

**Bill Murray, *Football: A History of the World Game*. Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1994. pp. 297, £35.**

Scats and soccer are like pipe and piper. They belong together, and the history of the world game testifies to that. Scats and Scottish zeal for association football helped to get the game going in Great Britain and then, as Scats emigrated to all comers of the Empire, they played key roles in establishing the game elsewhere. Bill Murray may have lived in Australia for forty years but he is still a Scot, and his efforts in explaining to us the phenomenon of the world game echoes the intense efforts of his forefathers a century ago.

*Football: A History of the World Game*, does its title justice. Starting with the British origins of soccer, Murray expands to the Continent and then all other continents. His grasp of French, German and a little Spanish enables him to trawl sources which elude most English speakers and he has been considerably helped by such polyglots as Pierre Lanfranchi and Joe Arbena. The only major snag to covering all hotbeds proved to be a sparsity of sources for Africa and Asia, arguably soccer meccas of the future. In chapters devoted to these lands Murray has been restricted, and although evocative prose enriches the read, as it does for all the book, the few sources which are available do not permit the author to be as interpretative as he is in other sections.

The early chapters are some of the best. 'From Rough House to Rule of Law' and 'For Love and Money' set the stage for the development of themes as Murray unfolds his plots. Most consistent is the familiar, often repeated story of the social elite establishing the game but unable to keep it to themselves. In Britain, Europe and South America proletarian elements took up and then took over the game, not necessarily as legislators but as those who created football culture. How professionalism emerged thereafter is another theme, tied as it is with both the desires of bosses and workers to capitalise on what football offered them. Murray is particularly perceptive on the role that commercial interests, especially television, have played in directing

elite soccer in recent times. His tone is sceptical, his judgements telling. Yet his stances are less about morality than indicating that football cannot escape the social and political climate in which it is played. The totalitarian regimes of the inter-war years, but not just that era or even dictatorships, are shown to have regularly mixed sport and politics. They have led Murray to lament, 'in sport no more than in life ...'

The most powerful message of the book is that soccer is as rich and vivacious as the societies that play it. It is the people's game and that should be understood in terms not just of popular appeal but intercultural differences. Each World Cup shows many similarities between elite elements, such is the homogenising effect of professionalism and commercialism, but contrasts in temperaments, characteristics and styles remind us that the globe is not a village at all. For more than a century soccer has remained distinctly different in Britain, Europe and South America. The emerging nations of Africa and Asia promise to offer even more variety.

The range of this book is a credit to Murray. He struggles valiantly with trying to do justice to the universal nature of soccer and his African and Asian details are especially appreciated given that they have been neglected by all before him. Yet his heaviest emphases remain on those areas he knows best, Britain and France. In some senses that is how it should be: Britain provided the impetus for the modern game and the French, be it with FIFA, the World Cup or major European titles, were crucial to developments as well. However, without being critical of Murray it is still worth pondering what sort of an alternative world history a European-based historian might write. A South American, African or Asian would be even more interesting.

If there is something wrong with Murray's book, it lies with the publisher. Through no fault of the author, Scholar Press decided that a book on football should not have a single photo, illustration or cartoon. The dust jacket is so bland that most bookshop browsers would judge it all too quickly. Even the author's track-record as a football(ing) historian,

*especially* his work on *The Old Firm* and *Glasgow's Giants*, does not rate a mention. Conceivably it was a matter of costs but at £35 an issue the very people most likely to devour Murray's latest offering, those who comprise the world game, have been priced out of the market. In the publisher's favour is the inclusion of an excellent index and instead of an accumulated bibliography Murray has been allowed to inform us, by way of small notes per entry, which sources have been the most influential in writing each chapter of the book.

*Football: A History of the World Game*, begs a world interest in soccer history. A conference aimed at gathering together those interested in such matters was mooted for USA '94 but unfortunately it never got off the ground. Given French intellectual traditions and the French influence in establishing major sporting events, and that goes far beyond even soccer, France '98 may prove to be a more fertile ground. If it does it has the advantage of Murray's book, a work that illumines and directs, not to mention entertains, those who puzzle over the world's most favoured game.

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