

Sport and Identity: The Football Association Cup Final and the Formation of National and Local Consciousness in England

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Sport is generally recognized as a major influence in the formation of national sentiment, but surprisingly little historical attention given to the role of British sporting institutions in this respect. This paper examines the place of the FA Cup Final in creating a sense of nation and locality during the period from the 1880s to the 1950s. It concentrates on two aspects of the event: It first examines the staging of the Final, noting how it became increasingly a self-conscious “national” event by contrasting the presentation and organization of matches at the Crystal Palace in the pre- 1914 years with those of Wembley from 1923 onwards. It also examines the relationship of the monarchy to the event.

As well, the paper analyses the elements of popular festival associated with the Cup Final after it became, from the 1880s onwards, an event dominated by professional clubs with a strong local following. It emphasizes the celebration of local and regional

identities through participation in the Cup Final, and the way in which these related to the image of the Final as an embodiment of nation.

Both aspects emphasize the place of ritual and symbol in football (soccer) culture and the representation of the Final in the national and local press. The paper argues that the Cup Final acts culturally as an area of exchange in which a variety of identities - both "official" and popular - interact. It follows Whannel (Fields in Vision: Television Sport and Cultural Transformation, in seeing the Cup Final as combining several messages simultaneously: "a popular celebration, with strong working class roots, a shared national ritual and a constitutional link between royalty and popular culture." (p.3)