Chapter 1

Introduction
Creating the rugby landscape

1 Introduction

Entertainment or competitive activities with characteristics comparable to what are now universally described as sport, have a long and complex history. Various scholars (Allison, 2001; Collins, 2009a; Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Harris, 2010; Smart, 2005) have researched the complex origins of modern sporting activity. For example, it has been argued that the family of modern football sports has their roots in classical antiquity and China. To elaborate Marindin (1890, p. 148) notes that elements of the game ‘Harpastum’, specifically the wrestling terms ‘dfia, avrDviqipis and TparjXur’ are considered to be components of phase play found in the early forms of football. Harpastum or ‘Pheninda’ (the Greek term) was a form of ball game played throughout the Roman Empire in which two teams using a small ball attempted to carry it to lines marked at the end of the field of play, requiring significant amounts of speed, agility, and physical exertion from the participants. Further examples exist in the British Isles with medieval Irishmen playing ‘Cod’, a game which involved carrying an inflated bladder into a goal and in Wales, a game called ‘cnappan’ was played on feast days and involved teams attempting to keep hold of a wooden ball (Richards, 2007, p. 26). A similar game called ‘cuju’ (translated as ‘kick ball’) created in China during the Han dynasty (206BCE–221CE) is commonly referred to as a precursor of the modern day version of football (Goldblatt, 2006, p. 5).

An issue with referring back to examples of sport within ancient civilisations is that it is impossible to determine the genuineness of these theories. All that can be said with certainty is that rugby and football are descended from a type of medieval folk game, as there is direct evidence to support researchers’ statements on this. Nevertheless, the origins of these folk games still remain obscure (Dunning & Sheard, 1979, p. 19), with some analysts suggesting that the game Harpastum was brought to Britain in 217 AD by the Roman Legions, an ancient example of colonialism and sport as ‘cultural cargo’ (Braumwart & Carroll, 1980, p. 1). Alternatively, there may
have been an entirely indigenous development of such games or they may have contained a mixture of native and foreign traditions.

Nevertheless, Henderson (2001, p. 11) explored the context of sport in Britain, more precisely England and football, by suggesting that different folk or mob football games were contested as early as the fourteenth century, and possibly extend back as far as the eighth century. Additionally, Magoun (1929, pp. 33–45) explored a range of statements inferring the existence of football throughout medieval England; it is the term ‘inferring’ that is key to Magoun’s work. Magoun (1938, vii) suggested that games varied depending on locality and were often part of annual festivities such as Shrovetide with rival teams differentiated according to village parish, employment or age. What is evident from both Henderson’s and Magoun’s work is that participants were mainly male and most notably from the lower classes.

A range of folk forms of football have been identified; a medieval variant called ‘campball’ was played in Norfolk and Suffolk (Marshall, 1892, p. 7) while another variant called ‘hurling’ was played in Cornwall (Dunning & Sheard, 1979, pp. 22–24). Hurling matches were mainly organised by gentlemen and the goals were either gentlemen’s houses or two towns or villages spaced three to four miles apart. The object of these contests was to force a ball shaped object into a neighbouring village. These games were loosely governed, if at all, the exact rules of these games were not recorded and the result was more often than not based on physical prowess rather than sporting ability. There were no limits on the numbers that could take part in such games and matches would often take place on holidays. The eve of Lent was a particularly popular time for games between rival villages, with many taking place on Shrove Tuesday (Harvey, 2005, p. 6).

The violence within folk football was in fact one of its unifying elements. There may have been significant differences in the forms of play involved, but a common coarseness seemed to permeate all of its forms countrywide (Dunning, 1992, pp. 8–11). Eruptions of violence were fairly common in the folk-antecedents of modern football and there were no referees or relatively impersonal rules of conduct to keep players in check. Folk forms of football were a channel into which violent tendencies could be directed, a kind of ritualised fight in which groups could pit their strength against local rivals and secure release of the tensions generated by the inevitable frustrations of day-to-day life (Cashmore, 2010, p. 306; Dunning & Sheard, 1979, p. 24).

During the latter half of the twelfth century, various forms of football had become established around London as well as throughout the north of England and the Midlands (Milton, 2007, p. 11). The authorities regularly sought to ban these ‘violent’ games, usually to maintain work and public order (Walvin, 1994, p. 16). In 1314, Edward II of England banned ‘fute-ball’ in the city of London. This was further enforced by an outright ban throughout England by Edward III in 1364, because the game was argued to
interfere with archery practice, which was deemed vital to the defence of the realm. Magoun (1929, pp. 37–38) quotes the statute decreed by Edward III:

‘To the sheriffs of London. Order to cause proclamation to be made that every able-bodied man of the said city on feast days, when he has leisure, shall in his sport use bows and arrows or pellets or bolts . . . forbidding them under pain of imprisonment to meddle in the hurling of stones. Handball, football or other vain games of no value; as the people of the realm, noble and simple, used heretofore to practise the said art in their sports, whence by God’s help came forth honour to the kingdom and advantage to the king in his actions of war. And now the said art is almost wholly disused, and the people indulge in the games aforesaid and in other dishonest and unthrifty or idle games, whereby the realm is like to be without archers’

(Edward III quoted in Magoun, 1929, pp. 37–38).

The banning of football was continued by Edward III’s successors, Richard II and Henry IV. By 1410, Henry IV enforced a punishment of imprisonment for six days to anyone caught playing ‘futeball’ (Henrick, 1982, p. 30). Similar stipulations were also endorsed by Philippe V and James I in France and Scotland respectively throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Interestingly, in 1423 James I of Scotland was returned to his kingdom after spending 19 years in the captivity of the English. On his return James I presented the Scottish public with 27 Acts of Parliament. Young (1973, p. 35) notes one of the statutes decreed by James I:

‘It is statute, and the King forbiddis that ne man play at the futeball under the paine of fiftie schillings, to be raised to the Lord of the land als oft as he be tainted, or to the scheriffe of the land, or his Ministers, gif the Lordes will not punish sik trespassours’

(James I quoted in Young, 1973, p. 35).

In the seventeenth century, James I of England was still trying to dissolve the game of ‘futeball’. James I outlawed ‘futeball’ from his court because it was “meeter for lameing than making able the user thereof” (Braumwart & Carroll, 1980, p. 2). What is most significant about this pronouncement is that James wanted it removed from his court. Football had not only survived 300 years of banning, but had progressed from an exclusively lower class activity to one with devotees among the nobility. Between 1314 and 1667 football-related activities had received 31 separate bans proclaimed by state and local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland (Richards, 2007, p. 27)

Pre-industrial football was a central part of the cultural life of much of Britain; however, during the nineteenth century it declined to a position
where it ceased to be played in all but a few places. The reasons for this
decline have interested historians and sociologists alike and a lively debate
has arisen on the subject. One of the most significant contributions has
come from Dunning and Sheard (1979, pp. 41–44), who argue that the cen-
tral factor in the decline of the game was the withdrawal of aristocratic and
gentry patronage in the period from 1780 to 1850. They believe it was part
of a wider withdrawal from public life by the upper classes in the face of a
perceived threat from the emergent bourgeoisie. Also, the end of patronage
and the overt attempts at suppression that occurred were stimulated by a
growing intolerance of the inherent violence of folk football.

However, the views expressed by Dunning and Sheard have been criti-
cised by Goulstone (2000, p. 135). Goulstone refutes the claim that extreme
violence was endemic in folk football and suggests no one has produced
what can really be called acceptable evidence that genuine matches were any
more dangerous than many modern sports or indeed than later Victorian
club and school football. Accounts from seventeenth century sports such as
hurling and the reports of Shrovetide football reveal them to be essentially
ritualistic in nature and they should not be confused with ‘normal’ football
(Goulstone, 2000, pp. 135–136). The common theme present in the critical
response of Goulstone is that it was principally the end of the bourgeois
acceptance of football in towns rather than the withdrawal of the support of
the gentry that led to attacks upon the game. Folk football became increas-
ingly problematic with industrialisation and urbanisation encouraging the
movement of the population from the countryside and villages to towns and
cities.

Folk football was disruptive of the social order required in the increas-
ingly populated towns and cities of a developing industrial society and was
regarded as too violent for the ‘civilised’ tastes of the arbiters of what was
deemed socially acceptable (Elias & Dunning, 1986, pp. 188–190). Between
1314 and 1667, ‘football’ and other popular games were banned on more
than 30 occasions. Over a period of a few years it was not simply the police
force, but also the army and a special force of police constables that were
used to stop games as riots and protests became common. The levels of
participation in sport declined so dramatically from the later decades of
the eighteenth century that by the second quarter of the nineteenth century
little was left of a formerly vibrant mass sporting culture. The use of force
resulted in football being replaced by more acceptable ‘civilised’ forms of
sport within the towns and cities. Government’s attempt to stamp out foot-
ball was a result of the general growing fear of the mob and a by-product of
the political climate of the times (Tranter, 1998, p. 11).

Although most forms of popular sport have their roots in a variety of folk
games, ancient civilisation recreational activities and traditional medieval
leisure pursuits, it is in the nineteenth century and associated developments
that the foundations of modern sport really lie (McRae, 1998; Richards,
2007; Taylor, 2008). It is from this point onwards that this book will now focus; as these developments coincided with society undergoing protracted industrialisation and urbanisation, which had a major influence on the development of modern sport.

2 Constitutional developments

The period between the mid-nineteenth century and the outbreak of the First World War was characterised by a transformation in the scale and nature of Britain’s sporting culture (Tranter, 1998, p. 13). The versions of football and rugby that exist in today’s society are resultant from a range of institutionalised national administrative organisations establishing rules and structures throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historians (e.g., Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Golby, 1988; Hobsbawn, 1990) have suggested that the heritage of the games of football and rugby emerged out of conflict and rivalry between English public schools in the early to mid-nineteenth century. This conflict led to competition between the schools and, while the rivalry was not necessarily on the playing field, it became a tool for the measurement and societal status of the public schools within wider society (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 294).

While the previously discussed banning orders in reference to football made it more difficult for the ordinary person to play football, the expansion of public school provision in the early decades of the nineteenth century encouraged the institutionalisation of popular activities such as hoops and marbles alongside bare-knuckle fights and mob football (Mangan & Walvin, 1991, pp. 1–4). Rugby School itself has a unique association to the sport of rugby; not only was it the first school to officially record rules in 1845 but it was also the first school to make structural stipulations in order to play the game.¹ The rules developed at Rugby School intended to make the game distinctive in a number of ways as noted in Hughes (1993, pp. 108–109):

’a sort of gigantic gallows of two poles, eighteen feet high, fixed upright in the ground some fourteen feet apart, with a cross-bar running from one to the other at the height of ten feet or thereabouts’

(Hughes, 1993, pp. 108–109).

The rules introduced the ‘H’ shaped set of goal posts with a cross-bar (over which the ball was kicked for a goal), line-outs, scrummages, tries and a stronger incentive to carry the ball forward. The concept of taking the ball across the opposition’s line earning a ‘try’ at goal is the origin of the term used in the modern version of the game that signals when the ball has been grounded over the opposition’s ‘try’ line. The Rugby School rules also introduced teams with a limited number of players, uniforms to differentiate
between teams, the choice of ‘ends’ and a change of ‘ends’ once a goal was scored (Dunning & Sheard, 1979, p. 90). Contrastingly, the 1847 rules devised by Eton school stated that the ball could not be caught, carried, thrown or struck by the hand and a goal could only be scored underneath the cross-bar between the goal posts.\(^2\)

A characteristic of the changing landscape of public and private education in the nineteenth century was the belittlement of the different variations of football games played within the public school educational system. Etonians regarded the iron-tipped boots used in the game by Rugbeians as ‘characteristic of a violent and “ungentlemanly”’ game, popular with the “common people” of Yorkshire’ (Dunning & Sheard, 1979, p. 94). In reply, Rugbeians viewed the abolition of ‘hacking’ at Eton as an ‘emasculating’ of football. The legacy of these rivalries continued through to universities where students strove to have the version of sport from their public school adopted as the university’s preferred set of rules. The universities of Cambridge and Oxford were the institutions in which the modification of the competing football rules first took place. At Cambridge, the dominance of ex-public schoolboys from the most established and elite schools, including Eton and Harrow, ensured that the ‘kicking’ rules referred to as football became adopted as the rules in university matches.\(^3\)

Outside of educational establishments ex-pupils established clubs which played according to the rules developed in their respective schools and universities. The clubs kept the traditions of ‘friendly’ school matches and provided the principal form of organising players both within and outside of educational institutions in England as well as in other regions and countries. This was the start of what later was to become known as the ‘old boys’ network; assisting their old schools’ social standing and confirming the former students as belonging to a distinctive and exclusive ‘class’ (Nau-right & Chandler, 1996, p. 103). University connections also transmitted the game to Wales and Ireland. According to Richards (2007, p. 31) there are records of the football game at Lampeter College in Wales during 1850 and at Trinity College, Dublin in 1854. Furthermore, the origins of club football in Scotland are accredited to John Hope, a graduate of Edinburgh University. While the examples in Wales, Scotland and Ireland do not refer to the ‘rugby’ game directly, they are evidence of the ‘old boys’ network established throughout the university system.

3 Rugby School: Muscular Christianity and Dr Thomas Arnold

A consideration of the origins of rugby union at Rugby School must include reference to Dr Thomas Arnold and the doctrine of Muscular Christianity. Rugby union’s ‘spiritual birthplace’, Rugby School, epitomised the spirit of
mid-Victorian England. The school itself was founded in 1567 and originally designed as a ‘free grammar school’ for pupils of Rugby town and its surrounding areas. Conditions at Rugby School during the late eighteenth century and the early 1800s were overcrowded, violent and riotous. These conditions typified Rugby School at the time, as the Rugby School website makes clear by using an example from 1797 of pupils blowing the door off the headmaster’s classroom and burning their books on the close. Only once when local militia were requested at the school did the students yield.\(^4\) However, by the early 1800s the school had become the second largest public school in England, with a national representation within its student cohort, albeit predominately from the aristocracy and with very little remaining of the ‘free’ ethos that the school was originally built upon.

Dr Thomas Arnold was appointed headmaster of Rugby School in 1828 and reformed the school in accordance with his belief in Christian values. Arnold’s concern was to create boys who had character, whose education would enable them to provide leadership to British society and the Empire (Nauright & Chandler, 2007, p. 103). Arnold’s philosophy epitomised the cultural shift that was occurring at the time. Arnold’s beliefs exemplified and expressed values of British society, combining free trade and opposition to aristocratic excess with loyalty to the monarchy and other symbols of traditional authority. The economic dominance of the British Empire was based on competition in the struggle for new markets and colonies (Hobsbawn, 1990, p. 282). Arnold’s view of the importance of his values is expressed below:

‘I would rather send a boy to Van Diemen’s Land, where he would have to work for his bread, than send him to Oxford to live in luxury, without any desire in his mind to avail himself of his advantages’


This quote reveals the sense of individual character and competitive drive that Arnold believed his values would empower within his pupils. Muscular Christianity was the embodiment of Arnold’s struggle for righteousness against sin, although, interestingly, Arnold never referred to the term directly himself.\(^5\) While Arnold had no interest in sport, his belief in Christianity was about action rather than contemplation. Muscular Christianity gave British middle class men of action, at home and abroad, a moral framework in which to justify their work (Collins, 2009a, p. 7). The training instilled within the educational confines of Rugby School had an impact on a national and international scale as a large number of former pupils went on to careers within the military and political spheres; it was this moral control that Arnold had developed at Rugby School that was to provide a layer of moral justification to both society and sport (Huntington, 1981, p. 22).
4 Cultural transmission

The changes in the public school system and the emergence of codified sport and games coincided with Britain’s undisputed dominance as a world power in the nineteenth century. The British Navy controlled the seas and British shipping linked a global trading system (Black & Nauright, 1998, p. 24). The movement of British servicemen, their families, traders, administrators, engineers and all the accompanying trades and occupations associated with colonisation enabled their cultural cargo, language, tastes and sporting interests and pursuits to be disseminated throughout foreign lands. As a result the various versions of British sports such as cricket, horse racing and the variations of football soon spread to areas of British influence overseas, most noticeably to America, Africa, India and Australasia (Black & Nauright, 1998, p. 24), as the maps in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 indicate:

The international diffusion of British sports followed two trajectories (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 8). Sports like rugby and cricket were popularised across imperial outposts, while football spread through business and industrial routes and in relatively informal social ways (Appadurai, 1995, p. 25). The expansion of the British Empire in the nineteenth century enabled an increase in the number of foreign nationals educated within British-led schools, often returning home to teach sport to their compatriots. For example, Tom Wills was born in Australia, was educated at Rugby School and established the first football club in Melbourne shortly after his return to Australia in 1856. Wills used his experience at Rugby School to establish the sport in Melbourne adapting a number of the original Rugby School rules, although the main regulations were followed. Specific adaptations included the eradication of the offside rule, changes in how the ball could be handled and the importance of the ‘mark’ call. These variations are of major cultural significance for Australian sport as they have been symbolised within the process of developing an independent national sport in Australia (Australian rules football). However, these particular rule adaptations are simply a reflection of the time, as similar conversations about rule clarification and change were occurring in Britain during the same period.

Rugby football was first introduced into North America by officers at a British Army garrison based in Montréal during 1865 (Collins, 2009a, p. 17). Students from the local McGill University had been exposed to rugby football whilst socialising with the British military elite. In May 1874, the McGill captain challenged Harvard University footballers to two matches, one under the Harvard style football rules and another using the McGill’s version of rugby rules. Despite a draw, the Harvard players were sufficiently impressed with the visitors’ game that they abandoned their own rules and took up the Canadian’s version (Fogel, 2012, p. 50). Again the game that was adopted from the Canadians underwent a series of significant adaptations, most noticeably the scrum being dissolved into two lines facing each
Figure 1.1 The British Territory in 1815

Source: adapted from Porter, 2009, p. 2.
Figure 1.2 The British Empire and Commonwealth in 1914

Source: adapted from Porter, 2009, p. 3.
other, which is known today as the scrimmage line in the modern form of American football (Kidd, 2013, p. 408).

The influence of Dr Thomas Arnold’s philosophy is further noted in the development of a sporting infrastructure within South Africa. The history of the colonisation of South Africa dates back to the Dutch settlements during the seventeenth century. However, the arrival of permanent British governance in 1806 allowed South Africa to grow economically, culturally and politically (Black & Nauright, 1998, p. 22). Public school life was adopted by English-speaking white middle class schools and sports enthusiasts (particularly in the areas of Cape Town and Johannesburg) typically used British games to help instil values of British elite culture (Black & Nauright, 1998, p. 22; Hain, 1971, pp. 113–148). In 1859 Canon George Ogilvie became headmaster of the Diocesan College, introducing a variant of football that he learnt during his studies, first at Winchester and then at St Andrew’s College, Bradfield (Hill, 2010, p. 18). It was Canon George Ogilvie’s experience within England that led to the ‘Winchester’ game developing within Diocesan College, although by the 1870s the elite schools such as Diocesan College and Hilton College adopted the Rugby school rules. The influence of these social elite schools generated support for the growth of the game and by the mid-1880s the game had spread throughout the country.

The diffusion of sport throughout the British Empire followed imperial posts and international trade routes. However, the development of rugby in France followed an altogether different path. Following defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, Pierre de Coubertin, a member of the French aristocracy, believed that the public school system and especially sports had been vital to the success of the British Empire and could revive the French nation. Coubertin’s interest in education and sport led him to England in 1883, touring a number of leading English educational institutions including Harrow, Eton and Rugby schools and Oxford and Cambridge universities. He was impressed by the curriculum at the public schools, where study was divided between intellectual subjects and physical education. In particular, Coubertin was inspired by the educational theories of Dr Thomas Arnold at Rugby School and returned for a further visit to explore the sporting structure within the school in 1886. On Coubertin’s return to France he campaigned for a modern Olympic Games and eventually oversaw the organisation of English sports in France (Collins, 2009a, p. 18). Pierre de Coubertin’s insistence that sport should adhere to the ‘Arnoldian’ values experienced at Rugby School enabled the rugby game to be promoted throughout elite schools and universities around France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

5 The formation of the Football Association and the Rugby Football Union

On 26 October 1863, the Football Association (FA) was formed at a meeting in the Freemason’s Tavern on Great Queen Street, London. The rationale
behind the FA’s establishment was to formulate a level of governance and establish a set of unified rules to regulate the game. Historians (Alison, 2001; Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Harris, 2010; Walvin, 1994) have stated that the formation of the FA was the defining moment in the identities of the ‘soccer’ and rugby forms of football. However, to examine these claims it would be more pertinent to review the exact process that led to the establishment of these unified rules for the FA rather than simply discussing the development of a governing body.

The FA held six chaotic meetings before the final version of the rules were confirmed and disseminated to its members. The fourth meeting on 24 November 1863 only contained 19 delegates representing just ten clubs and they voted to accept the following rules:

- A player shall be entitled to run with the ball towards his adversaries’ goal if he makes a fair catch, or catches the ball on the first bound; but in the case of a fair catch, he makes his mark, he shall not run.
- If any player shall run with the ball towards his adversaries’ goal, any player in the opposite side shall be at liberty to charge, hold, trip or hack him, or wrest the ball from him; but no player shall be held at the same time (adapted from Brown, 2013, p. 43).

What is noticeable about the rules is the similarity to those played by Rugby School rather than the Cambridge rules. However, the secretary of the FA, Ebenezer Morley, was not a supporter of Rugby’s rules and proposed a motion to endorse the football rules of Cambridge University, which forbade carrying the ball and hacking. At a fifth meeting (which contained 15 delegates and only eight clubs) a motion was passed to strike out the previously agreed rules that contained hacking and running with the ball. At the sixth and final meeting, most of the clubs supporting the Rugby rules did not attend and the final rules specifically stated non-hacking and non-handling conditions. The FA states that there were 18 founding members; six of them subsequently left because of their preference for the Rugby rules (Collins, 2009a, p. 14).

The formation of the FA, and more specifically the intentions of Ebenezer Morley, created a distinctive and regulated version of football that differed from the Rugby rules; however, it was not completely independent. There were some things that overlapped; for instance the initial FA rules still allowed handling a ball. A ball could be caught with the hands before it bounced and the catcher allowed to take an unimpeded kick, similar to the mark in rugby or Australian rules football (Collins, 2009a, p. 15). These examples reveal not only the fluid state of the various rules of football at this time but also how little difference the FA’s formation initially made to the game. The FA rulebook became an accumulation of the various rules and preferences from a range of public schools, rather than any direct
attachment to one specifically. However, the process of rule development does highlight the willingness of the stalwarts from Eton and Harrow to resolve their differences compared to those from Rugby who had belief in the supremacy of their code of football.

The social prestige attached to the larger public schools such as Eton, Winchester and Harrow, did not translate into their codes of football becoming popular adult sports. Reasons for this could have been the FA’s decision to only incorporate features from the range of football codes rather than adhering to one specifically, the stifled regulations of a governing body or even the one guinea membership fee. In the early 1870s, of all the public school codes of football, it was the Rugby code that flourished among adult clubs (Collins, 2009a, p. 15). On 26 January, 1871, 21 clubs represented by 32 people met at the Pall Mall Restaurant in London and took two hours in which to form the Rugby Football Union (RFU). At this founding meeting two sub-committees were formed; the first, consisting of three Old Rugbeians, was tasked with writing the laws of the game. This sub-committee agreed upon 59 rules for playing rugby, including the abolition of hacking. This was an attempt to overcome the increasing concern about violence in the game of rugby and the variety of rules restricting the spread of the game. The second sub-committee was tasked with establishing the international profile of the game and choosing a team to play the Scottish members of the Union, who had already issued a challenge to the English members. On 27 March 1871, the first International rugby union match was played between Scotland and England at Raeburn Place in Edinburgh. The RFU intended to

![Figure 1.3 Proposed laws of the game (RFU, 1871).](image)
use the formation of the governing body as a further springboard to develop the club game. However, once the FA Cup became popular in the 1870s, the increased rivalry and competitiveness of the cup forced clubs to choose a code in which to specialise and thus increase their chances of success in the competition. Consequently, clubs playing the football rules increased whereas the development of clubs playing rugby did not progress as well as the RFU had intended.

6 British developments: the ‘trendsetters’

The desire of the predominantly London-based clubs that founded the original national football organisation was for matches to be player-orientated, emphasising the intrinsic reward of playing for fun and pleasure (Obel, 2001, p. 14). However, for both FA- and RFU-affiliated clubs, competitive local rivalries quickly became the basis of organised competitions. The development of these competitive local rivalries encouraged the establishment of cup and league competitions. The success of these competitions expanded support for both rugby and football clubs particularly in the north of England in the second half of the nineteenth century. The consequence of this success was conflict and disputes over rules and values associated with the games between northern, regional and London-based national organisations.

The aforementioned cup and league developments provided a level of financial support for both codes in the north of England, with money from supporters and financial backers allowing clubs to retain and attract players with unofficial payments. During the late 1870s rugby union clubs in the north of England devised a number regional cup competitions starting in Yorkshire (1877), Northumberland (1880), Durham (1880) and Cumberland (1882) (Vamplew, 1988, p. 64). In 1888 leading FA clubs in the north of England went one step further and formed a National Football League, which involved 12 teams competing against each other with home and away fixtures.

The response to the formation of the National Football League, which the RFU vigorously opposed, was almost immediate. In 1889 the RFU introduced a national county championship, which was available to all affiliated RFU counties and sanctioned by the RFU due to the suspension of international matches (discussed later in the chapter). Furthermore, northern rugby clubs emulated the FA-affiliated clubs and established league competitions. The Yorkshire Rugby Union introduced the first league competition in 1892, which by the 1894–95 seasons had evolved into four divisions. The increasing membership numbers within the northern gate-taking clubs was also reflected in inaugural English national team selection that contained seven players from the Manchester and Liverpool clubs (see Figure 1.4).
The first ever international Rugby match was played in perfect conditions on a bright, sunny afternoon before an attendance of 4000 spectators. The pitch, measuring 120 yards by 55, was small by English standards and consequently the visiting half-backs were unable to display the excellent running of which they were capable. The first half was a prolonged forward battle and after 50 minutes the teams changed ends, neither side having scored. In the second period, the Scottish forwards dominated and the scoring opened with a pushover try which Cross, the Scottish half, converted. England fought back and Birkett scored a try near the corner which Stokes, the English captain, could not convert. In the closing minutes of the game, the fitter Scottish combination secured another try when Cross scored.

For England, Tobin and Green were the outstanding players in an uncoordinated team, while the Scottish victory stemmed from a well-drilled pack of forwards. Cross was the best back on the field though Osborne, one of the English full-backs, made a memorable tackle on Finlay during the course of the match. While the Scottish forward was sprinting towards the English goal-line, Osborne folded his arms across his chest and charged into Finlay, both players recoiling yards before falling to the ground.

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(Try: Birkett)

Tries: Buchanan, Cross
Conversion: Cross

*Note: The table above lists the team compositions for both Scotland and England as of 1871.*

**Figure 1.4** Scotland vs. England teams, 1871

*Source: adapted from Griffith, 1982, p. 11.*
7 Professionalism vs. amateurism; the development of a professional attitude

In the early nineteenth century the professional sportsman was regarded as the social inferior and for the amateur it was essential that sport was not associated with labour. The identity of the amateur was synonymous with the concept of the gentleman, an individual who did not need to seek reward for playing sport. The amateur played the game vigorously and intensely but never took the outcome too seriously and did not engage in unduly elaborate preparation (Baker, 2004, p. 1). Amateurism in the nineteenth century was described by G. Lacy Hiller in the following terms:

‘The sportsman, then, is the man who has an amusement which may cost him something, but which must not bring him in anything, for an amusement which brings him in anything is not a sport but a business’ (G. Lacy Hillier quoted in Mangan, 2001, p. 1).

The work of Mangan illustrates a clear distinction between the terms ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’. To remain nominally amateur suggests that participation in a sporting activity was purely for the ‘love’ of the game without any need for excellence or success. Whereas being a professional refers to a ‘profession’ or ‘livelihood’ as a result of training and expertise within sport and more importantly the opportunity to be paid. However, these direct definitions neglect the unclear concept of being an amateur but having a ‘professional attitude’ towards sport. For example, an amateur could go for a run or play a spontaneous game with friends after work (activities with professional undertones) simply for fun rather than for the development of a set of techniques that could up-skill the individual. This example under Mangan’s classification would denounce the individual as an amateur and instead rebrand them as a professional. This was certainly evident in the early decades of the nineteenth century as a range disputes over the definitions and classifications of the concepts of amateurism and professionalism would shape the structure of sport for the next 100 years (Allison, 2001).

The success of the gate-taking northern rugby and football clubs, due to the sports’ popularity amongst the working class, eventually led to disputes over player payments, league competitions and control over the selection of the national sides. Three years before the establishment of the Football League, in 1885 the FA accepted professionalism. The pressure for the FA to accept professionalism came from urban, commercially successful northern and midland-based football clubs that also had a direct representation on the FA’s national council (Mason, 1980, p. 17). Professionalisation enabled the FA to establish a clear distinction between amateur and professional players and restrict players’ movement either through requiring them to declare their amateur status or through the enforcement of professional contracts.
The FA’s acceptance of professionalism settled the disputes between the northern football clubs and the FA; preserving football as one game with a single controlling governing body.

Contrastingly, the disputes over professionalism between northern rugby clubs and the RFU increased after the establishment of regional league competitions in the 1890s. Similarly to football, the success of the northern rugby club competitions attracted large crowds as exemplified by a crowd of 22,000 watching a match between Bradford and Halifax in the Yorkshire Cup in 1893 (Latham, 1996, p. 80). The growth of ‘spectatorism’ in the north encouraged clubs to entice players with financial inducements to ensure success and increase crowds. However, in October 1886, the RFU voted to ban all payments to players, either directly or indirectly, with the sole exception of ‘legitimate travel expenses’. Transgressors would be punished by suspension or expulsion from the game. As had been the case in association football in 1882, amateur rules were tightened in an effort to discourage professionalism and the pursuit of profit through competitions.

The 1890s saw further expansion of league and cup competitions in the north of England, as the region was experiencing a significant level of economic growth (Dunning & Sheard, 1979, p. 150). The Yorkshire leagues that had been established evolved from a one league structure to four and interestingly without a promotion or relegation system. In 1893, a dispute arose between the senior rugby clubs in Yorkshire regarding the ‘promotion–relegation’ issue and the financial gains of the top clubs in a closed business market. The clubs in the top league were able to provide and entice players with higher-level ‘broken-time’ payments, which ultimately created a gulf in playing standards across the leagues. Yorkshire county representatives approached the RFU with a proposal that included three issues: that RFU meetings should be held on alternate years in London and at a northern venue, that broken-time payments be legalised, and that county unions be granted permission to set up leagues (Dunning & Sheard, 1979, pp. 147–149). The proposal did not encourage professionalism but rather sought to protect the leagues that had already been established within their regions and ensure their participation in the national county competition. The RFU dismissed the legalisation of ‘broken-time’ payments causing the Yorkshire Rugby Union (under protest from the senior clubs) to introduce a promotion–relegation system into their league structure. In 1895, 22 northern clubs, including 11 of the 12 Yorkshire senior competition clubs, nine Lancashire clubs and two from Cheshire, resigned from their county unions and established a separate Northern Union (NU) of rugby clubs. In 1896, the NU introduced new rules to the game, most noticeably the abolition of lineouts, kicking to touch and the agreement to broken-time payments of six shillings a day. By 1898, professional contracts were introduced alongside tighter regulations on the movement of players between clubs.
Similarly to the development of the FA and the RFU, there was an initial surge in membership for NU clubs compared to a decline in RFU-affiliated clubs. However, this initial increase in member clubs started to decline by the turn of the century. Even though the introduction of promotion–relegation

Figure 1.5 RFU minutes (8 August 1895, p. 1).
remained, there was a lack of financial distribution throughout the leagues, causing a number of clubs to either dissolve or transfer over to the FA or the RFU. Unlike the establishment of both the FA and the RFU, the NU was established by a number of senior clubs in the north, with a specific focus on further development of the already established leagues.

8 The game in Great Britain and Ireland

At the turn of the twentieth century, both rugby league and rugby union were undergoing periods of change which was exemplified by rugby league focusing on cup and league developments and the RFU attempting to preserve the values of amateurism despite intimidation from commercial values. Support for the ‘amateur’ RFU increased as a number of public and grammar schools exchanged football for rugby union during the 1920s and 1930s, securing rugby union as a socially exclusive sport (Mason, 1980, pp. 148–149). However, although the intentions of the RFU were to promote the values of amateurism it also had the objective of establishing the sport as England’s national game. Nevertheless, these aims were hindered by the developments of the FA Cup and the expansion of the football league that generated a growth in the popularity of football and established the sport as the ‘national’ game in England.

Although envious of the FA’s position within England, the RFU undertook a different approach to its development strategy and concentrated its focus on establishing the international game. Soon after the formation of the RFU in 1871 other countries formed their own unions: Scotland in 1873, Ireland in 1879 and Wales in 1881. Once the first international had been played between England and Scotland in 1871, annual home-nation fixtures were contested.

The development of rugby in Scotland and Ireland was slow due to the popularity of indigenous games such as in shinty and hurling. Furthermore, the development of rugby in these countries was also complicated by the levels of conflict arising from the political and ideological domination by England (Cronin, 1998, p. 38). As within England, rugby union in Scotland and Ireland became embedded as a minor but exclusive sport. Football became the more established sport in Scotland, ousting shinty as the national game and Gaelic football, which identified with the Irish independence movement, gained popularity alongside football in the Irish Republic. The popularity and development of rugby union in Northern Ireland (as it is today) was dependent upon English or Gaelic affiliations both within educational institutions and local communities (Bairner, 2003, p. 520).

The public school and university network that had diffused football throughout England during the mid-nineteenth century also introduced rugby union to Wales in the 1870s (Smith & Williams, 1980, p. 11). The first club was established in Llanelli in 1872 by John Rodgers, a former
Rugby School pupil. Other clubs soon developed, including Neath in 1873, Newport in 1874 and the South Wales Football Club in 1875. In 1881, the first rugby union international between Wales and England took place, with England eventual victors (Smith & Williams, 1980, p. 40). The defeat of the Welsh national team hastened the formation of the Wales Football Union (WFU) in 1881 as the established clubs were unhappy with the national team’s performance against their English rivals. The opportunity to have central control over the game gave more prestige to the selection of a national team and also allowed for the development of local and national gate-taking competitions that generated income and spectator interest in the sport.

As with the formations of the FA, RFU and Rugby League, the establishment of the International Rugby Football Board (IRFB) was also accompanied by controversy. The RFU were in dispute with the Scottish Football Union (SFU) over the result of an international match between England and Scotland in 1884. The disagreement between the RFU and SFU forced the abandonment of the annual contest between the two sides after an agreement could not be reached at the annual Rugby Union Committee meeting. Consequently, at the Irish Football Union’s (IFU) annual general meeting in 1885, there was a proposal for the formation of a body that could independently settle any disputes between the home nations. In Dublin, 1886, all four home nations convened to discuss the IFU’s proposal; with the SFU willing to drop the dispute of the 1884 match providing that any newly constituted body was constructed with equal representation between the countries. However, this was not accepted by the RFU as they sought to retain their perceived dominant position as not only the founder of the sport, but also the country with the greatest number of affiliated clubs. A further meeting took place in Manchester in 1886 to officially establish constitutional terms of the IRFB; the RFU refused to agree to the terms and were not in attendance at the meeting.

The RFU’s resistance to the constitutional regulations and rule changes proposed by the IRFB forced the English team into international exile between 1888 and 1889. The RFU took their dispute with the IRFB to arbitration, which was presided over by the FA president Major Marindin. In 1890 the RFU joined the IRFB but only after arbitration had resolved that international matches should be played under one code of laws and that the IRFB should consist of six representatives from the RFU and two from each of the other countries (Smith & Williams, 1980, p. 50). This position gave the RFU a controlling influence on the board and, more significantly, control over international games. The RFU held this position until 1948 when its votes were reduced from four to two (the RFU volunteered to reduce its count from six to four in 1910) and the New Zealand, Australian and South African national rugby unions were admitted to the board (Smith & Williams, 1980, p. 51).
In the early years of the IRFB, its members sought to establish consistency between the home nations. Rules were established and adopted between the home nations, allowing the international game to prosper. The rules used in matches within the individual countries were still designed by national administrators rather than the IRFB, but for the international game the rules

Figure 1.6 RFU minutes (23 April 1897, p. 56).
were standardised. Arthur Gould’s (the most capped and highest scorer in
Welsh rugby history during this period with 27 caps) testimonial in 1897
was a catalyst for the first constitutional amendment of the IRFB. The pro-
cess of establishing rugby union as the national game in Wales had led to
flexible interpretations of the amateur regulations, with individuals and
clubs often being sanctioned by the RFU. In 1897, Welsh supporters pur-
chased the deeds to Arthur Gould’s house and this was supported by the
WFU donating £50 to the cause.

The testimonial and more importantly the £50 donation from the WFU
was deemed as an act of professionalism and consequently the WFU were
forced to temporarily withdraw from the IRFB. The RFU supported the
IRFB’s stance on professionalism and banned any English club playing
against Newport (Gould’s club). The English clubs protested against
the sanction imposed by the RFU as the games against Welsh sides often
attracted a large number of spectators. The position of the English clubs
quickly forced the RFU to retract its stance providing the WFU thoroughly
reviewed its affairs, and this allowed the WFU to re-join the IRFB in 1898.

Despite the suspension from the IRFB, the WFU did not consider leav-
ing the union game. Unlike in Scotland, Ireland and England, the rugby
game in Wales was not an exclusive sport; rather it was socially inclusive.
Despite the public school origins, working men were never excluded, and
they adhered to the discipline and the obligations imposed by the game and
its formalities. The WFU were quite prepared to tolerate the over-generous
payment of expenses to working-class players without officially sanctioning
professionalism. Even though the WFU were investigated on several occa-
sions for professionalism, the WFU refused to join with the NU in fear of
being ostracised from the international rugby fraternity and being reduced
to a region playing the regional representatives of the north of England
(Williams, 1985, p. 266).

The WFU’s resistance to the structure of professional rugby league allowed
rugby union to become embedded into Welsh national culture. It was such
a devotion to the rugby union game, centralised control and the rejection
of professionalism that would be eventually mirrored in the game in the
southern hemisphere. By the turn of the twentieth century, international
networks were expanding and the rugby union game was becoming popular
throughout the empire. The home unions, encouraged by the game’s rising
international appeal, sent proselytisers throughout the Empire to promote
the amateur values of the rugby union game and establish a worldwide
international network.

9 The Antipodes

Football games had been played in the colonies since the 1850s and in Aus-
tralia clubs and competitions emerged predominantly on the east coast and
in south Australia. As in the British Isles, the public school system was influential in the development and diffusion of the various versions of football played in Australia. The ‘game cult’, greatly influenced by the famous English public schools, the less famous grammar schools, and the distinguished universities of Oxford and Cambridge, became an established feature of the culture of the middle classes of Australia (Mangan & Hickey, 2001, pp. 105–106). However, cricket developed along regional lines in Australia allowing the game to become adopted as the national sport rather than any variation of the football code. The variations of the football game did not provide the emerging colonies with an opportunity to develop relations with Britain; thus, indirectly allowing cricket to prosper as there had been international fixtures between and ‘English Eleven’ and Australia since 1861.

Nonetheless, the rugby game did develop in Australia, predominantly in New South Wales and Queensland. The first club established in Australia was the University of Sydney club in 1863 with Sydney Football Club (1865) and Wallaroo (1870) soon following. While in Victoria and South Australia, Victorian Rules football (an adaptation of the rugby game introduced at the Melbourne football club in 1856) developed an ‘iconic’ status and consequently became the dominant sport in the region.

The growth of the rugby game in New South Wales encouraged the formation of the Southern Rugby Football Union (SRFU) in 1874. As with the formation of the RFU, the SRFU evolved out of a demand for consistency in rules and competition regulations. The codification of rugby in Australia occurred in rivalry against the emerging sport of Victorian Rules football. As with most histories of the development of the rugby game, its continued evolution in Australia relied on ex-public school pupils establishing club networks on completion of their educational studies. For example, the establishment of the University of Sydney rugby club ensured a legacy that would see the number of clubs in Sydney increase from five in 1874 to 79 by the turn of the century.

Similar developments occurred in Brisbane where support for rugby came from the middle classes. Rugby increased in popularity around Brisbane after a Queensland rugby team successfully toured New South Wales in 1882 (Cashman, 1995; Crotty, 2001). However, the increase in popularity of rugby was rather a reflection of the isolated migrant population working in a community at a time when the dominant social groups subscribed to the imperial hegemony (Horton, 2006, p. 1362). Further, the Queensland team tour of New South Wales in 1883 and the establishment of inter-colonial competitions increased the popularity of rugby, which was assisted further by the adoption of rugby in state schools in 1888.

International rugby matches were starting to appear on the rugby calendar with an unofficial British team touring Australia in 1888 followed by a New Zealand Native team in 1889. The opportunity for the SRFU (renamed to NSWRU in 1892) and the Queensland Rugby Union (QRU – established
in 1892) to host international teams and develop inter-colonial contests not only popularised rugby in the respective regions, but also allowed the two administrative boards to have a sustained level of income.

The various levels of regional development of football codes in Australia had, by the turn of the century, led to the dominance of one football code throughout the country, which was centred in Melbourne. By contrast, in New South Wales and Queensland, the popularity of rugby was tied to international contests, especially contests involving British and New Zealand teams. By 1890, the attendance figures at international rugby matches on the east coast began to rival those of local Victorian rules football during the 1880s (Booth, 1997, pp. 13–14). Although the profile of the rugby game was starting to increase, so too were concerns about control and money. The rugby game in Australia was managed by the independent regional administration boards, which created rivalry over the right to control the game and ultimately money. The rugby game’s stance on amateurism enabled rugby league to develop and eventually become the dominant rugby game on the east coast. The opportunity to earn money from what was a previously unpaid hobby saw rugby league increase its profile and ultimately its player base in Australia. The split in the game, which led to rugby union’s marginal position in Australia, was ironically facilitated by the development of the international contests; a process which the IRFB thought would strengthen the rugby union game.

Sporting history in New Zealand follows the traditional trade route lines in which games moved from one place to another. Indeed, the growth of rugby within New Zealand was assisted by the early influence of an educated middle class schooling system and the development of the international game, enabling rugby union to become the ‘national’ game of New Zealand by the turn of the twentieth century. It is suggested that the adoption of rugby in New Zealand was due to the game’s ability to enable socially and ethnically diverse groups to not only communicate but also to have a common bond (Phillips, 1987, pp. 90–92). As in Australia, clubs were originally formed around the cities and spread to rural areas once the educated secondary school pupils returned to their rural settlements. Teams and clubs including Maori players became established in the rural areas and a broad cross-section of the population, including skilled and unskilled workers alongside judges, businessmen and editors, were involved in rugby clubs in the urban areas (Richardson, 1995, p. 3). By the mid-1870s, rugby union was established in five dominant areas of New Zealand.

The rugby game was assisted in its expansion throughout New Zealand due to the growth of inter-provincial matches and its ability to be a socially inclusive sport (Grainger, 2006, p. 54). Provincial unions formed in both the North and South Islands and established an administrative board to oversee the development of the rugby game. Inter-provincial matches were stimulated by the Auckland team tour of New Zealand in 1875 and this proved
to be the catalyst for the spread of the game nationally. Over 700 local clubs and 18 provincial unions were established by the 1890s (Phillips, 1987, p. 94). Furthermore, the inclusion of rugby into the curriculum of secondary schools in the late 1890s made it extremely difficult for other sporting codes to compete with rugby. Football’s failure to sustain a foothold in the
education system in New Zealand restricted the game’s local diffusion and resulted in rugby union becoming the dominant sport for the educated elite (Keys, 2006; Ryan, 2008; Harris, 2010). By the turn of the twentieth century, rugby union had developed throughout New Zealand and the islands were the recipients of touring sides from NSW (1894), Queensland (1896) and the inaugural British and Irish Lions team in 1888.

In 1892, the provincial unions agreed that all matters relating to rugby should be controlled by the New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU). A national governing body (NGB) would foster the game as an amateur national game and would further promote international contact. The new administration designed an organisational structure that was hierarchal in nature with local clubs subordinate to the control of provincial unions who, in turn, were directly represented through national meetings. Ultimately it could be argued that the New Zealand rugby organisers copied the English cricket system in which ‘the nation was the exemplary unit, and “counties”, not communities, were the lower level constituencies’ (Appadurai, 1995, p. 32). This mechanism of organisational structure was designed as a means of ensuring both protection against professionalism and the viability of clubs and competitions.

Prior to the NZRFU’s formation a range of disputes emerged between the provincial unions regarding fixtures and tournaments and eventually discussions took place regarding the need for a centralised authority, as the provincial bodies on the South Island believed that they should govern their own provinces. Although these disputes represented an initial stumbling block for the formation of a national union, the prominently North Island based provincial bodies did agree to a central authority as a way of promoting unity in the regulation of the game in New Zealand. This, they hoped, would encourage better games between provinces and provide control over the selection of New Zealand teams (Swan, 1948, p. 112). However, the formation of the NZRFU in 1892 caused a split in the game between northern and southern provinces. Canterbury, Otago and Southland initially refused to join the NZRFU, which consequently prohibited their provincial and club sides from competing against any teams affiliated to the NZRFU. Ultimately, within two years, the self-excluded provincial unions decided to join the NZRFU to ensure their representation on the board that controlled and regulated the game in New Zealand. However, as a punishment the NZRFU did not select any of the rebellious unions’ representative players in the first official tour by a New Zealand team to Australia in 1897.

The popularity of international touring sides with spectators convinced the NZRFU to establish a national team to travel worldwide (Ryan, 2005, p. 33). In 1905, the NZRFU sent a national team to the northern hemisphere to play fixtures in Britain, Ireland, France and North America. The New Zealand side were only defeated once during the tour and it was the dominance of this touring side that caused their northern hemisphere opponents
to label the side as the ‘All Blacks’, based on the colour of their kit and the team’s dominance on the field. The popularity of international tours both in New Zealand and worldwide generated increased levels of income for the NZRFU. The financial success of the 1905 northern hemisphere tour contributed £12,000 (roughly £1.3 million in modern currency) to the NZRFU while the tour also helped the financial welfare of clubs and national unions in Europe (Nauright, 1991, p. 243).

Establishing an international touring side increased the importance and prestige of national selection. From a player’s perspective, not only did they have the opportunity to travel, but additionally the NZRFU sanctioned a three shillings a day tour allowance as a level of income without breaching the amateur regulations. However, this was not disclosed to the opposition unions for fear of being reported to the IRFB and being reprimanded as had previously happened to Wales after the Arthur Gould affair in 1897 (Haynes, 1996, p. 17). While players and some provincial unions unsuccessfully attempted to change the NZRFU’s stance on low tour allowances, the success of the 1905 tour would inspire a privately organised team to tour England in 1907–08. This tour would be the catalyst for the establishment of rugby league in New Zealand and Australia and increase the developing rivalry between rugby league and rugby union.

Figure 1.8 1905 Touring New Zealand rugby team
Source: adapted from the New Zealand Museum of Rugby.
10 The First World War: rugby union’s gain

The early years of the twentieth century was a period in rugby union’s history when it was still trying to define its amateur status against a range of reported infractions throughout the Empire. Consequently, the RFU used the outbreak of the First World War to demonstrate its ‘amateur’ values, emphasising that rugby union was a sport that represented more than recreation given its ability to train young men to be leaders of the Empire. The outbreak of the First World War provided an opportunity for the RFU to publicly promote the number of former and current public school pupils who were ready to fight in defence of the Empire (See Figure 1.9). Within nine days of the outbreak of war, the RFU cancelled all fixtures around the country dedicating their resources to the war effort. In contrast, the FA continued their fixtures through to the start of the 1915 season (amidst claims of being counterproductive to the war effort) as they had employed professional staff and functioned as a business.

The RFU promoted examples set by rugby union players during the war to further popularise the sport amongst a fiercely patriotic middle class. A particular example is the story of Edgar Mobbs, a former England international and Northampton rugby captain. Following the outbreak of First World War, and undeterred by the denial of an officer commission due to his

![World War One recruitment posters](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com)
aging years, Edgar Mobbs joined what became known as the ‘Sportsman’s Battalion’. The Sportsman’s Battalion consisted predominantly of men from the world of sport and entertainment and allowed admission for individuals up to the age of 45. Edgar Mobbs joined up as a private soldier but by April 1916 had risen to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and formed his own unit of 264 men as ‘D’ company, 7th Battalion, Northamptonshire regiment, of which only 85 survived the war. Unfortunately, Mobbs was not among them, having been gunned down leading an assault on a machine gun post during the Third Battle of Ypres. However, the RFU and the Northampton club used this example of gallantry to increase the profile and status of the game of rugby union both regionally and nationally. In 1921 thousands of people turned out for the unveiling of the Mobbs Memorial in Northampton’s Market Square. That year also saw the first Mobbs Memorial Match between the East Midlands (more recently Bedford) and the Barbarians, a fixture that has been played ever since. By 11 November 1918, 140 rugby internationals from nine national teams had lost their lives during the First World War (McCrery, 2013, p. 17).

The RFU’s publication of the contribution of rugby players to the war effort led to public criticism of the FA. The FA was slow to cancel their fixtures at the outbreak of the war and consequently received a level of public criticism, exemplified by the volume of critical letters to The Times newspaper in 1914. In response a Footballers’ Battalion was formed in 1916 although it was claimed by its colonel that only 122 out of 1,800 professionals had joined. The FA tried to limit the damage by claiming that half of the eligible footballers had already joined up and that the rest were married, but the harm was already done (Birley, 1986, p. 59).

‘There is no excuse for diverting from the front thousands of athletes in order to feast the eyes of crowds of inactive spectators, who are either unfit to fight or unfit to be fought for. . . . Every club that employs a professional football player is bribing a needed recruit to refrain from enlistment, and every spectator who pays his gate money is contributing so much towards a German Victory’


Negative public reaction to the response of the FA to the First World War was led by the middle and upper classes of the population, whereas the working man was unfazed by the continuation of leisure time activity during the war time period (Branson & Heinemann, 1973; Collins, 2009b; Perkin, 1989). Rugby used this period to promote its amateur values by identifying the sport as a hobby and something that was an obvious and appropriate sacrifice during the war period. The RFU demonstrated its players’ loyalty
to the nation, which came before any notion of leisure or commercial gain during the war period. However, for full-time professional players sport was a method of earning a living and it is argued that the continuation of other non-essential industries, for example theatres, justified the delayed response by the FA to cancel its fixtures (Philpotts, 2000, p. 109). Furthermore, it might also be suggested that football could have provided a valuable boost to morale throughout the war-induced period of austerity.

II Changing tides

The post-war years of the 1920s saw a great revival in the fortunes of rugby union. After surviving the ‘great split’ in 1895 and competing against professional codes of sport, rugby union profited from a change in the landscape of society. The post-war years saw an increase in demand for civil servants and managers of services and industry and the proportion of salaried earners rose from 12% in 1911 to 22% in 1921 (Birley, 1986, p. 86). Ultimately, the development of management within industry established an overall expansion of the middle class. The ‘new’ middle class attempted to behave in a way that they perceived was appropriate to their new station and status and this included embracing middle class manners, modes of behaviour and pastimes such as tennis and rugby union (Philpotts, 2000, p. 110). The resultant embrace and endorsement of rugby union’s virtues between 1920 and 1930 meant that the RFU expanded by 231 clubs (Griffiths, 1982).

In the post-war years, rugby union’s popularity as a spectator sport increased significantly. The crowds gathering at Twickenham to watch internationals grew from 18,000 in 1910 to 49,000 in 1924, to 73,000 at the 1936 match against the All Blacks, spectator figures rivalling cricket fixtures at Lord’s, horse racing at Ascot and even tennis tournaments at Wimbledon (Griffiths, 1982). As the numbers of spectators grew, so did the level of expectation placed on the players. To compete at the highest level required an individual to have a level of fitness that would enable them to perform, not only for themselves but also for the paying public. Nevertheless, the RFU and the IRFB insisted that training was contrary to the amateur ethos of the game and consequently banned formal training sessions, placing fitness as the responsibility of the individual (Vincent, 1998, p. 124). Collins (2009a) illustrates that the individuals playing international rugby union for England during this period were from the social elite of society, which enabled them to find more time in which to develop their fitness to compete at the highest level. Towards the end of the 1920s it was acknowledged by the RFU that competing in international rugby placed a heavy demand on the players involved. To cope with such demand, players were starting to develop an awareness of the importance of training and conditioning, an attitude that the RFU believed was forming a ‘professional’ approach to the
game within its membership body. Consequently, in 1935 the RFU declared that at least three years should elapse between major tours both in the interests of the increasing demands being placed on the players and to reduce the prospect of a ‘professional’ attitude forming.

By the end of the 1920s, football at the highest level was played almost exclusively by professionals, who were governed by contracts with the professional clubs that stated the expectations for training and playing while also identifying the salaries that the players were to receive. Amateur football clubs such as the Corinthians were unable to compete with their professional counterparts and eventually had to merge with Casuals FC in order to compete in the Isthmian League after World War Two. Contrastingly, the Barbarians Rugby Club were able to expand their fixture list and compete with top club sides; and thus benefitted from the association with heroism and the war, exemplified by the Mobbs Memorial Match. Indeed, the Barbarians continued to attract the best players from all over Britain and on 31 January 1948 they were invited to provide the final fixture for the Australian team on their tour of the British Isles at the Cardiff Arms Park in Wales. The fixture attracted 45,000 spectators and subsequently a fixture against the Barbarians has become a traditional end of tour fixture for national sides touring throughout northern hemisphere. In light of the amateur ethos within rugby union and the concept of playing for ‘fun’, another tradition was established where at least one player in the Barbarian team would be a non-international, a practice which is still maintained today.

During the 1930s the RFU’s stance on professionalism remained as cautious as ever, and minutes from various RFU meetings leading up to Second World War reveal that infractions of the professional ruling and defections to rugby league were relatively rare. However, the relationship with rugby league remained throughout this period. Following the declaration of war in 1939 the RFU relaxed the rules on professionalism so that professionals could be allowed to play rugby union in the armed forces until the end of the war in 1945. Immediately after the war the RFU reinstated their policy on professionalism and revived their stance towards players from rugby league.

12 International inconsistencies: northern and southern hemisphere differences

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the RFU’s stance on amateurism was consistently tested, not only by international variation in the interpretation of amateurism but also by the continued development of rugby league. This caused the RFU to become meticulous in their attempts to identify and expel transgressors and they ruthlessly drove out anyone with the remotest connection to rugby league (Collins, 2009a, p. 57). Examples range from a schoolboy who played rugby league for a local club rather than his school union side to England full-back Tom Brown, who was
banned for life from the game in 1933 merely for having a discussion with
officials of a rugby league club (Collins, 2006b, pp. 131–133).

The Antipodean battleground and the rise of
South Africa

‘It is better that a game should be played badly, and that no-one should
go to see it, than that the price should have to be paid for professionalism’

The above quote is cited from a book written by Dave Gallaher and Billy
Stead, who were captain and vice-captain respectively on the 1905 New Zea-
land rugby union tour of the northern hemisphere. The quote itself empha-
sis the value of amateurism and the disdain for professionalism at the turn
of the twentieth century, even to sides in the southern hemisphere. However,
the success and the financial remuneration evident in the 1907 New Zealand
Rugby League tour of Australia and Great Britain represented a change in
the mind-set of how rugby union was to be structured and played in New
Zealand. In an attempt to survive the threat posed by rugby league, in the
early part of the twentieth century the NZRFU regularly (unbeknown to the
RFU) revised the playing rules and also reinstated rugby league players in
order to expand the popularity of the game. Rugby football was brought
to New Zealand via the natural trade routes from Australia with Auckland
being the nearest and most popular stopping point. It was in Auckland
where the intense rivalry between league and union was most evident.

The aftermath of the First World War saw the governing bodies of both
New Zealand and Australia officially propose to the RFU a series of rule
changes to entice more players and spectators to rugby union and to stem
the flow towards rugby league. Additionally, there was also a proposition
to introduce an Imperial Rugby Board for the southern hemisphere to have
equal representation on an international board of governance for rugby
union. However, all suggestions were initially rejected by the RFU. Never-
theless, continuing disputes with rugby league throughout the early 1920s
forced the RFU to officially recognise the southern hemisphere’s requests for
rule alterations in order to help constrain or defeat the rugby league threat
in the southern hemisphere.

On 11 May 1908, the QRU banned its players from taking part in rugby
league matches in Sydney. The popularity of professional rugby league had
increased to become the dominant code in Queensland after the First World
War. Consequently, the QRU and the NSWRU were forced into a position
of recruiting rugby league players to ensure the game existed amongst its
professional counterparts. A similar practice was conducted in New Zea-
land at the outbreak of the Second World War when the NZRFU granted
an amnesty to rugby league players, unilaterally extending the RFU’s lifting
Introduction: creating the rugby landscape

of its own ban for the duration of the war (Collins, 2009a, pp. 59–64). With such distance between the southern hemisphere sides and the Home Nations, the Antipodean countries had the ability to control and govern the evolution of the rugby game in their respective countries rather than inflexibly embrace and uphold the entirety of the regulations being enforced by the RFU.

In South Africa in the early twentieth century, rugby union served to unite a nation that had previously been at war. The South African War resulted in a high level of animosity between the British and the Afrikaner populations, especially over the high death tolls of women and children in British-controlled concentration camps during the war (Black & Nauright, 1998, p. 33). The South African team tour of the British Isles in 1906 was the first time that a South African team, in similar fashion to the New Zealand team in 1905, was not only competitive with their British counterparts but also victorious. The touring side only communicated in Afrikaans to signify a sense of identity and to avoid moves being interpreted by opposing players. The South African team created their own nickname ‘Springbokken’ which the British media referred to as ‘Springboks’, which is a term still used to identify the South African rugby union side and has been a symbol used on their playing shirt crest since the 1906 tour.

The period between the 1906 rugby tour of Britain through to the outbreak of the First World War saw an extraordinary transformation in relationships between England and South Africa. Although officially declared a dominion in 1910, the majority of South Africans still had a loyalty to the Empire. Upon the outbreak of war, the Union of South Africa provided over 146,000 men in First World War, with over 6,000 men losing their lives, proving their commitment to the Empire. Furthermore, the inter-war years demonstrated the loyal support of the South African Rugby Board (SARB) to the RFU despite the Union of South Africa becoming independent of the British Empire in 1934. This is further evidenced by the high number of South African-born England internationals during this period authorised by the SARB. However, the 1948 national election saw the National Party come to power and with it a heightened emphasis on Afrikaner identity throughout all aspects of South African society. The 1948 election success for the National Party empowered the newly elected political body to enforce existing policies of racial segregation under a system called ‘apartheid’ (Hain, 1971, pp. 16–18). Under apartheid, the black and white populations were forced to live in separate areas, use separate public facilities and, in relevance for this thesis, use separate sports facilities. In 1964 the South African Minister for the Interior explained the direct influence of apartheid on sport in South Africa, which is illustrated below:

‘The participation in international or world sports tournaments or competitions by mixed teams representing South Africa as a whole can in circumstances be approved. . . . The South African custom, which
is traditional, finds expression in the policy that there should be no competition in sport between the races, within our borders, and that the mixing of races in teams taking part in sports meetings within the Republic of South Africa and abroad should be avoided’ South African Minister for the Interior 26th of June 1964’

(cited in Hain, 1971, p. 35).

Despite strong and consistent opposition to apartheid within and outside of South Africa, its laws remained for over 50 years. With the National Party in power the SARB started to challenge the policies of the RFU and the IRFB. The SARB made a series of proposals to change the IRFB’s published rules and regulations, which were ultimately rejected. Unperturbed by the IRFB, during the 1958 French national team’s tour of South Africa player substitutions were introduced, an innovation which was openly criticised by the IRFB (Black & Nauright, 1998; Dunning & Sheard, 2005).

Furthermore, in 1963 the SARB president publicly suggested that players should have their expenses payments increased whilst on tour representing their country. The IRFB did not respond to the request but, in turn, questioned the SARB’s interpretation of amateurism. Although all members of the SARB loudly proclaimed their adherence to amateurism, it was apparent that many Afrikaners did not entirely share the ‘amateur’ enthusiasm of the RFU or even the IRFB (Collins, 2008, p. 11).

**b The French revolution**

The relationship between the RFU and the FFR during the early part of the twentieth century was fractious at best. The FFR never embraced amateurism with the same enthusiasm as was requested by the RFU, which resulted in a number of accusations of professionalism from their English counterparts. In the years following the end of the First World War, French rugby resembled rugby in the north of England prior to the 1895 split. Allegations of payments for players, inducements to switch clubs and protests about violence in what became known as ‘le rugby de muerte’ (rugby of death) created intolerable tensions both within the French game and with the RFU (Dine, 2001, p. 69).

Rugby union in France required participation in the Five Nations Championship both to ensure a consistent level of international competition and to develop the profile of the game within the country. However, the French ethos was a determination to win rather than to adhere to the amateur principles being dictated by the RFU and the IRFB. Consequently, the game of rugby union was played under a ‘win-at-all’ costs mentality in France, often resulting in scenes of violence both on and off the field. When the Olympics were held in Paris in 1924, the home nations refused to enter a team into the tournament, which was ultimately contested by only three sides: France,
Romania and the United States of America (USA). After a series of physical encounters, the USA were the eventual winners defeating the French in the final. Spectators at the contest expressed great concern that American supporters were being physically assaulted as the result went the way of the Americans, with witnesses stating that bodies were being passed down to the field of play to be collected by ambulances (Dine, 2012).

In 1931, 14 French clubs attempted to break away from the FFR to set up a competitive league structure. This led to the Home Nations excluding France from the Five Nations Championship and removing them from the IRFB. This response was clearly a reaction by the IRFB to the challenge to its control of the international game; something they believed would serve as a warning to other NGBs:

‘Until the FFR comes to our way of carrying on, we cannot condone what is going on in France without playing traitor to all that we in the four Home Unions have been taught and believe about the game’

(Moses, 1960, p. 18).

The removal of France from the Five Nations Championship allowed rugby league to prosper in France. In December 1933 a rugby league match took place between a British select side and an Australian team, which was sponsored by L’Echo des Sports (Dine, 2001, p. 86). The opportunity for international competition greatly helped rugby league to recruit top French rugby union players who were in international exile. An additional threat to the IRFB was the emergence of the Federation Internationale de Rugby Amateur (FIRA), in the early 1930s, representing other European rugby union governing bodies such as Romania, Italy and Germany. In response to the development of FIRA and the growth of rugby league in France, as well as attempting to show European solidarity in the face of the military threat of Germany, France were readmitted to the IRFB in 1939. Confirming the rationale for dismissing France in 1931, the IRFB again reiterated the importance of banning professionals for life and sent a reminder to all governing bodies on how they wanted the game of rugby union to be administered:

“The real foundation of the game as played in our countries is the friendly match between clubs’

(Moses, 1960, p. 32).

During the 1950s, accusations of infractions in relation to the amateur ideal were once again made against France. However, the RFU were not as authoritative or severe in dealing with the situation. In fact, the RFU simply wrote to the FFR asking for an investigation to take place; to which the FFR replied four years later in 1954 giving assurances over the amateur game in France. The reluctance of the RFU or even the RFU-dominated IRFB to
sanction France illustrates the diminishing power the two boards had within world rugby (Allison, 2001; Dine, 2001). Outright professionalism, however, was still against everything that rugby union represented.

The reluctance of the IRFB and the RFU to act against the French in the 1950s reflected a shift of power occurring in rugby union. Both French rugby and the southern hemisphere countries had developed successful national sides, embedding the sport into their respective national cultures. Furthermore, France’s leadership of FIRA, which had seen the game expand into eastern Europe, also illustrates the growing influence they were exerting on the world game (Collins, 2008, p. 10). Although the RFU and the IRFB were losing overall control on the interpretation of amateurism from the early decades of the twentieth century onwards they were still committed to ensuring that an amateur ethos remained embedded within the game in some form. This initiated further conflicts over rules, competition and regulations between the constituent members of the IRFB as the century progressed and can be argued to have hindered the development of the game in an increasingly commercial and mediated sports industry in the twentieth century.

13 Summary

Disputes over player payments in association football and rugby emerged in the north of England during the second half of the nineteenth century where the development of local club and league competitions had proved commercially successful. The approach by the respective governing bodies differed greatly, with the FA retaining control over both the professional Football League and amateur football, whereas the RFU activated a split in the game by rejecting the commercial practices that had made the game popular in the north, forcing the northern clubs to form a separate professional rugby code under the NU.

As part of the cultural cargo of the British Empire, sport was disseminated around the world, in both its amateur and professional forms. In Australia, club competition increased the popularity and participation of sport beyond the social elites. The increase in profile of sport in Australia encouraged the Victorian Football Association to accept professionalism in order to retain its authority over the sport (Obel, 2001, p. 43). However, the administrative bodies that were controlling rugby on the east coast resisted professionalism and as in England triggered a split in the game in 1907. In New Zealand and Wales, rugby administrators were able to establish regular inter-provincial/ regional matches and promoted the sport as a national commercially successful amateur game, albeit amidst allegations of professionalism. Contrastingly, in Scotland and Ireland the game developed as a minor, exclusive amateur game promoted in gentlemanly friendlies.
The institutionalisation of rugby in New Zealand and Wales characterised the game’s popularity as ‘inclusive’ within these two countries. Whereas, rugby developed a level of ‘exclusivity’ in England, France and South Africa by requiring players to either declare their amateur status or sign professional contracts. International rugby matches became the pinnacle of ‘amateur’ friendlies and were used to establish contact and enable the cultural transmission of an ‘amateur gentleman’s’ game throughout the British Empire, which is explored further in the following chapter.

The period between the 1895 declaration and the end of the Second World War was a period in rugby union’s history that heavily shaped its identity as a world sport. The game had to endure a continual shift in power with battles against rugby league, the loss of players to the war effort, a challenge to the game’s traditional hierarchy and the slow erosion of the amateur ethos throughout the game. The dominance of the southern hemisphere national teams on the playing field which stems from the early half of the twentieth century established the international sides as the dominant teams in world rugby (see Table 1.1). The southern hemisphere sides developed their own interpretations of the rules and regulations in an attempt to defeat the ‘motherland’ and it has been argued as the central reason for their dominance in the international game (Black & Nauright, 1998; Dunning & Sheard, 2005). Furthermore, other developments were occurring in the southern hemisphere, such as training and performance analysis, that was completely against the RFU’s interpretation of amateurism. For example, in 1930, a South African scrum half named Dannie Craven invented the dive pass to speed up delivery of the ball to backs. Also in the 1930s, Australia was given permission to remove the law relating to kicking into touch on the full (without touching the ground beforehand); this gave them a 30-year head start on the British teams in playing a more open, running game. In the 1950s, New Zealand developed a tactic called ‘ten-man rugby’, which

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enabled their sides to create a forward-dominated game against foreign opposition.

Unimpeded as they were by the class-based amateur ethos, the southern hemisphere nations used rugby to establish their identity on the global sporting landscape. As is evident throughout this chapter, although not openly professional, the southern hemisphere nations’ diluted interpretations of amateurism ultimately created a professional approach to rugby union decades before the move to ‘open’ professionalism in 1995.

The following chapters draw on interview material with 48 elite level rugby union players from England, Wales, Scotland, France, Ireland, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia who participated and earned at least ten international caps in elite level rugby union either before, in the overlapping period or after the declaration of professionalism in 1995. The interviewees’ identities have been protected through anonymity and have been arranged into categories depending on their nationality, playing eras and given pseudonyms, which are illustrated in Table 1.2 and utilised throughout this book.

Notes

1 The oldest codified form of football is the Eton ‘field game’, which was first set down in writing in 1815; however this was and still is only played within the school confines (Taylor, 2008, p. 37).
2 The 1847 Eton rules stated that ‘hands may be used to stop the ball, or touch it when behind’ (Dunning & Curry, 2006, p. 44).
3 The ‘Cambridge Rules’, were first published in 1848 and specifically prohibited running with the ball and, in so doing, established the first inter-public school standard for former public schoolboys entering the university (Cox, Russell and Vamplew, 2002, p. 243).
4 Dunning and Sheard (1979) discuss 21 public school rebellions between 1768 and 1832, illustrating that it was not just at Rugby School that the pupils were rebelling against the school hierarchy.
5 Muscular Christianity was a term used to indicate that participation in sport could contribute to the development of Christian morality, physical fitness, and ‘manly’ character (Winn, 1960, pp. 64–66).
6 Melbourne Football club was established in 1858.
7 Tom Wills also attended Cambridge University, obtaining a blue representing the university at cricket. It was cricket at which Tom Wills excelled, captaining the state side Victoria throughout the late 1850s.
8 Illegal payment to players covering a loss of earning whilst playing.
9 In 1906 the rules of the RFU were altered as the number of players on the field was reduced to 13 and in 1922 the game became known as rugby league and distinct from the RFU (Greenhalgh, 1992, p. 363). Furthermore, the Challenge Cup originated in 1896 and the Northern Rugby Football League was established in 1901 when the Yorkshire and Lancashire leagues merged.
10 In 1801 the Irish Parliament was abolished with Ireland becoming a part of the new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland under the Act of Union, causing many bloody conflicts between the Protestant settler (predominantly from
England and Scotland) and the Catholic natives (Aretxaga, 1997). Similarly, in Scotland, many battles have been fought for independence from England dating back to the thirteenth century. However, animosity was increased further in 1707 when the Scottish parliament merged into the English parliament (Davis, 1998, pp. 2–3). It was not until 1999 that Scotland reformed an independent parliament in the country.

11 The WFU was renamed the Wales Rugby Union in 1934.
12 The final game of the Home Nations Championship in 1884 resulted in England defeating Scotland. The result was based on WN Bolton converting a try (points were only scored for successful kicks at goal) by RS Kindersley who had received the ball to score after it had been ‘knocked back’. The Scottish team challenged the referee’s decision to award the score and, even after the final whistle, refused to accept the defeat, registering an appeal to the RFU.
13 In 1948 the ARU, NZRFU and SARB were given one vote each on the IRFB, with that increasing to two in 1958.
14 The British and Irish Lions are a combination of players from the Home nations who first toured in 1888 and have recently toured Australia in 2013.
15 Arthur Gould affair in 1897 and the NZRFU tour in 1905.
16 The Military Service Act of 1916 saw the regulations regarding enlisting of unmarried men extended to conscription of married men. This was the first time that conscription was used by the British Military in the First World War.
17 An example of New Zealand liberalism is showcased in the career of Karl Ifwerson. Playing for both New Zealand Rugby League and Union between 1914 and 1924.
18 Auckland is the only New Zealand team that competes in the National Rugby League; which comprises 15 teams from Australia and one from New Zealand, representing professional rugby league in Australasia.
19 The NSWRU remained the default governing body of Australian Rugby Union until the ARU was formed in 1947.
20 Prior to 1908, there were no rugby league clubs in Queensland.
21 Also known as the Boer War took place during 1899–1904 between forces from the British Empire and the Boer South African Republic (Transvaal).
22 The South Africans were the first team to use a 3–4–1 scrum formation, designed to help them on wet grounds.
23 In 1914 the Mauritz rebellion by Boer South African Republic supporters protested about helping the British. The rebellion was quashed by the pro-British government and several members of the rebellion group were imprisoned.
24 SARB was formed in 1889 and became the SARFU in 1992. Furthermore, England Internationals who played for England 1920–39 and were born in South Africa: Jannie Krige, Frank Mellish, Richard Lawson, Thomas Francis, Tuppy Owen-Smith and Herbert Freakes.
25 From 1961 to 1994, more than 3.5 million people were forcibly removed from their homes and deposited in townships (www.history.com).
26 Apartheid was dismantled in the early 1990s with the first non-discriminatory political elections taking place in 1994.
27 Former South African international player, Danie Craven, was the serving SARU president.
29 The RFU had not entered a team into the 1920 Olympic Games due to late scheduling of domestic games and lack of time to prepare (RFU minutes, 17 October 1919). Furthermore, the RFU did not enter a team into the 1924 Olympics due to continuous violence evidenced both in the crowd and on the field of
play when playing against French sides, something the RFU did not want illustrated on a global platform at the Olympic Games (RFU minutes, 9 April 1924).

In 1933 Jean Galia compounded the FFR’s problems by leading a rugby league breakaway to form the Ligue de Rugby à Treize, which soon began to rival the FFR (Dine, 2001, p. 86).

France were eventually reinstated to the Five Nations Championship in 1948.

Known as the ‘Australian Dispensation’, it stated that direct kicking to touch could only be conducted within the 22-metre line.

References


