Football History

How One Game Spread Around the World | Level C1 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Did you play football (soccer) or another ball game as a child? Where did you play, and what did you use for goals?
2. Which football teams or players are popular where you live, and what makes them popular?
3. How might people's interest in football differ by country, age, or gender?

Reading: Football History

On streets and dusty fields around the world, people play football with two bags for a goal and a ball that **has seen better days**. The game needs almost no equipment, which helps to explain its **ubiquity**. Its governing body, FIFA, has more member associations than the United Nations has member states.

Kicking games are very old. In China, a game called cuju was played more than 2,000 years ago, partly as training for soldiers. Medieval Europe had a more **unruly** version, in which whole villages chased a ball through the streets. London banned the game in 1314, and English authorities kept banning it for centuries, **to little avail**.

The modern game began in a London pub in 1863. Schools and clubs played by different rules, so matches could **degenerate** into arguments. One **sticking point** was hacking, the practice of kicking an opponent in the shins. The new Football Association banned it, and the club that wanted to keep it left and later helped found rugby. Later, students at Oxford turned "association" into "soccer," a word still used in a few countries.

British sailors, railway workers, and teachers carried the game around the world. Many clubs still show **traces** of this origin. AC Milan, for example, still uses the English spelling of its city's name. In Brazil, the best-known **pioneer** was Charles Miller, the son of a Scottish railway engineer. He came home from school in England in 1894 with two footballs and a book of rules. Local players soon made the game their own. Uruguay hosted the first World Cup in 1930, timed to **coincide** with a hundred years of independence. The long sea voyage **deterred** most European teams, so only 13 teams took part. Football was now growing **on its own terms**.

The game also took on meanings beyond sport. In 1958, Algerian players left their clubs in France to form a team that would **bolster** support for Algeria's independence. For many new nations, a national team became a **rallying point**. Women, however, were pushed aside. In 1921, England's FA banned women's games from its members' grounds. Brazil went further, **outlawing** women's football from 1941 to 1979. In 2026, the World Cup had 48 teams for the first time. One of its **milestones** was the debut of Curaçao, an island of about 160,000 people. It became the smallest country by population ever to qualify.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

rallying point **has seen better days** **unruly** **bolster** **milestones** **pioneer** **traces** **degenerate** **sticking point** **to little avail** **coincide** **ubiquity** **outlawing** **deterred**

1. My old bicycle _____, but it still gets me to work every day.
2. The _____ of smartphones means that almost anyone can film a match.
3. Security staff struggled to control the _____ crowd near the exit.
4. She called the airline five times, but _____; nobody answered.
5. The friendly debate began to _____ into insults when politics came up.
6. The price was the main _____ in the negotiations.
7. Archaeologists found _____ of an ancient village under the car park.
8. Marie Curie was a _____ in the study of radioactivity.
9. The festival was planned to _____ with the full moon.
10. The high ticket prices _____ many young fans from going to matches.
11. A strong first-half performance helped to _____ the team's belief that it could win.
12. The old harbor became a _____ that brought the whole town together to save it.
13. Several cities are _____ diesel cars from their historic centers.
14. Learning to walk and talk are important _____ in a child's development.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. an unruly	_____	**a.** confidence
2. degenerate into	_____	**b.** the high cost
3. a major sticking	_____	**c.** crowd
4. leave no	_____	**d.** chaos
5. pioneer a new	_____	**e.** trace
6. be deterred by	_____	**f.** milestone
7. bolster	_____	**g.** technique
8. reach an important	_____	**h.** point

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Smartphones are now _____ in cities around the world. (*ubiquity*)
2. She did _____ research on the history of women's football. (*pioneer*)
3. It was no _____ that the first World Cup was held in 1930. (*coincide*)
4. Fines are meant to act as a _____ to dangerous driving. (*deterred*)
5. The _____ of the debate into personal insults upset the audience. (*degenerate*)
6. Many football traditions can be _____ back to British sailors and engineers. (*traces*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. According to the writer, why can football be played almost anywhere?
2. What was cuju, and what was it partly used for?
3. What was medieval football like in Europe, and how successful were the attempts to ban it?

4. Why did matches between schools and clubs in England often end in arguments before 1863?
5. What was hacking, and what did the new Football Association decide about it?
6. Who was Charles Miller, and what did he bring to Brazil?
7. Why did only 13 teams play at the first World Cup in 1930?
8. Why did a group of Algerian players leave their clubs in France in 1958?
9. Why does the writer describe Curaçao's place at the 2026 World Cup as a milestone?
10. **True, False, or Not Given?** *"Charles Miller later played for Brazil's national team."*
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given?** *"The writer suggests that, by 1930, football still depended mainly on Britain to grow."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer mention the spelling of AC Milan's name? Is it (a) to show a trace of the British origins of many clubs, (b) to compare the Italian and English languages, or (c) to suggest that AC Milan is the oldest club in Italy?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. Cuju was played in China more than 2,000 years ago. **T / F**
2. Medieval football in Europe was a calm game with strict rules. **T / F**
3. The modern game of football began in a London pub in 1863. **T / F**
4. The new Football Association allowed hacking. **T / F**
5. The word "soccer" was created by students at Oxford. **T / F**
6. Charles Miller brought footballs to Brazil from Scotland. **T / F**
7. Most European countries sent teams to the first World Cup. **T / F**
8. In 1958, a group of Algerian players left their clubs in France. **T / F**
9. In 1921, the English FA banned women's games from its members' grounds. **T / F**
10. The 2026 World Cup had 32 teams. **T / F**

Language Focus: Appositives: Noun Phrases That Rename

An **appositive** is a noun phrase placed right after another noun to say who or what it is.

Pattern: noun + comma + appositive (+ comma) + rest of the sentence. *My sister, a nurse, works at night.*

It can also end a sentence: *We visited Hoi An, an old trading port in Vietnam.*

From the reading:

"Its governing body, **FIFA**, has more member associations than the United Nations has member states."

"One sticking point was hacking, **the practice of kicking an opponent in the shins**."

Tip: Use commas when the appositive adds extra information. Leave them out when it tells you *which* one: *the singer Rosalía, my friend Ana*.

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you. Add an appositive after the comma, then complete the sentence.

Appositive in the middle

1. My hometown, a _____
2. My favorite athlete or performer, _____
3. The best teacher I have ever had, _____

Appositive at the end

4. One place I would love to visit is _____
5. At home, I still have _____

Part B. Questions

Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to answer using an appositive. *Then ask a partner.*

6. Who is someone you admire?
7. What is your favorite book, film, or series?
8. Which sport or game do you know best?
9. What is one dish visitors should try in your country or region?
10. Who is a famous person from your country or city?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. Do you prefer to watch sports or to play them? Why?
2. Which sports are popular in your country but little known elsewhere?
3. Have you ever watched a big football match with a large group of people? What was the atmosphere like?
4. What is this sport called in your language, and do you know where the word comes from?
5. Cricket and rugby also traveled with the British. Why might football have spread more widely than either of them?
6. Many clubs carry traces of their origins in their names, colors, or badges. Do you know the story behind a club or team near you?
7. Is it a problem that so many global sports were first organized in just a few countries? Why or why not?
8. Can a national team really be a rallying point for a country? Give an example you know.
9. Should sport and politics be kept separate? Think about the Algerian team of 1958.
10. Women's football was banned or limited in several countries for decades. What effects might that still have today?
11. Is a 48-team World Cup a good idea? Consider small countries, players' health, and the quality of the matches.
12. Ancient games such as cuju are sometimes revived for festivals and tourists. Is it worth keeping old games alive?
13. How has the internet changed the way people around the world follow football?
14. Some people say football is "just a game." Others see it as part of who they are. Which view is closer to yours, and why?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/football-global-history** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.