first being played by the British migrants.[[9]](#endnote-9) This supports the views taken by many historians including Lincoln Allison who noted that the game was first played abroad by British bankers, entrepreneurs and engineers who played matches between themselves.[[10]](#endnote-10) Britain at this time was the dominant world power in industry and commerce and its professionals were in high demand around the world. Along with their professional skills and expertise they brought their sports, including football. Britain and all things British, including its sports were seen as modern and the local elite were keen to adopt them as a way to become modern themselves. Allison notes that the sports were introduced to institutions like public schools and gentlemen’s clubs as the second step in the internalisation of the game. The third step was the adoption of the game by the country’s working classes. As a simple game that required little equipment other that a ball, two goals and an area of open space football was more accessible to the working classes and also easier to understand than other potential competing British exports like rugby and cricket. [[11]](#endnote-11) However Allison’s model has been contested by academics including Beck and Lanfranchi and Taylor who argue that it assumes that the British were making a conscious effort to spread football to the citizens from other countries whether they were the elite or the masses.[[12]](#endnote-12) This essay recognises that there would often be resistance by a country’s leaders, the church and patriots to ‘foreign games’ being adopted. Holt has described that even within the British Isles, Gaelic games were used as resistance to English culture in Ireland. [[13]](#endnote-13) This essay also acknowledges that there was some development of local variations or styles of football. However the desire to associate with modernity and games like football is considered to have been very strong amongst the local inhabitants in those countries where the British were playing ‘their games’.[[14]](#endnote-14) There may not have been a premeditated or formal plan on behalf of the British to persuade the world to play football, but like many other aspects of British life there was an arrogance or confident self- belief in the British way of life including its sports. This was a period of imperial enthusiasm and total confidence in Britain’s position in the world, as Birley notes ‘there was a belief that games were essential for leadership and that the British were uniquely gifted in both.’ [[15]](#endnote-15)

The influence of the British either formally by design or informally by accident in the development of football worldwide is not disputed and is witnessed by many sources through the ‘Anglicised’ names given to the newly formed teams, Grasshoppers and Young Boys in Switzerland and AC Milan, not Milano, in Italy.[[16]](#endnote-16) Similarly the language of sport was English, it was used when playing the game or when organising the game.[[17]](#endnote-17) The Italian football federation’s name originally included the English word ‘Football’ in the title, but this was changed to ‘Calcio’ in 1909 to emphasize the Italian nature of the game.[[18]](#endnote-18) It is therefore incorrect to say that Britain was excluded or isolated in the formation of the game in Europe as they were wholly integrated with the game’s development, even if there was no formality to it or a centralised plan.

Once sports are established in countries, domestic matches and leagues are formed and then there is a natural progression to international competition. Again the template for this came from Britain with the creation of the (English) FA in 1863 and the other three home countries having formed their own associations and competitions by the 1890s.[[19]](#endnote-19) The first international match was held in 1872 between England and Scotland and within twelve years an annual championship was held between the two nations and Wales and Ireland, (Northern Ireland after partition).[[20]](#endnote-20) The internationalization of sport was not unique and was just one example of political and economic developments between nation states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[[21]](#endnote-21) It was in this period that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was formed in 1894 at the Paris International Convention the brainchild of Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin. [[22]](#endnote-22)

Within two years the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896 in an attempt to not only bring the world’s athletes together but to also attempt to foster world peace. [[23]](#endnote-23) Football was not played in the first games but did make an appearance in the Paris Games in 1900 and was actually won by Upton Park FC from Britain. Although it is unclear why they were chosen by the English FA to attend the Games on behalf of Great Britain but it may have been, in part, because they were a resolutely amateur club. [[24]](#endnote-24) The Olympic football competition will be addressed in more detail later but it is important to concentrate on the creation of the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) which was established in 1904. The first international match between two non-British teams having been played the previous year when Hungary beat Bohemia 2-1. According to Hill there were two principal objectives for its formation; to regulate the trend towards international matches and to standardise the laws of the game. A later responsibility was to oversee the international transfer of players.[[25]](#endnote-25) However unlike the IOC there was no British representation among the initial eight countries that formed FIFA. Significantly FIFA, like the IOC was formed in Paris and not a British city. Indeed there was a very definite lukewarm approach from Britain to the whole concept of an international football organisation although the FA did join in 1906 and were followed by Scotland, Wales and Ireland by 1911. For a short period there was a cooperative approach to British integration into the administration of world football (South Africa joined in 1908 and Argentina and Chile in 1912). Britain’s leading position in world football, even as a late comer to FIFA was evidenced by each of the home countries having their own representative on the FIFA board rather than having just one British member. Indeed this was one of the reasons for the other home countries belated entry, after FIFA initially had difficulties accepting them under the federation’s one member one country principle. [[26]](#endnote-26)

FIFA was not the first organisation created to oversee the governance of the game because initially the laws for actually playing the game varied from country to country and it was accepted practice that the home team (country’s) laws would apply. To overcome this, the International F.A. Board (IFAB) had been created in 1886 by representatives from the four home nations to standardise and supervise the laws. With the four home nations becoming members of FIFA the IFAB was increased to five organisations in 1913, with FIFA having the fifth seat, in addition to those original four. With this development Britain ensured that it had control over the laws of itsgame with any changes having to be agreed by a four-fifths majority.[[27]](#endnote-27)

British representation in FIFA was however short-lived and continued to reflect a superior attitude consistent with being founders of the game. As Fredrick Wall, the FA Secretary wrote in his memoirs ‘we want to govern ourselves both on and off the pitch.’[[28]](#endnote-28) Indeed as Russell identifies it was for ‘off the field reasons’ that in 1920, after the First World War, the four home nations withdrew from FIFA over FIFA’s desire to resume relations with ex-enemy countries. A brief return was made in 1924 before they withdrew for a significantly longer period in 1928. Russell further explains that the principal reason given related to definitions of amateurism, this concerned the participation of players in the Olympics for which FIFA now had responsibility for organising the football element of the Games.[[29]](#endnote-29) However a much deeper and insular reason was the on-going belief that FIFA should not have total control over individual national associations. “We should be free to conduct our affairs in the way our long experience has shown them to be desirable” was the FA’s opinion.[[30]](#endnote-30) Or as Mason identified ‘no one could tell them anything about football’. [[31]](#endnote-31)

Formal relationships with FIFA were then ended in 1928 until 1946. However in reality this did not mean a period of isolation from international football for British teams. Despite being outside of FIFA the four British FA’s enjoyed a type of virtual membership with constant dialogue with FIFA via the attendance by FIFA officials at matches in the Home International Championships, with the continuance of the overwhelming British presence on the IFAB and most importantly the continuation of friendly internationals. [[32]](#endnote-32) Beck writing on Britain’s relationship with FIFA during the inter war years notes that on the pitch itself England in particular, continued to play international ‘friendlies’ across Europe despite the technicality of not being eligible to play matches against FIFA associated countries. The challenge of playing against the masters of football was too strong for the continental teams to resist or sensible for FIFA to enforce. England generally enjoyed successful results in these matches beating and drawing with the 1934 and 1938 World Cup winning Italy and beating Germany in 1935 and 1938. There were defeats, including a 4-3 reverse in Spain in 1929 but generally the public and the press accepted the absence from the first three World Cups and considered that the real test remained the annual Home International Championships.[[33]](#endnote-33)

For both parties maintaining cordial relations were important, FIFA needed British support to retain their creditability as the international governing body for a world sport and this they achieved by having a close association with of the founders of the game even if it was informal. Two examples of this association was the lifting of the ban on British referees officiating in FIFA organised matches from 1931 and then the recognition of the 75th anniversary of the FA in 1938 when a Rest of Europe team lost 3-0 at Highbury, London.[[34]](#endnote-34) The most significant example of this informal relationship was the courting of the four British FAs by FIFA officials including their General Secretary Ivo Schricker to participate in each of the first three World Cups despite their absence from FIFA. FIFA's objective in inviting the British teams and especially England was to increase the credibility of their tournament. However the invitations appear to have been unsuccessful for a number of reasons: although there is little documented evidence to support this, they are thought to include the general feeling of superiority and a ‘Little Englander’ attitude, together with the real logistical issues associated with travelling to and playing in the inaugural World Cup in Uruguay in 1930. Indeed only four European teams made the journey across the Atlantic. These logistical challenges were supported by a report from Chelsea FC who had toured South America in 1929 but had identified many difficulties and dangers of playing on that continent, which only helped to back up the entrenched views of non -involvement held by the FA.[[35]](#endnote-35) Chelsea’s tour however is another example in itself to counter the total isolation view of British football from the rest of the world during the inter war years. Prior to the second World Cup that was held in Italy in 1934, FIFA officials attended the 1933 England v Scotland game to investigate the possibility of both countries involvement. They even offered direct entry into the completion, no pre-qualifying would be required and expenses would be paid to cover travelling and accommodation costs. Both FAs again said no but ironically both countries played friendlies on the continent during the summer of 1934 prior to the World Cup matches.

A similar approach was made in 1938 in the lead up to the finals in France and even an offer to enter a United British Team made. This was not surprisingly rejected by the British FAs as it was considered to potentially set a precedent for future international team involvement and end the independence of each of the four FA’s to run its own team. This would be a recurring theme for the following seventy years and one that was controversially re-visited in the lead up to the 2012 London Olympics, with long and heated debates in the press and between the respective home nation FA’s and the British Olympic Association (BOA) about the merits and challenges of a Team GB playing at the Games.[[36]](#endnote-36) As in 1934 England and Scotland played games in Europe in 1938 in the lead up to the World Cup and England actually played in Paris in the World Cup final stadium just nine days before the tournament started and attracted a bigger crowd than any game of the World Cup. There was also a move towards greater co-operation off the field with the 1938 meeting of the IFAB switched from its original venue in Northern Ireland to Paris so that officials could also attend World Cup matches and events. However there was still little enthusiasm from the British press or the public for the World Cup, with little coverage in the newspapers for this foreign tournament. [[37]](#endnote-37) Far more coverage was given to England’s 6-3 victory in the same year against Germany when as Russell reports *The Daily Mail* proclaimed ‘Once again England are proved to be the leading football nation in the world’, although this game is most famous for the English players giving the Nazi salute before the kick-off.[[38]](#endnote-38) The political significance of the game was reported to audiences that in Berlin ‘England beat Nazis … restoring British soccer prestige on the continent’.[[39]](#endnote-39)

Following the Second World War a change of attitude saw Britain keen to establish itself a role in a post-British Empire world and so it became more enthusiastic to be included in world organisations. This new reality was recognised by Stanley Rous, the FA secretary from 1934 -1961, who saw football as a chance for Britain to retain some influence over world culture.[[40]](#endnote-40) So in 1946 two years before the Olympic Games were staged in London, the four home nations re-joined FIFA but only on their terms. This meant ensuring they were still represented as four separate nations on the pitch and in the committee room with each ‘nation’ having its own single vote in FIFA and also ensuring they had 50% of the votes on the IFAB.[[41]](#endnote-41) IFAB was now to have four representatives from FIFA and one each from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – an abiding acknowledgement of the historic significance of the British associations in world football. A three-quarters majority was required for any item to be passed.[[42]](#endnote-42)

Once returned to FIFA, progress and results were mixed for the previously superior England football team. The first foreign team to play at Wembley were Argentina who were beaten 2-1 in 1951 but this was only one year after the highly embarrassing 1-0 defeat by the USA in the 1950 World Cup in Brazil, the first time that any of the home nations had competed in the tournament. Greater humiliation followed in 1953 with the infamous 6-3 defeat by Hungary at Wembley which shattered once and for all the pretensions about English dominance in international football; a position that six months later was reinforced to an even greater depth when the Hungarians beat England 7-1 in Budapest. These defeats and the lowering of England’s position in the world order of football might also be seen to be symptomatic of Britain in the 1950s a country still struggling with rationing and having lost its position as the most dominant power and economic force in the world.[[43]](#endnote-43) There was one significant return to a position of the previous ascendancy when in 1966 with Rous now as the president of FIFA, England hosted and won the World Cup beating the West Germany 4-2 after extra time at Wembley Stadium. [[44]](#endnote-44) However since then England have failed to repeat this success and indeed failed to even qualify for the final stages three times in 1974, 1978 and 1994.

Even in the second decade of the twenty first century there is an argument that nothing has changed regarding the feelings in Britain towards FIFA. There were signs of mistrust at best and claims of bias and corruption levelled at FIFA following the discussion to award the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the 2022 competition to Qatar rather than to England. [[45]](#endnote-45)Calls were made for England to leave FIFA and set up an independent rival organisation. This echoes the comments of a previous Football League President Charles Sutcliffe from the beginning of the twentieth century who stated ‘an organisation where Uruguay, Paraguay, Egypt and Bohemia are equal with England has little appeal and is an example of magnifying the midgets.’ [[46]](#endnote-46)

Returning to Olympic football it is worth highlighting the performance of the British team in the Games, and its participation which was not continuous and broadly in line with British membership of FIFA. Britain actually won gold in 1900, 1908 and again in 1912 but in 1920 a weakened team representing a tired nation after the First World War was beaten in the first round. This possible threat of further humiliation, the fear of international football in general being linked to increased levels of nationalism and finally concerns with payments to players, a situation that to the British with their strong amateur values was a complete compromise of the values and ideals of the Olympic Games, saw no British participation in the 1924 and 1928 Games. [[47]](#endnote-47)There was no football competition in the 1932 Los Angeles Games but the 1936 Berlin Games did see the return of a British team to play in the Olympics when they lost in the quarter finals to Poland.

Away from international football there was a significant record of British professional club sides participating in overseas tours with an increasing frequency shown by reports from the 1920s. [[48]](#endnote-48) However these adventures were not always positive or likely to foster good impressions likely to encourage closer international ties, with reports of rough play, poor interpretation of the laws by poor and even biased referees.[[49]](#endnote-49) However once again this provides evidence that British football associations were not totally against engaging with foreign teams or even travelling to and playing them in their country.One of the major developments in football after the Second World War was the installation of floodlights at a number of the top English football team’s grounds. One of the first was Molineux home of Wolverhampton Wanderers. This was in 1954 and to launch this development the club embarked on a series of ‘floodlit friendlies’ two of the first teams to visit were Spartak Moscow and Honved of Hungary. [[50]](#endnote-50) The Honved match saw Wolves prevail 3-2 against one of the strongest teams in Europe a team that included many of the Hungarian national team who had recently beaten the England national side. The success of these games prompted Gabriel Hanot the editor of *L’Equipe*, the main sports paper in France to encourage the Union of Europe Football Associations (UEFA) to organise a European Club championships. This was approved and started the following season in 1955 but despite the obvious success of the Wolverhampton experiment there was no English entry into the first competition with the Football League Secretary Alan Hardaker refusing to let the current English champions Chelsea enter as he did not believe it was in the best interests of English football to be a part of it.[[51]](#endnote-51) The Scottish league however were more enlightened and permitted Hibernian to enter, not that they were Scottish Champions but because they had floodlights at their ground and it was thought their participation would generate interest across Europe. Hibernian actually progressed to the semi-finals before losing to the French team Stade Reims. [[52]](#endnote-52)

English teams could not be denied the place in the competition for long and the next year the exclusion was challenged by Matt Busby who entered Manchester United without the support of the league, but who in the first year of entering also made the semi-finals before losing to the great Real Madrid side. [[53]](#endnote-53)Despite this success the league were still were sceptical about English club participation and this was shown in their reluctance to help the clubs with accommodating their overseas fixtures including a requirement that teams had to return to England a full day before they were scheduled to play their next domestic fixture. This possibly contributed to the urge to return home promptly after Manchester United’s quarter final game in Belgrade in February 1958, for fear of possible fines. The players and team officials boarded the plane in Munich in extremely dangerous and snowy conditions before the now infamous crash that left eight players and three officials dead. [[54]](#endnote-54)

Despite this tragedy British teams continued to embrace the European club football tournaments which were expanded to three annual competitions by the beginning of the 1960s. Tottenham Hotspur became the first English team to triumph in Europe, winning the Cup Winners Cup in 1963 before Celtic became the first British team to win the European Cup in 1967 beating Inter Milan 2-1. [[55]](#endnote-55) Manchester United with Munich Air Crash survivors’ Matt Busby, Bobby Charlton and Bill Foulkes present followed Celtic to win the European Cup in 1968. [[56]](#endnote-56)This began a dominant era for English and Scottish teams through the 1970s and 1980s with a total of 23 wins in the three major European competitions including six straight winners of the European Cup from 1977 to 1982. This run of success was ended in 1985 after the Heysel stadium disaster when Liverpool played Juventus and 39 fans were killed after crowd unrest. This lead to the expulsion of English teams from European competition for five years as a punishment. On this occasion the isolation was not instigated by the British but it meant the clubs were excluded from international football. The ban was lifted in 1990 and it was Manchester United who again led the way back by winning the Cup Winners Cup in 1991 and becoming the first English team to win the European Champions League in 1999 beating the German side Bayern Munich in a thrilling 2-1 extra time win in Barcelona’s Camp Nou. [[57]](#endnote-57)

The role of the individual, especially players but also coaches can help to support the isolationist viewpoint, but research has also demonstrated that a significant amount of migration occurred with Britons plying their trade at overseas clubs, more than is often assumed. In recent years there has been an increasing importation of foreign players, coaches and owners to provide further evidence of the cosmopolitan nature of the British game.

It has already been established how the British were instrumental in creating an interest in football around the world and how they were central to the creation of new teams. Naturally British players were part of this process; FC Barcelona formed in 1899, included the Witty brothers in their early teams.[[58]](#endnote-58) However the brothers were more a representation of Britons living and working in Barcelona with a passion for football, rather than regular British players displaying economic migration tendencies seeking to ply their footballing trade abroad. While there were examples of British footballers playing overseas, as Lanfranchi and Taylor observed they were not natural travellers. The push and pull effect of playing abroad was weak. Why would successful players want to leave the most prestigious and competitive league in the world to play in less well developed and less challenging alternatives? [[59]](#endnote-59) Indeed, this is still partly true today given the economic advantages of playing in the EPL even if the quality level is often debated.

There were however a significant minority of players who did take the opportunity to play abroad and one of the attractions of British players for foreign teams during the inter war period, in addition to their playing ability, was there was no official requirement to negotiate and pay transfer fees to the British clubs. This was because with the self-imposed exile from FIFA it meant the home country FAs had considerably less control over players’ rights and registration requirements if overseas clubs approached them. [[60]](#endnote-60) During this period there were a number of players who enjoyed long and successful careers abroad in France in particular. However this situation did represent a threat to the Football Leagues’ status and these players risked being banned from returning to play in the British leagues if their ‘transfer’ had not received the consent of their English clubs prior to their defection. It reached a pinnacle in April 1932 when the Football League President John McKenna announced that any players going to France “would cease to have the right to play (football) again in this country”, although this threat had little impact on player migration to France.[[61]](#endnote-61)

After World War Two some players took the opportunity to move to Columbia to play football influenced no doubt by the chance to receive significant payments far in excess of the maximum wage that players in the British game were still being paid. Two of the highest profile players were Manchester United’s Charlie Mitten and Stoke’s Neil Franklin. Franklin had to break his contract with Stoke to play in Bogota, could not settle in Columbia and found that, as with the situation of footballers playing in France before the war, when he returned home the Football League took punitive action banning him for a year and suspending from the England team indefinitely*.[[62]](#endnote-62)* Later in the early 1960s further high profile British footballers had short spells in Italy and this included Denis Law and Jimmy Greaves. However for most of these players they found in difficult to fit in with the culture, the food and even the training encountered in Italy and quickly returned to Britain.[[63]](#endnote-63) This is supported by Lanfranchi and Taylor who identified the absence of the traditional English drink and pub culture as reasons why Greaves and then more recently Gascoigne failed to adapt to the accepted Italian footballers’ lifestyle.[[64]](#endnote-64) One notable exception to this trend was John Charles who enjoyed considerable success during the late 1950s and early 1960s playing for Juventus and Roma. He embraced the Italian way of life and this is perhaps one of the reasons for his success and he has been considered to be one of the most successful British footballing exports and one of the finest foreign players in Italy.[[65]](#endnote-65) At the end of the twentieth and into the early twenty first century Lanfranchi and Taylor suggest that with few exceptions the world finest players were migrants. [[66]](#endnote-66) Yet only a small percentage of these successful talented migrant players have been British with most of them still preferring to stay at home.

Another notable footballing British export throughout the first half of the twentieth century as Taylor has identified, was the migrant British coach who played an important role in the development of the game in the rest of the world. Taylor describes how these migrant coaches have become known as the second footballing wave following on from the early touring teams and were employed by overseas teams to teach them the British game. Detailed records do not exist but he estimates there were in excess of one hundred British coaches working across Europe in the inter war years. This is particularly relevant for it was the period when the British FAs were mainly outside of FIFA and indeed of the sixteen teams at the 1934 World Cup in Italy three had English managers. [[67]](#endnote-67)

In terms of today’s footballing imports to Britain, this essay has already identified the mutli-national or even saturated nature of the EPL and has also described how this has increased throughout the EPL’s existence. While this essay has argued and identified that British football has not been as isolated as some might suggest it is unquestionable that as far as allowing players from outside of the Britain and Ireland most foreign professionals had effectively been banned from the English game between 1931 and 1978. The only foreigners allowed were amateurs, students, those with family Commonwealth ties, POWs or those who arrived for other reasons (non-football work) and achieved resident status after two years. [[68]](#endnote-68) It is interesting to note that while the 1948 Immigration Act confirmed that Colonial-born players were free to enjoy un-restricted entry into Britain, few players were actually attracted or encouraged to play here.[[69]](#endnote-69) This contrasted with the French approach that used sport as a process of cultural assimilation creating the concept of the ‘Black Frenchman’.[[70]](#endnote-70) However for players coming from outside of the British Empire there was very strong resistance and even hostility. When in the 1930s, Arsenal, who were the leading team of the time tried to sign an overseas player the then FA President Sutcliffe said ‘it was repulsive to clubs, offensive to British players and an admission of weakness in club management.’[[71]](#endnote-71)

The 1970s witnessed two significant developments which instigated a change of regulations and attitudes. The first was Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 and the subsequent impact on employment law. The second in 1978 saw the self-imposed ban lifted when the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) agreed to lift the ban on overseas players after UEFA had agreed with the EEC that it was unlawful to discriminate against footballers from other EEC countries. This led to a season of star arrivals including Muhren and Thijssen. [[72]](#endnote-72) Initially however when the ban was lifted the Department of Employment would only issues work permits to players from non EEC countries that were capped and could in their opinion ‘make a contribution to the national game.’[[73]](#endnote-73) A further restriction that was imposed in England was a limit of only two foreign players per team which was set at the beginning of the 1980s.[[74]](#endnote-74) This restriction was relaxed in 1991 after a “Gentleman’s Agreement” between UEFA and the EEC resolved that football was in breach of European Employment law regarding the freedom of movement of workers between member states. This led to the adoption of a compromise and the so called ‘3+2’ rule where up to five non-nationals could be part of every matchday squad.[[75]](#endnote-75) This agreement remained in place until 1995 when after five years of proceedings the pivotal ‘Bosman’ ruling from the European Court of Justice decreed that football should not be treated differently to any other industry and that the sport was in breach of the Treaty of Rome by restricting the number of EU footballers (workers) able to move and therefore play for a club within the EU. [[76]](#endnote-76)This was the last significant barrier to any isolation for English football with unlimited access to players from across the 27 EU member states. A more relaxed attitude to the ‘import’ of players from across the world has seen the EPL transformed. This is best illustrated by *The Daily Mail* reporting the examples of Chelsea and Arsenal who have respectively fielded a team of 11 non English players and a full matchday squad of 16 non English players in EPL games. [[77]](#endnote-77)

Finally some consideration of the political, geographical, economic and cultural factors that attract international players to the EPL is required. These reasons have been identified by Maguire in his work on the typologies of sport labour migration where he has shown that the motivations and experiences can vary considerably.[[78]](#endnote-78) It is clear however that in economic terms the EPL is one that can offer a footballer a substantial salary. A succession of lucrative TV deals between the EPL and Sky TV has significantly increased the salaries paid to footballers making a transfer to a top English team a very attractive proposition. [[79]](#endnote-79) This equates to Maguire’s theory of ‘following the money’.[[80]](#endnote-80) There are also a number of cultural reasons why players might decide to come and play at ‘the home of football’. For the northern Europeans in particular McGovern states that integration is often relatively easy, most speak English as their second language.[[81]](#endnote-81) This is supported by Lanfranchi and Taylor who add the climate is similar and they are familiar and comfortable with a ‘British way of life’ with similar political, religious and culinary experiences to which they are used to at home.[[82]](#endnote-82)

The EPL since it was formed in 1992 has accelerated the globalization of English football with the top English clubs now being regarded as global brands as much as just football clubs representing the local community. This is reflected in the international nature of their shirt and ground sponsorships deals. Arsenal are a classic example playing in the Emirates Stadium, managed for 16 years by a Frenchman Arsène Wenger a prolific buyer on the global transfer market and in 2012 having twelve different countries represented in their regular matchday squad in addition to the few English players.[[83]](#endnote-83) Wenger is currently one of eight foreign managers in the EPL and one of thirty three who have managed in the league since it was formed. It is important to note that in the league’s inaugural season, none of the then twenty two clubs had foreign managers in charge although Aston Villa had previous employed the first non -British born manager to take charge of a team in England’s top league when Jozef Venglos was appointed for one season in 1990/91. This reflects the changing trend in the EPL and potentially is linked to the increased globalisation of the league and the increase in overseas owners. In terms of managerial success there has also been a swing towards foreign managers with only six trophies having been won by clubs managed by an English born manager of the seventy major trophies in English football that have been won during the existence of the EPL compared with twenty seven trophies won by clubs with foreign born managers. [[84]](#endnote-84)Of course over this same period Sir Alex Ferguson collected twenty trophies during his reign at Manchester United continuing a long history of successful Scottish managers in the English league.

Another development is an ever increasing amount of foreign ownership of clubs in the EPL. [[85]](#endnote-85) The two most successful English football clubs in terms of league titles won, Manchester United and Liverpool, have American owners and Manchester United are actually listed on the New York Stock Exchange rather than the London equivalent. The most recent progression in these trans-Atlantic ownership partnerships has seen Manchester City, another club from the north west of England, although now owned by the billionaire Sheikh Mansour of Abu Dhabi, form a business partnership with the New York Yankees Baseball organisation to form a new Major League Soccer Franchise in New York.[[86]](#endnote-86) This development if successful could lead to even greater collaboration between English clubs and sporting clubs from foreign countries, not necessarily from the same sport, working together to create international brands and business partnerships.

As pioneers of the game the British, as with most of their cultural products and values, were keen to share, export and sometimes impose football on countries around the world wherever they ventured. Initially and informally there was always a high level of integration rather than isolation between the ‘home of football’ and the rest of the world. There were however two notable and high profile exceptions to this rule which have given the impression of an isolationist policy. These have been identified as the reluctance to join and then remain part of FIFA and the acceptance of foreign players into the British leagues. This essay has not sought to deny either of these very well documented facts and has highlighted and discussed material to support both of these positions but it has endeavoured to show that behind the mask of a policy of isolationism there has always been a significant level of co-operation and contact between individuals, clubs and even associations from Britain and the rest of the world. This contact and Britain’s historical, economic, cultural and social position have all contributed to the situation today where the EPL is the richest, most watched and most culturally diverse league in the world. A situation that fans often argue is to the detriment of the development of home grown British players and to the potential for success of England or any of the home nations at international team competitions. It even goes to the very fabric of the game with the majority of the famous and most successful teams ‘enjoying’ foreign ownership and involvement.

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