

## **Editorial Preface**

### **Women in/and football**

Discussions of women in/and the various football codes around the world have, in recent years, begun to explore reasons why and how women play. This shift has started to expose the myth that women's involvement in football is a new phenomenon by revealing a long history of organised women's games in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into the recent resurgence of women's participation as players in nearly all football codes in the last twenty years. Women's involvement has not only been as players. Women have been club administrators, provided domestic support and, in the cases of codes such as Australian Rules Football, have had a very high profile as fans for most of the game's existence. In this, women have not challenged the basic codes of the gender order with its set of accepted and approved femininities. Women's return to playing football – after an early engagement was cut short during the 1920s – includes challenges to accepted and marginal femininities and dominant and approved masculinities. As historians we dislike counter-factual questions, but that still does not stop us wondering whether the active campaign against women's football in many countries during the 1920s prevented soccer, at least, from being a major aspect of women's international sporting practice: what then might the sporting world have looked like?

Whereas early twentieth century women were primarily playing football in western Europe and its colonies of settlement, the reassertion of women's playing in the last twenty years has been a more global shift. All the articles in this issue deal with the question of women players being the wrong bodies in wrong spaces and time. We regret that none of the articles deal with the world beyond this Euro-American space, but are delighted at the range of ways they address the displaced, dislocated and disruptive actions of women's football activities. Each of the articles is an, at times, explicit engagement with the question – what is so masculine about football? All of the articles connect with aspects of others in the issue so that themes weave through, enhance and enrich to make what we hope is a collection that is more than the sum of its parts.

As Diana Tucker shows, the framing of football as a masculine space means that women provide significant emotional support to footballing men, and in doing so often confront particular problems of their own. Tucker's article is significant in that it introduces new approaches to analyses of women's engagement with football, and enriches the growing understanding of the support provided sport by women's domestic labour by exploring the rhetorics of coaches' wives in American football.

Shona Thompson and Barbara Cox investigate the dynamics of sexuality in a soccer team in New Zealand and suggest a wider political potential in efforts to counter homo-negativity in the sport. They provide an opportunity to

read questions of sexuality across from other studies to encourage comparative analysis, and suggest a more explicitly politically engaged area for analysis. A similar point may be made about Charles Little's examination of organisational and media debates concerning a rugby league match in Sydney, Australia in 1921. Little's analysis of this single event resonates with broader masculinist discourses of women's sport at that time, and with more recent discourses framing masculinist understandings of women's football.

There is a tendency in the English speaking world to focus on Anglophone experiences and debates. Gertrud Pfister's examination of the dynamics underlying and inhibiting the development of German women's football (soccer) reveals the problems of that approach. Although twentieth century German social, cultural and political history is often depicted as unique – as if all modern German history may explained by the Nazi era – Pfister's article suggests that placing too much emphasis on that specificity undermines the very useful evidence that may be drawn from comparative studies by pointing to key differences between women's experiences of playing football in Germany, England and France.

David Howe's paper injects another set of dynamics into the issue to suggest the relevance of closer consideration of the specificity of contemporary and contradictory circumstances. He poses important questions about the position and understanding of women's rugby in Wales where rugby union embodies both manhood and nationalism, and more importantly for his case has become increasingly professionalised leaving behind many of the older 'masculinising' practices and marginal femininities, practices that are ironically powerful in the culture of women's rugby. Alongside the others, this paper shows the importance of the local and the particular as well as clearly considering global and wider political trends.

*Football Studies* promotes multi-code and trans-disciplinary debate and investigation into the experiences of football. Although various football codes occupy culturally dominant locations in different countries, each presents approved forms of masculinity and nationhood to function as an articulation of dominant sets of socio-cultural relations. Investigation of women's involvement in football can help expose these dominant relations by challenging notions of approved femininities to suggest ways in which these particular sporting codes, despite their apparent differences, operate in a similar socio-cultural fashion.

The need for international and comparative study of this phenomenon to critique the sport-nation-masculinity nexus and the invisible mythologies denying fissures of gender associated with it has become more urgent in recent years as the rates, significance and forms of cultural and social globalisation have become more apparent, and as it has become increasingly obvious that more subtlety is required when considering the meanings and implications of globalisation. This growing realisation has meant an increasingly global

awareness of and engagement with many of the world's football codes and their celebrities, and the marginalisation of others such as Canadian football. This process has seen a growing awareness of developments in women's football internationally, and the emergence of women's football celebrities. These developments are poorly understood. They must be explored and theorised in their specific cultural contexts but understood globally.

A tight focus on a specific cultural context too often overshadows women's common football experiences. Too often we see the potential for comparative analyses defeated by structural arrangements: such as conferences where, for instance, the soccer people talk to the soccer people, and the Europeanists talk to the Europeanists. As these global cultural, economic and social flows and streams develop we become more convinced of the need for the multi-disciplinary, trans-national and cross-code comparative analyses. Our editorial decisions were guided by a desire to include a range of codes, a range of different national or cultural circumstances, and a range of disciplinary perspectives. As a result, we have had to exclude some of the very good articles that could otherwise have been included to ensure this balance was met. Some of these pieces will be included in subsequent issues of *Football Studies*.

Analysis and investigation of women's football is at a potential turning point. While we recognise that recovery history and narrative investigations are necessary when the hidden experiences of subaltern groups are being explored, we also believe that it is time to begin a move beyond that approach. In some respects, analyses of women's football are becoming a series of case studies applying already existing knowledge, rather than extending the analysis to new theoretical and conceptual areas: this issue includes elements of both these approaches. We look forward to those theoretical and analytical extensions, and to more specialist issues of *Football Studies* to facilitate such development.

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