



'Play up! Play up! And Win the War!' Football, the Nation and the First World War 1914-15

Author(s): Colin Veitch

Source: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1985), pp. 363-378

Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260349>

Accessed: 01/02/2010 09:20

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=sageltd>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Sage Publications, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Contemporary History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Colin Veitch

'Play up! Play up! and Win the War!' Football, the Nation and the First World War 1914–15

7:30 a.m., 1 July 1916. Along an eighteen mile front in Picardy the first attack line of the British Fourth Army, more than 500,000 men all-told, crouched in their trenches. Laden with equipment, they awaited the signal to clamber out over the parapet and begin their advance across no man's land to occupy the shattered German lines. A seven-day bombardment had pounded the Germans with more than 1,500,000 shells; nine high explosive mines, tunnelled deep beneath their positions, had exploded between 7:20 and 7:28 a.m., hurling enormous clouds of earth and smoke 4000 feet into the air. Little opposition was anticipated. As the officers' whistles shrilled, a soldier in the Montauban sector noted:

As the gun-fire died away I saw an infantry man climb onto the parapet into no man's land, beckoning others to follow. As he did so he kicked off a football; a good kick, the ball rose and travelled well towards the German line. That seemed to be the signal to advance.¹

Thus began the blackest day in the entire history of the British army. By nightfall, 57,470 casualties had been sustained; 19,240 officers and men were dead.

The gallant and defiant actions of the infantryman in question, Captain Nevill of the East Surrey Regiment, have not gone unnoticed by social, military and sports historians alike. The incident has become legendary, as research has revealed that Nevill bought four footballs on his last leave in London, and offered a prize to the first of his platoons to dribble a ball into the German positions which they were to attack. The winning platoon, however, were not able to claim their prize. Captain Nevill was killed during the assault along with many of his men. As an appropriate epitaph to him, two of the footballs were recovered, and are now enshrined in British military museums.² To complete the legend, an anonymous elegy was composed to commemorate the incident:

Journal of Contemporary History (SAGE, London, Beverly Hills and New Delhi), Vol. 20 (1985), 363–378.

On through the heat of slaughter
Where gallant comrades fall
Where blood is poured like water
They drive the trickling ball
The fear of death before them
Is but an empty name
True to the land that bore them
The SURREYS play the game.³

The incident can be variously represented as illustrative of the indomitable British spirit, a celebration of defiant English pluck, the ultimate proof that the British believed war to be just another game, or simply that football was the common thread that bound together a group of men facing the most severe challenge of their lives. There are some elements of truth in all of these explanations, but none of them do justice to the complexity of the interrelationship between team games and trench warfare in the Great War of 1914–18. The Nevill incident is but one popularized example of sport and battle from the war. There were many others.⁴ It has been selected to open this paper, however, because it symbolizes the intensity of the relationship whilst masking the clarity. It has passed into British folklore as illustrative of the national sporting character; an act of bravado that was shared by a group of men united in their devotion to sport. As this paper will show, incidents such as this have been used to gloss over some very real and pertinent British disunities concerning sport and the war. Accordingly, the paper will seek to examine more resolutely the ideological and actual links between team games and the first world war, taking as its main point of focus events in the first nine months of the war.

To understand the place of team games in wartime British society it is necessary to review briefly some crucial developments in sport and education that took place during the nineteenth century. At this time, the private educational establishments known as the ‘public schools’, which catered almost exclusively to the fee-paying sons of the country’s titled and wealthy, began to encourage the introduction of games into the curriculum for distinct moral and educational purposes. Games as recreational pastimes, it must be said, were by no means new to the schools. What was unique was the didactical purpose behind their introduction. Eminent educationalists began to realize that through the employment of team games they could foster discipline and self-control in their often unruly charges, whilst simultaneously contributing to the character development of the young boy, who was being groomed by the schools to take his privileged position in the ever-expanding British

Empire. The belief in the simple linear equation ‘games build character’ blossomed. In the following years, it became self-supporting and self-generating as the influential products of the public school system left their ‘alma maters’, taking with them their enthusiasm for games, and the resolute conviction that participation in football, cricket and other manly sports inculcated valuable character traits. Team sports, they believed, taught loyalty, consideration and selflessness, whilst simultaneously generating courage, strength and pluck. Organization of the games by the boys themselves encouraged responsibility and fostered their abilities both to lead by example and to obey with gentlemanly deference. Regulation of the sports brought with it an appreciation for order, good form and fair play. Above all, the game was to be played to the utmost of one’s abilities – victory was to be accepted with humility, and defeat with unembittered integrity. Significantly, these characteristics were held to mould the boy for later life, fostering patriotism and preparing him for the moral and military battles he might have to face in the wider world. Together, these beliefs will be taken to comprise an educational ideology called ‘athleticism’, which had an enormous influence on British thought and practice in the Victorian and Edwardian eras that researchers are only recently beginning to appreciate.⁵

Football, in a variety of forms and guises, was the major winter game of the public schools, and was therefore accorded the ability to develop those admirable characteristics previously highlighted. Hard knocks and good lessons were amongst the benefits that were held to accrue from a wholesome and manly game of football; both would stand the young boy in good stead once he embarked on his chosen career. For many young public schoolboys, the chosen path was entry into the officer corps of the British army. As this institution, too, was dominated by members of the country’s social élite, it is hardly surprising that the qualities valued most highly for a potential officer were those which were being honed on the cricket field or football pitch. In 1857, for instance, Sir John Burgoyne wrote:

At a public school will be found one set of boys, who apply to their studies, and make the greater progress in them, another set take to cricket, boating, fives, swimming etc. Now, of the two, I should decidedly prefer the latter, as much more likely to make good officers.⁶

Another officer stated that, although knowledge of the principles of gunnery was desirable, ‘activity of body, proficiency in field sports and qualification for commanding men’ were all of ‘almost equal importance

to the artilleryman in the field'.⁷ As British military influence spread into remote quarters of Africa, the Far East, and the Indian sub-continent, so there developed a familiar stereotype of the schoolboy-sportsman-soldier, patriotically doing his duty throughout the Empire. As Headmaster Haslam of Ripon School made clear in his address on Speech Day in 1884, it was participation in games which was to a great degree responsible for this admirable and plucky product:

Wellington said that the playfields of Eton won the battle of Waterloo, and there was no doubt that the training of the English boys in the cricket and football field enabled them to go to India, and find their way from island to island in the Pacific, or to undergo fatiguing marches in Egypt. Their football and cricket experiences taught them how to stand up and work, and how to take and give a blow.⁸

These sentiments were reiterated in Henry Newbolt's *Vitai Lampada*. Written on the eve of the Boer war in 1898, it can be seen as the ultimate poetic expression of the ideological transfer held to take place between public school playing-field and the battlefield:

There's a breathless hush in the Close tonight
 Ten to make and the match to win —
 A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
 An hour to play and the last man in.
 And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
 Or the selfish hope of a season's fame
 But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote —
 Play up! Play up! And play the game!

The sand of the desert is sodden and red —
 Red with the wreck of the square that broke —
 The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,
 And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
 The river of death has brimmed his banks
 And England's far and Honour a name,
 But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks;
 Play up! Play up! And play the game!⁹

Patriotic and game in his outlook upon life, this stereotypical figure of the young schoolboy on duty around the Empire was to endure the setbacks of the Boer war with naught but a shrug of his athletic shoulders. As late as 1911, the *Standard* was reminding its readers that 'in some lonely sentry box on the Empire's frontier, up there on the Khaiber or the Bolan, there a clean-cheeked, smooth-haired boy will handle his

half-hundred wind-baked ruffians as if they were the Second Eleven, and he their Captain'.¹⁰

It was, then, understandable that *The Times* should publish the following poem two weeks after war had been declared in 1914:

Lad, with the merry smile and the eyes
Quick as hawk's and clear as the day,
You, who have counted the game the prize,
Here is the game of games to play.
Never a goal – the captains say –
Matches the one that's needed now:
Put the old blazer and cap away –
England's colours await your brow.¹¹

The historical evidence, then, would appear if not to sanction and justify the bravado of Captain Nevill on the Somme, certainly to allow an explanation of the action to be advanced. Indeed, several researchers have cited the incident as an eccentric act, stemming from an ideological immersion in athleticism. Nevertheless, no one has yet shown that Nevill had actually been educated at a public school, nor have they attempted to account for the actions of his men, who were most unlikely to have been reared in their youth by an educational force intent on moulding their characters through games. The reiteration of the Nevill incident then, has contributed to the propagation of a misleading myth regarding contemporary British attitudes towards sport and war in the years of the Great War. As the next section of this paper will show, football did indeed play a vital part in the early stages of the war in shaping British responses to the conflict, but for several months its contribution was neither jingoistic nor laudatory. Instead, football proved to be the medium through which vocal elements of the middle and upper classes launched an embittered literary attack upon the working-class reaction to the national crisis. The game itself became the weapon in a war of words that was the crystallization of strong feelings over the social changes which had occurred in football in the previous thirty years.

The public schools had nurtured the game of football behind their venerable walls during the nineteenth century, and it had been on the impulse of a group of ex-public schoolboys that the fledgling Football Associations had been formed in 1863. Teams of old boys had dominated the first ten years of national competition in the FA Cup from its inception in 1871, but that had been their zenith. From that point on, although the gentlemen and amateurs educated at the public schools continued to retain their administrative power, they were never again to dominate

the game on the field as before. Football, or 'soccer' as it had become known, had been rapturously embraced by the working classes, and the teams emerging from the industrial heartlands of England — particularly Manchester, Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Blackburn — began to gain ascendancy. This social diffusion of football brought with it ethical and ideological turmoil for those who had been reared on the game in the closeted environments of the public schools. They had been taught to value, in Vernede's words, 'the game the prize', rather than the result. Football, like other team games, was to be played in a spirit of sportsmanlike good conduct, where rivalry was good-natured and the quality of the game surpassed the result in importance. The vast intrusion of the lower classes into the game, bringing with them the ultimate bane of the amateur gentleman ethos — the *professional* footballer — was held to be totally detrimental to the progress and practice of football.¹²

It is crucial to remember, as Mason points out, that the bitter and often bigoted viewpoints that are recorded in this debate are invariably those of a section of the population who felt themselves and their beliefs and values to be threatened by the challenge from the new working men's teams.¹³ Nevertheless, this literary onslaught was to set the tone for football's role in the opening months of the war. The *Badminton Magazine* clearly illustrated the root of the discord in 1896:

...the artisan differs from the public-school man in two important points: he plays to win at all costs and, from the nature of his associations, he steps onto the football field in better training...his strong desire to win leads him to play up to the rules (and) to indulge in dodges and tricks which the public school man is apt to consider dishonourable, while it is difficult for him to realise that you can be defeated with honour.¹⁴

In 1911, another gentlemanly viewpoint was recorded, this time in response to the referee's power to award a penalty kick for a foul close to the goal. As this ruling had been incorporated into the game in 1891, the twenty years intervening perhaps make this comment all the more significant; 'It is a standing insult to sportsmen to have to play under a rule which assumes that players intend to trip, hack, and push their opponents and behave like cads of the most unscrupulous kidney.'¹⁵ Alongside professionalism, and a lack of sportsmanship, the act of spectating was the third element of soccer's unholy trinity identified by the defenders of the old school game. Conveniently forgetting the large crowds of boys that used to crowd the sidelines during their own school and house matches, the most vocal of the adherents to the amateur, upper-class game took exception to the huge crowds which were attending the

Saturday matches. Football, they felt, was a game to be played, not watched. Benefits were derived from participation, not observation; large-scale mass support, particularly when the home crowds were so partisan, was simply another travesty of the game that was to be endured by the purists. On the eve of war, then, all was far from well in the arena of British football. Class divisions were prominent, and were the root of several internal divisions within the Association. The three main areas of contention identified here were to achieve an embarrassing notoriety following the outbreak of the war.

Vernede's poem appeared in *The Times* on 19 August 1914. Its sentiments and its language both place it firmly in the mould of athleticism, for despite its adoption of football as the metaphor for warfare, the game chosen by the poet was distinctly upper-class and amateur. The references to blazers, caps and colours, together with the allusion to the game itself being the prize, all mark the poem as being undeniably aimed at the products of the public schools, who had been reared on these particular trappings and ethics of game-playing. Though the response was obviously not directly related to the poet's appeal, the public school and university men responded to the nation's plight with alacrity. *The Times* appealed to its own readership: 'All Varsity men, Old Public School Boys — men who are hardened to the soldiers' life by strenuous pursuit of sport should enlist at once'.¹⁶ *TP's Weekly* was one of several magazines which carried advertisements from the War Office for these young men to enlist as junior officers for the duration of the war,¹⁷ and some 37,000 of these were swiftly commissioned.¹⁸ More than 20,500 of these men had previous Officer Training Corps experience, and were characterized by one of their commanding officers thus:

They are the figures of the British youth with the principles of honour, manhood, justice and courage instilled into them, and with a very real idea of what sacrifices of ease and luxury and possibly of life are demanded today.¹⁹

The formation of these essential characteristics was naturally attributed, in part, to the football field: '... even today there are amongst us those who really imagine that Wellington trained his officers between the goalposts'.²⁰

Advocates of athleticism, then, saw football as a cardinal virtue which had helped shape the manly English characters of those young men now being called upon to defend their country. Their praise, however, extended once again only to the amateur game. The professional game

administered by the Football Association received short shrift from an often hostile press, contributors to which were incensed by the decision to continue to play the scheduled league games despite the crisis of war. In a column headed 'Duty Before Sport', the *Evening News* published the following announcement:

This is no time for football. This nation, this Empire has got to occupy itself with more serious business. The young men who play football and the young men who look on have better work to do. The trumpet calls them, their country calls them, the heroes in the trenches call them. They are summoned to leave their sport, and to take part in the great game. That game is war, for life or death.²¹

The renunciation of football and enlistment to 'play the greater game' for King and country shot to disproportionate prominence in the early months of the war. Recruitment for Kitchener's 'New Armies' was based exclusively on a voluntary basis. Consequently, a vocal minority saw it as expedient to the national effort that the Football Association should be forced to abandon its programme of games, and encourage players and spectators alike to sign up. Such responses from the amateur clubs and associations only served to embitter the 'unpatriotic' stance of the professional footballers. On 2 September, Mr. Philip Collins, Vice-President of the Hockey Association and Chairman of the England Selection Committee, had suggested that all coming matches for the season be abandoned, as this would release some 40,000 able-bodied men for army service.²² Two days later, all rugby clubs in Kent were asked by the association to scratch their fixtures and encourage enlistment.²³ The following day, the Rugby Football Union announced its intention of forming a corps of rugby players, and in a column headed 'Patriotism Before Sport', invited volunteers to send applications to Twickenham, the traditional home of English international rugby.²⁴ Perhaps the most notable contribution on this topic appeared one week later, penned by none other than the redoubtable cricketer Dr W. G. Grace:

The fighting on the Continent is very severe and will probably be prolonged. I think the time has arrived when the county cricket season should be closed, for it is not fitting at a time like the present that able-bodied men should play day after day, and pleasure-seekers look on.²⁵

Conscious of its somewhat delicate position in the limelight of the nation's press, the Football Association put its complete administrative structure at the disposal of the War Office, and offered the use of all league club grounds for recruitment and training. It was announced that

Glasgow would form a battalion of football players and followers, and that recruiting rallies would be held at soccer grounds during the half-time interval on match days. One poster displayed at a London ground encouraged fans with the words:

Do you want to be a
Chelsea Die-Hard?
If so
Join the 17th Battalion
Middlesex Regiment
'The Old Die-Hards'
And follow the lead given
by your favourite Football Players²⁶

These acts, however, were insufficient to quell the protests, which reached a sensational peak on 8 September when one F. N. Charrington, an East End Temperance worker, sent a telegram to the King, asking for the playing of football to be banned during the war. Earlier that year, George V had been the first reigning monarch to attend a Cup Final, and had also become the honorary patron of the Football Association. In a diplomatically-worded reply, the King's Personal Secretary told Charrington '...the doings of the Association will be carefully followed having regard to the King's position as its patron'.²⁷ This incident appears to have toughened the resolve of the Management Committee of the league, who stated: 'The committee are even more decidedly of the opinion that in the interests of the people of this country, football ought to be continued'.²⁸

The defiant stance of the FA was a source of considerable disappointment to the army's recruiting officers:

It has a moral effect... These professional footballers of England are the pick of the country for fitness. Nobody has a right to say that any body of men are not doing their duty, and there may be excellent domestic reasons why every one of these thousands of players does not enlist. But when the young men week after week see the finest physical manhood of the country expending its efforts kicking a ball about, they can't possibly realise there is a call for every fit man at the front.²⁹

The controversy was fuelled by the publication in the same issue of the following poem, 'The Game' by A. Lochhead. A close reading of the first stanza in particular reveals the poet's bias:

Come, leave the lure of the football field
With its fame so lightly won,
And take your place in a greater game
Where worthier deeds are done.
No game is this where thousands watch
The play of a chosen few;
But rally all! if you're men at all,
There's room in the team for you.

You may find your place in the battle-front
If you'd play the forward game,
To carry the trench and man the guns
With dash and deadly aim.
O, the field is wide, and the foe is strong,
And it's far from wing to wing,
But we'll carry through, and it's there that you
May shoot for your flag and King.

Will you play your part in the middle line
Where our airmen bear the brunt,
Who break the plan of the foe's attack
And rally the men in front?
A bold assault and a sure defence
In their game they will combine;
And there's honour too awaiting you
If you'll play in the middle line.

And, last of all, you may find a place
Perchance of less renown,
Where a willing arm may save the game
If the first defence breaks down.
So while others serve in the far-off front
Or out on the deadly foam,
Will you not enrol to keep the goal
And fight for your hearth and home!

Then leave for a while the football field
And the lure of the flying ball
Lest it dull your ear to the voice you hear
When your King and country call.
Come join the ranks of our hero sons
In the wider field of fame,
Where the God of Right will watch the fight
And referee the game.³⁰

A shorter, and more sardonic poem of the same sentiments had appeared earlier that week, complete with explanatory heading:

'Professionalism as Usual'

(The Football Cup Competitions are to proceed as usual – Daily Paper)

Two-and-twenty fighting men
Fit as fit can be
Kick the football, though the war
Is fought on land and sea.
'Play as usual', run and kick,
Though the foemen land,
Goals must be defended still
If Britain is to stand.³¹

The Times reported in a bitter tone that recruitment drives at football league matches were having dismal results, despite large crowds. On Saturday, 21 November, only six volunteers came forward from the crowd at the game between Cardiff and Bristol Rovers, while at the Arsenal ground in London, a call for recruits yielded only one man.³² It was noted that there was a 'growing feeling that professional and spectacular football is incompatible with successful recruiting'.³³ These observations ignored the fact that the month of November had been a highly successful one for the nation in recruiting terms. More than 160,000 men had come forward, a substantial increase over the months of September and October.³⁴

The controversy over the depicted unpatriotic response of the professional footballers and their spectators was no doubt fanned, albeit unconsciously, by the actions and press coverage of their amateur and educated counterparts, the public school sportsmen. The call for the formation of a public school battalion met with an overwhelming reaction in September 1914, and within days 1,950 ex-public school and university men had enlisted to serve alongside their peers. A reporter pointed out, 'They are all of the well-to-do class, and are paying their own expenses', and noted that most wore their old school caps or colours as they paraded from Hyde Park to Victoria Station, en route to Epsom Downs for training.³⁵ Their dutiful and enthusiastic patriotism was celebrated in 'The Recruits', by I. Gregory Smith:

O! Hearts ever youthful, like schoolboys at play,
So be it with you in the thick of the fray;
In the crash and the smoke and the roar of the fight
Be it yours, if it need be, to die for the Right!³⁶

Even in death, sporting imagery followed these young men. The obituary for Mr. Julian Martin Smith, who achieved posthumous fame for being the first volunteer to fall in action, noted that at Eton 'his athletic record

was remarkable'.³⁷ That of A. J. N. Williamson, believed to be the first public schoolmaster killed in action, recorded little more about the Highgate master than that he had run for Cambridge against Oxford in the Mile in 1908–10.³⁸ For the benefit of its readers, *The Times Educational Supplement* actually constructed a 'league table' of the public schools' contribution to the war effort.³⁹

Whilst this thinly veiled struggle between the values and expectations of two polarized social classes was continuing to gain attention, there were more conciliatory attempts being made to persuade the youth of the nation that their footballing skills were an advantageous preparation for war. Sir Robert Baden-Powell in his enormously influential unofficial training manual for the war, wrote that new recruits must be taught:

... from the first that they are like ... players in a football team: each has to be perfect and efficient, each has to adhere patiently to the rules and to play in his place and play the game — not for his own advancement or glorification, but simply and solely that at all costs his side may win.⁴⁰

Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, too, chose to remain aloof from what had become a dispute of distinctly acidic rhetoric, and in his appeal adopted reason in preference to rancour:

I cast no stones. The men who play football, cricket and other games are our finest specimens of British manhood. I put it to them to consider — they are fit, strong, healthy and as sportsmen they are cheery; health makes vigour, cheeriness makes pluck — I put it to them that we must now all be prepared to stand by our country and to suffer for our country.⁴¹

Professional football finally fell into line on 24 April 1915. The 'Khaki Cup Final' was played at the Old Trafford ground in Manchester between Chelsea and Sheffield United, the latter club winning by the only goal of the game. As he presented the cup and medals to the teams, Lord Derby effectively closed the debate on wartime professional soccer with the words, 'You have played with one another and against one another for the Cup; play with one another for England now'.⁴² Thus ended eight months consternation for the patriotic British reading public.⁴³ As Mason suggests, it must have been with some considerable relief that the news was broadcast later that year that the men of the First Battalion of the 18th London Regiment had gone into action at Loos, led by men kicking a football.⁴⁴ At last Britain's national game could claim total concord with the war effort, without the skeleton of active professional soccer at home in the cupboard. This was a far more desirable image — the

British sportsman-soldier leading the fight against the Hun — and it undoubtedly quietened the former critics. It also set the tone for future British war-reporting, which embraced the national sporting stereotype with renewed vigour. Nevertheless, the furore over the continuation of the game during the early months of the war had highlighted the Victorian legacy of intense social differentiation within the nation, particularly in regard to attitudes towards and valuation of team games and their contribution to the formation of national character. In particular, it reveals the extent to which the most vocal of the critics — especially those who raised their objections within the columns of *The Times* — distorted the situation to give credence to their assault on what was essentially an attack on their comprehension of the working-class ethos of sport. Their tirades ignored the fact that the vast majority of working-class soccer was amateur, and that many of the more than 300,000 players registered with amateur teams had already enlisted in the forces.⁴⁵ They paid scant attention to claims by the Football Association that they were employing only 5,000 professionals, of whom 2,000 were already with the forces, and only a further 600 were unmarried, and therefore being encouraged to enlist.⁴⁶ Although the Football Association's claim that their organization had recruited 500,000 men by the end of 1914 remains unsubstantiated, there is little doubt that their administrative machinery was of invaluable assistance to the War Office in the early months of the war.⁴⁷ Once again, this received little acknowledgement from the patriotic protesters who saw the continuation of the game as the ultimate national evil. In these regards, there would appear to be some justification in the equally antagonistic claims of the *Athletic News*, which spoke out strongly in support of the professionals:

The whole agitation is nothing less than an attempt by the classes to stop the recreation on one day in the week of the masses . . . What do they care for the poor man's sport? The poor are giving their lives for this country in thousands. In many cases they have nothing else . . . there are those who could bear arms, but who have to stay at home and work for the Army's requirements, and the country's needs. These should, according to a small clique of virulent snobs, be deprived of the one distraction that they have had for over thirty years.⁴⁸

By mid-1915, the battle of words was all but over, but the real war was far from won. Sport was to maintain its ascendancy in the forefront of British thought and expression throughout the remaining years of the conflict, and continued to be used to typify the genetic strength of British manhood.⁴⁹ This paper has attempted to search beneath that glossy veneer presented by the contemporary literature, and show that the undercurrents

which brought sport into the forefront of the nation at war were powerful, deeply-rooted and not nearly as neatly delineated as some authors, poets, journalists, and even historians would have us believe. The role of sport within the confines of British society in the first world war and, in particular, the gallant actions of young men such as the courageous Captain Nevill are far too important to an understanding of British social history to be left unchallenged and misunderstood.

Notes

1. Pte. L. S. Price (8th Royal Sussex), in M. Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (New York 1972), 124.
2. One at the National Army Museum, and the other at the Queen's Regiment Museum, Howe Barracks, Canterbury.
3. Cited in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford 1975), 27–28.
4. For instance, there were at least five such incidents recorded during the war in which an attack took place accompanied by the dribbling of a football. See C. Veitch, 'Sport and War in the British Literature of the First World War, 1914–1918', MA Thesis (Alberta 1984).
5. This definition was constructed after reference to two similar attempts: that of J. A. Mangan in his *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School. The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge 1980), and that of G. Redmond in 'The Gospel in the Colony: "Muscular Christianity" in Nineteenth Century Canada', Proceedings of the IX International HISPA Congress, Lisbon 1981.
6. Sir John Burgoyne, *Army Reform* (n.p. 1857), 10.
7. Anonymous contributor to a collection of papers and letters on military education at R. M. A. Woolwich, housed in the Corps Library, Royal Engineer Training School, Chatham Barracks, Kent.
8. Quoted in J. A. Mangan, 'Class, Cultural Hegemony and the Institutionalisation of British Games', a paper presented at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, March 1983.
9. H. Newbolt, *Poems Old and New* (London 1898).
10. The *Standard*, 31 May 1911, in J. A. Mangan, 'Images of Empire in the late Victorian Public School', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, XII, 1 (January 1980), 34.
11. R. E. Vernede, 'The Call', published in *The Times*, 19 August 1914, 7.
12. This ethical dilemma is given considerable coverage in Charles P. Korr's paper 'West Ham United Football Club and the Beginnings of Professional Football in East London 1895–1914', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13, 2 (April 1978), 211–32.
13. Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863–1915* (Sussex 1980), 222.
14. *Badminton Magazine*, III, 1896, 560, in Mason, op. cit., 231.
15. *C. B. Fry's Magazine*, II, 8, November 1911, 126–27, in Mason, op. cit., 233.
16. Quoted in James Walvin, *The People's Game. A Social History of British Football* (London 1975), 89.

17. *T. P. 's Weekly*, 614, 15 August 1914, 227.
18. R. Pound, *The Lost Generation* (London 1964), 29.
19. Alan R. Haig-Brown, *The O.T.C. and the Great War* (London 1915), 83.
20. Haig-Brown, op. cit., 93.
21. *The Times*, 3 September 1914, 6.
22. *The Times*, 2 September 1914, 3.
23. *The Times*, 4 September 1914, 10.
24. *The Times*, 5 September 1914, 12.
25. *T. P. 's Weekly*, XXXIV, 618, 12 September 1914, 316.
26. Walvin, op. cit., 89.
27. *The Times*, 8 September 1914, 4. Both telegrams are reproduced in full in H. W. Wilson and J. A. Hammerton (eds.), *The Great War. The Standard History of the All-Europe Conflict*, II (1915), 145.
28. *The Times*, 8 September 1914, 4.
29. *The Times*, 24 November 1914, 5.
30. *The Times*, 24 November 1914, 9.
31. *T. P. 's Weekly*, XXIV, 628, 21 November 1914, 561.
32. *The Times*, 23 November 1914, 6.
33. *The Times*, 30 November 1914, 5.
34. John Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain, 1914–1916* (Stanford 1979), Appendix I.
35. *The Times*, 11 September 1914, 5.
36. *The Times*, 15 September 1914.
37. *The Times*, 16 September 1914.
38. *The Times Educational Supplement*, 6 October 1914, 160.
39. *The Times Educational Supplement*, 3 November 1914.
40. Sir R. Baden-Powell, *Quick Training for War. A Few Practical Suggestions Illustrated by Diagrams* (London 1914), 102. In September 1914 alone, this book sold over 50,000 copies in three impressions.
41. *The Great War*, II (1915), 117.
42. Quoted in several sources, including W. J. Baker, *Sports in the Western World* (Totowa, N.J. 1982), 207. *War Illustrated*, the weekly national tabloid immediately published a photographic feature of the professional soccer players in training for the war at the White City ground in London, I, 630.
43. Although *War Illustrated* published as late as 25 December 1915 Sir Owen Seaman's poem, 'To a False Patriot', which opened with the following lines: 'He came obedient to the call/He might have shirked like half his mates/Who, while their comrades fight and fall,/Still go to swell the football gates'.
44. Mason, op. cit., 255. The incident was commemorated with an artist's impression of the event in *War Illustrated*, 30 October 1915, 264.
45. Walvin, op. cit., 86.
46. Mason, op. cit., 253.
47. Walvin, op. cit., 89.
48. Mason, op. cit., 254.
49. Colin Veitch, '“Play up! Play up! and Win the War!” The Propaganda of Athleticism in Britain, 1914–1918', a paper presented at the pre-Olympic conference, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 1984.

Colin Veitch
has presented papers at several
conferences in Britain and North America,
including the pre-Olympic conference in
Eugene in July 1984. He is currently
continuing to research the first world
war era.