Steven Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen. The Origins of Professional Soccer in England.* Holmes and Meier, New York, 1981. Illus., Select Bibliog. pp. x + 154. $27.50.

This short but interesting book about the commercialisation of British soccer is written with quite exceptional clarity. In the first chapter the American author outlines the preindustrial roots of football, its transformation in the British public schools of the early nineteenth century and the emergence, along with the rugby variants, of Association Football codified in 1863. This is probably the least controversial of the seven chapters and the only one in which Tischler shows any interest in how the game was

played or in its rule changes. In Chapter 2 he discusses the re-adoption of football by the working classes in the last quarter of the century. He outlines the astonishing boom in the number of players and spectators and the related emergence of professionalism and its reluctant acceptance by the code's administrators. Chapter 3 looks at the (commercial) reasons for the formation of the Football League in 1888. The second half of the book then examines for the next 25 years the sources, nature and interaction of club directors, professional players and paying spectators.

Given the topic and period this book naturally begs comparison with Tony Mason's larger work *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915,* although neither author apparently saw the other's work before their almost simultaneous publication. Considerable differences exist. Whereas Mason's style is descriptive and prone to an 'on the one hand on the other' approach, Tischler has a thesis and presents it with considerable panache. His is a market model and he uses it to explain virtually all developments in soccer from the 1880s on. Mason argued that few directors were in the game for profits but Tischler holds that many took out a good return. In addition to the spin-offs from social and political status accruing to bourgeois directors Tischler feels that, for a start, the 5 per cent ceiling on dividends represented a not inconsiderable yield in the uncertain economic climate at the turn of the century. Then he goes on to emphasise that indirect returns from ground rent, catering, building and the like were sizeable and that club balance sheets disguised as much as they revealed. He always endeavours - usually successfully - to set football developments in their wider economic and social setting. This is clearest in the sections on spectators where he stresses the safety valve and social control aspects of the new boom leisure industry. It is also used tellingly elsewhere in connection with the 'scramble for [football] markets' in the South and the rejection of 'free trade' in the labour market through the retain and transfer system. Tischler also provides quite a biting contrast to Mason in his illustration of the one-sided nature of the sporting press during the players-clubs dispute culminating in the strike threat of 1909.

Yet Tischler's terse authority does not mean that he always proves his case. Mason's evidence suggests that Tischler at times

pushes his thesis a little too hard. His Americanisms intrude not merely by archaic reference to *'the* Bolton Wanderers' and *'the* Blackburn Rovers' but also in the doubts he casts on the true source of spectators' allegiance to their team. Here I think he greatly underestimates the instinctive regional loyalties which he implies were sold to spectators by press 'hoopla'. His evidence is far from convincing. Also the single occasion upon which I chose to check one of his references gave rise to some doubts about his use of sources. My interest was aroused by his categorisation of Nick Ross as a Liverpool player four years before that great club came into existence (p.106). I consulted his reference to discover that Tischler had made not merely the trivial error (for non-Merseysiders) of confusing Liverpool with their deadly rivals, Everton, but also that the important example he had offered his readers of player-director relationships was to be found nowhere in the source he cited. One trusts this was an isolated instance.

Overall this book is a stimulating exercise in assessing for big-time football how far class roles and relationships were made to conform with those of ordinary life. Despite its high local price reading it should be a must for all students of sport in this period.

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