

Tischler, Steven. *Footballers and Businessmen: The Origins of Professional Soccer in England*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publ., 1981, Pp, x, 154. Notes, bibliography, index, tables, photographs. \$24.00

The match is on! Fans of analytical sports history should hasten to read the challenger to Tony Mason's *Association Football and English Society*. Steve Tischler, playing from the left, with his contrasting style and approach is making a determined effort to topple Mason from the top of the soccer history

league. His pre-match form is good. Recently signed by the faculty of the Empire State College Center for Labour Studies, Tischler has redrafted his Columbia Ph.D. thesis to present a well-argued explanation of the origins and development of professionalism in English soccer in terms of the profit motive being brought into the game by club promoters and directors. Like most successful doctoral candidates he has a sound defence based on the use of primary source material as he has investigated the local and national sporting press as well as the records of the Football Association (the ruling body of English soccer), the Football League (in effect the employers' association) and the Professional Footballers' Association (the players' union). Additionally he has utilised balance sheets and returns of directors lodged with the Companies Registry by those clubs which adopted company status. Yet there is a weakness. Nowhere is there any material from soccer club records.

Tischler plays a cautious game. He uses his material well and is generally careful not to infer too much from his data. Only occasionally does he get himself offside by wandering ahead of his evidence as with his allegation of a decline in the number of public-school graduates who played soccer after, and presumably because of, the legalization of professionalism; or his supposition that working-class directors required financial support from other, more influential, board members. Possibly he is correct, but the evidence presented here is not solid enough to justify his statements.

When he advances into Mason's territory he performs creditably. He makes a sound occupational analysis of soccer club directors in order to demonstrate that the boards were dominated by industrial and mercantile interests, though he could have made more use of the shareholders' registers to assess whether the boards were representative of the owners of the clubs. Turning from the masters to the servants Tischler stresses the restrictive nature of employment as a soccer professional. In what other occupation did a worker face not only a maximum wage, but also the lack of freedom to change his employer except at his employer's behest? He plots out how these contractual conditions eventually spawned trade unionism among soccer players and led to a threatened national strike in 1909, though unfortunately he ends his narrative prior to the great fall in union membership which preceded the first World War. His examination of career lengths shows that professionals only had a short time at the top, though his figures may be unduly influenced by the use of starting and end-of-season line-ups as a measure of attrition rates, a novel but imperfect proxy.

He is stronger on the field than off it. His section on spectators provides some entertaining quotations by the middle-class critics of working-class soccer fans who were castigated for wagering and drinking at matches, for watching rather than playing, and for taking time off work to attend games. However, he fails to consider some of the historical implications. Does it suggest that the work-ethic had never been fully internalised by the working class? Was the gambling and drinking merely a continuation of traditional leisure habits? Had the working man ever been a sports participant on any scale?

Perhaps slightly behind after the social section, Tischler outflanks Mason by venturing further into economic matters. This enables him to score at least one point. Nevertheless he should have benefitted from some coaching. He appears to accept balance sheet figures at face value when he notes that some clubs exhibited only "modest" profits, but he confuses net with gross profit figures and does not consider how much undistributed profit was ploughed back into facilities and transfer fees. His calculation of the percentage of club income which was spent on labor is also confused in that he fails to show whether transfer fees received were included in the income figure or whether net transfer fees were simply listed as expenditure. A major problem is his failure to indicate what economic policies would be adopted by a profit-seeking directorate and in what ways these would differ from those pursued by boards who put premierships before profits. This makes it difficult to substantiate his claim as to the primacy of profits in English gatemoney soccer. The Football Association did limit dividends to five per cent, but Tischler points out that this was a reasonable return compared to that on government bonds.

The final whistle coincides with the waving of the yellow card and the issuing of a caution to those sports historians who might immediately reject a soccer history whose index lists such teams as "Balckbum Rovers" and "Weiss Bromwich Albion." Although these misprints are unhappily representative of the printing quality of the book, it would be a greater error not to read this original contribution to the serious historical analysis of English sport.

Flinders University of South Australia

Wray Vamplew