

American Exceptionalism: Soccer and American Football

Ivan Waddington and Martin Roderick

Centre for Research into Sport and Society

University of Leicester

Within half a century or so of the codification of the rules of soccer in the English public schools and at Cambridge University in the middle years of the nineteenth century, soccer was already well on the way to becoming the world's most popular sport. The rapid diffusion of soccer from Britain across the world was linked not only with the far-flung network of relationships associated with the British Empire but, perhaps even more importantly, with the even wider network of relationships associated with the growth in Britain's international trade, for along with the export of British goods and labour, the British - and especially the English - also exported their enthusiasm for sport. The English were to play a major part in developing and disseminating a number of sports, of which cricket and rugby were among the most prominent, but undoubtedly Britain's biggest sporting export was soccer.

Within the context of the international spread of soccer, Britain played a particularly important role for, as Mason (1989, p.175) has noted, whilst the rapid spread of the game was undoubtedly associated in part with its basic simplicities and with the intrinsic satisfactions of the game itself, it was also associated with Britain's world power status and her world-wide trading connections. As Britain's trade and commerce expanded, so sizeable British communities sprang up in many parts of the world and in many countries British engineers, managers, clerks and manual workers played an important part in the early development of the game.

This was the case, for example, in Spain where English engineers introduced soccer in Bilbao in 1893 (Mason, 1986, p.68). In Austria, a number of English firms had branches or representatives in the capital, and several Englishmen played central roles in founding the first two soccer clubs in Vienna; the English influence is evident in the names of the two oldest

clubs, the 1st Vienna FC and the Vienna Cricket and Football Club (Meisl, 1956, pp.55-6). In Germany, British merchants established a number of football clubs including Bremer FC (1881), the Anglo-American FC in Hamburg (1881) and the English FC in Berlin (1885), whilst it seems that the first German team to play soccer proper - that is, association football in its specifically modern form, with the prohibition on the use of the hands - was the English FC of Dresden in 1890 (Meisl, 1956, pp.83-4). In Italy in 1893, English port employees founded the Genoa Cricket and Athletic Club which, shortly afterwards, was renamed the Football and Athletic Club (Mason, 1986, p.68). Further east, it was apparently British workers at the Colentina textile factories and the Ploesti Standard Oil fields who organized the first teams in Rumania. In Russia, the Charnock family from Lancashire introduced soccer into their textile factory near Moscow in the 1890s, whilst another English entrepreneur awarded a cup which was competed for by teams in St Petersburg between 1907 and 1917 (Mason, 1986, p.68). Outside of Europe, the English also played a major part in the early development of soccer in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Brazil, all of which had active British communities looking after British investments. (Lever, 1983, pp.39-40)

There were, too, other signs of the growing importance of soccer as a world game. Soccer was, for example, the first team game to be included in the Olympics (Greenberg, 1991, pp.168-9). At the second modern Olympic Games, held in Paris in 1900, soccer was represented, not as an official Olympic event, but as what we would now call a demonstration sport. England, represented by Upton Park (London) defeated France, represented by L'Union Francaise des Sports Athlétiques by 4-0. Eight years later, at the first London Olympic games, soccer was an official Olympic sport. In the final, England defeated Denmark, a result which was repeated four years later when the same teams met in the final of the Stockholm Olympics. (Meisl, 1956, pp.87-8)

Another important indication of the growth of the game on an international level was the formation in 1904 of what became the world governing body. The initial meeting of FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) was held in Paris, and attended by representatives of seven nations, all from Europe (Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). Membership of FIFA has grown rapidly and

fairly consistently throughout the twentieth century. By 1914, 24 national associations were in membership; by 1930 there were 41 members, and by 1950, 73. After the Second World War, growth was even more rapid, with membership almost doubling between 1950 and 1984, at which latter date there were 150 members, with another dozen or so aspirant members (Tomlinson, 1986, pp.85-8). FIFA's membership is, by comparison with other international organizations, impressive: amongst sporting organizations, only the International Olympic Committee, with its multi-sport appeal, has more members (194), while the membership of FIFA is not far behind that of the United Nations, which has a membership of 184 (Union of International Associations, 1995).

Brief mention should also be made at this stage of one other index of the international spread of soccer, namely the establishment and subsequent development of the World Cup. The first World Cup competition was held in Uruguay in 1930. It is interesting to note that the nation which gave football to the world was not represented in the first competition, for the English Football Association, along with the other British associations, had withdrawn from FIFA in 1928 following a disagreement over the definition of what constituted amateur status (Tomlinson, 1986, pp.89, 92). However, the United States was represented. America was in fact one of the teams seeded in the four qualifying pools, and, fielding a team made up largely of ex-British professional players, the Americans defeated Belgium and Paraguay, before being beaten by Argentina at the semi-final stage (Glanville, 1980, pp.16-19). The first time England competed in the World Cup was in Brazil in 1950, when they suffered one of the most embarrassing defeats in the history of English football, being beaten 1-0 by a United States team which was thought to have no chance of winning, and which included several players who had stayed up until the early hours the night before the game (Glanville, 1980, pp.50-1).

Whereas the first World Cup was a relatively small affair involving just thirteen countries, it is now a major event in the international sporting calendar. Soccer is now played so widely throughout the world that it takes more than two years and in excess of 250 preliminary games simply to determine the participants in the final stages of the competition, and there is little doubt that soccer's World Cup, together with the Olympic Games, are now the world's premier sporting events.

However, notwithstanding the early exploits of the United States in the World Cup, it remains the case that whilst soccer has been successfully transplanted to very many countries, the game has never really caught the public imagination in the United States in the way it has done in most of Europe, South America and, in recent years, much of Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia. In some respects - and particularly in view of the historically close relationship between Britain and the United States - it may appear surprising that a country which has so many linguistic and cultural ties with Britain should have proved so unreceptive to one of Britain's greatest cultural exports. Data from the 1991 National Soccer in the US Participation Survey, measuring sports activity in 1990 and published by the Soccer Industry Council of America, indicate that participation in soccer in the United States has grown enormously in the last decade or so, but it remains the case that, especially at the professional level, and as a spectator sport, soccer remains relatively underdeveloped particularly in comparison to the situation in Europe and South America. How, then, does one account for this phenomenon? Why has the world's most popular game failed to excite Americans in the way it has excited generations of Europeans? What were the processes as a result of which the Americans developed their own, nationally distinct, form of football? In a nutshell, what are the social roots of American exceptionalism in sport? It is these questions which form the focal point of this paper.

One explanation offered by some historians for the relative failure of soccer, not just in the United States but also in countries such as Australia, South Africa, India and Canada, is based on an implicit - and therefore unexamined - assumption that in each society there is a limited amount of "space" for sports, and that once this "space" has been "filled" by one sport, there is no room for other sports. Examples of this kind of approach may be seen in the work of Tony Mason and John Sugden in Britain and Andrei Markovits in the United States. Writing about the Australian situation, Mason (1986, p.78) suggests that the "failure of the game to develop on a large scale in Melbourne is not perhaps too difficult to explain. Australian Rules got in first." Australian Rules, he suggests, "filled a gap that might well have been plugged by football twenty years later". Here we see clearly the use of this implicit concept of a limited "space" for sport and the associated idea that this "space" or "gap", once plugged, leaves no "room" for new sports to be introduced.

Mason consistently returns to the “limited space” theory as a way of seeking to explain the varying fortunes of soccer in different countries. As noted above, his explanation for the failure of soccer to take root in Melbourne was that Australian Rules “got in first”. However, Australian Rules did not spread to New South Wales. Why, then, did soccer not take off in New South Wales? According to Mason (1986, p.78) the “answer in this case was the prevalence of Rugby Union and also, somewhat later, Rugby League”. In other words, the two rugby codes “got in first”. And what of the failure of football in the United States? Once more, Mason’s argument (1986, p.79) takes an identical form. He argues that “The great trek from the old world to the new was over before 1914,..... before football had really become the national game of so many European countries. Moreover, long before then America had its own national game, baseball”. In other words, baseball “got in first”. In all these cases the common “explanatory principle” - we shall argue that it provides no explanation at all - seems to be to identify the most popular sport or sports in those countries in which football did not take root and then say that those sports “got in first” or “plugged the gap”.

The same kind of assumptions underpin the work of Markovits. Thus he argues that in the United States, soccer was “crowded out” from above by American football and from below by baseball. In similar fashion to Mason, he argues that in all those countries where soccer did not take root, it was because the available “sport space” was occupied by other sports. In Canada, this “sport space” was filled by baseball, basketball, Canadian football and ice hockey. In several other countries - he cites New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the West Indies - cricket occupied a major portion of the “sport space”, with the remainder of the “space” being filled by field hockey (India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), rugby (New Zealand and South Africa) and Australian Rules football (Markovits, 1990, p.232).

More recently, Sugden (1994) has used the concept of “sport space” - which he appears to use interchangeably with the concept of “urban industrial recreational space” - in similar fashion to suggest that, in the United States, soccer was “crowded out” by baseball and American football. Thus after describing the development of baseball, he suggests that “the successful dissemination of baseball ‘crowded out’ soccer from

the popular consciousness of American sports fans” (Sugden, 1994, p.231) whilst later, he argues that the development of American football at both the college and professional levels meant that “even before basketball emerged to attain the status of a third, home grown, national pastime, the working class and middle class ‘sport space’ of the American public was already crowded” (Sugden, 1994, p.235).

As noted above, an explanation of the type offered by Mason, Markovits and Sugden is based on an implicit, and therefore unexamined, assumption about the “space” available for sport within societies. Such an argument may seem superficially attractive, but as soon as one begins to examine this assumption more closely, its inadequacies become immediately apparent. The difficulties of using concepts in this implicit, unexamined way may be illustrated by reference to Sugden’s work. As we noted above, Sugden uses the concepts of “sport space” and of “urban industrial recreational space” interchangeably and without elaboration. Do these concepts refer to the same social processes, or is the “space” available for recreation larger than that available for sport? And the concept of urban industrial recreational space clearly implies that this is different in some sense from non-industrial agrarian recreational space. This leads on to a more general point which is that, even if one overlooks the conceptual difficulties and ambiguities associated with the idea of a “space” or “gap” for sport, it clearly is not the case that this “gap” is of the same size in all societies. Both the amount of leisure time and the significance which people attribute to sport vary between societies, so the size of the “gap” for sport - a more precise and more sociologically adequate formulation would be the amount of time and other resources available to people to invest in sport - will also vary between societies. Thus the fact that one sport may be well established in a particular society does not necessarily exclude the successful establishment of a second, third or fourth major sport. This is the case, for example, in the United States, where American football, baseball, and basketball are all very popular spectator sports, while in the northern states, ice hockey is a fourth major spectator sport. The explanations of Mason, Markovits and Sugden all run into problems of this type. Why, for example, in terms of Mason’s analysis, was just one sport - Australian Rules - sufficient to “plug the gap”, and thus to prevent the development of soccer in Melbourne, while in New South Wales it took two sports, namely Rugby Union and Rugby League? Similarly why, in terms of

Markovits's analysis, was soccer "crowded out" by just two sports in New Zealand and South Africa (cricket and rugby) and in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (cricket and field hockey), whereas it took three sports to fill the available space in the United States and no fewer than four in Canada? Mason, Markovits and Sugden provide no answer to this problem and, indeed, they appear not even to recognise that it is a problem.

Similar problems arise with the explanations offered by Mason and Sugden for the relative failure of soccer to take root in the United States. Their argument, as we noted above, is couched in terms of baseball "getting in first". However, this argument ignores the fact that the Americans *did* take up football in a big way, though it was not, of course, the Association game which they took up. During the 1870s, most American colleges played a game based on the rugby version of football but, as is well known, the Americans subsequently developed from this game their own, distinctively American version of football in the form of the grid iron game. A properly sociological analysis, rather than suggesting that soccer did not develop because baseball "got in first", would seek to explain why it was that, in the first place, the Americans opted for a game based on the rugby rather than the soccer version of football and why, having done so, they then developed that game in ways which took it further and further away from rugby, resulting in the distinctively American version of football. Some of these questions are taken up, and some tentative solutions offered, in the remainder of this paper.

The two most popular sports in the United States today, at least at the senior/professional level, are of course baseball and American football. The latter is derived from the rugby code of football which, like soccer, has its modern roots in the nineteenth century English public school system. Baseball, on the other hand, developed in the early nineteenth century in New England and is probably descended from an ancient English game called "rounders", which also involves running between bases of the type found in baseball. However, a distinguishing and very important quality of both baseball and American football is that, notwithstanding the fact that both sports resemble games which had earlier been played in Europe, baseball and American football draw upon and express - or at least, and no less importantly, are commonly *believed* to draw upon and express - a set of values and characteristics which are uniquely American.

However the gulf, or at least the perceived gulf, between American and European - and specifically English - sports has not always been as great as sometimes appears to be the case today. In the eighteenth century, many aspects of the colonists' social life reflected their strong links with England for, as Mandell has noted, "as soon as their wealth permitted, the ambitious immigrants imitated the distinguishing styles of the gentry in the homeland" (Mandell, 1984, p.178). Many colonial churches and civic buildings reflected English architectural styles, while furniture was often based on designs published by English cabinet makers. What was true of buildings and furniture was also true of sport in eighteenth and early nineteenth century America, at least among the wealthier sections of the community. Horse racing, for example, retained many features of the English model, with spectators betting on horses - often imported English stallions - which ran over measured courses. Wealthy colonial Americans also copied the English in their close observation of the ritual and etiquette associated with hunting. Until well into the nineteenth century, Americans imported expensive horses and pedigree dogs from England, whilst imported English books on sport in general and hunting in particular enabled those with the appropriate level of wealth to engage in public displays of their sophistication (Mandell, 1984, p.179-80).

Rather less is known about the sporting and leisure activities of the lower classes, although it seems that among the urban working class and in the frontier settlements, relatively violent or less civilised sports were popular. English blood sports such as dog fighting and cock fighting were popular, while pugilism also thrived in the male-dominated urban culture of this period. The latter was a relatively bloody and violent sport; some street fighters grew a long finger nail for the purpose of gouging their opponent's eyes, while biting off an opponent's nose was also a permitted tactic. Other popular spectator sports, at which gambling was an essential ingredient, included pedestrian contests, horse races, billiards, dice and cards (Reiss, 1991, p.16; Mandell, 1984, p.179). The American Indians had their own games, but amongst the colonists American sport for a long time was, as Mandell (1984, p.180) has noted, "English sport transmitted and adapted".

The degree to which English sports were adapted varied from one sport to another. Horse racing, as we have noted, was based on the English pattern,

though the American version was less formal, and also less class specific than was the case in England. However, if the adaptation of horse racing to the American situation involved relatively little modification, other sports were modified rather more radically. One such example is provided by the development of American football, to which we now turn.

The development of both soccer and rugby was closely associated, as we have noted, with the development of the English public school and university system. In the United States, too, the colleges were one of the most important sources for the development of modern sport. Prior to the Civil War there were already some 250 colleges in the United States and by 1904, some 250,000 Americans were in higher education, roughly twelve times the number enrolled in colleges and universities in France and in Germany. Moreover, in the second half of the nineteenth century, sport came to play an increasingly important part in the American college system, a part which, at least in some respects, was not unlike that played by the “games cult” in the English public schools. According to Mandell (1984, p.187) by the late nineteenth century, the typical college offered an easy and irrelevant curriculum and had evolved into “a peculiar institution which performed the socially tranquillizing function of keeping the boisterous children of the prosperous classes out of the way for a few years”. Part of the process of keeping them out of the way involved the development of “the extra-curriculum”, which included debating societies and fraternities and sororities, but which also included sport as an increasingly important element. The growing importance of sport in the second half of the nineteenth century culminated in the so-called “sports craze” on American college campuses in the 1890s, a process which was reflected in the development of baseball, rowing, and track and field but, above all, in the development of American football, with the growth of gate receipts, alumni support but also public concern at the roughness of the game, which frequently resulted in serious and occasionally in fatal injuries (Mandell, 1984, p.188). However, we are running ahead in the story of the development of the American version of football. Let us then turn to the early development of football in the college system.

Variants of football were played throughout the colonial period and down to the Civil War. After the war, it was the elite eastern universities which were most culturally receptive to the English game, with the game between

Princeton and Rutgers on November 6, 1869 - won by Rutgers by six goals to four - being generally regarded as the first intercollegiate football game in America. It was at about this time that the bifurcation of soccer and rugby was taking place in England, and it seems that the Princeton-Rutgers game was more like soccer than rugby.

It was of course rugby rather than soccer which was the parent of American football - indeed, rugby provided the foundation for all the fundamental aspects of the American game down to the introduction of the forward pass in 1906 - and it was not until May 15, 1874, that the first intercollegiate rugby match took place, when a team from McGill University in Montreal travelled to Cambridge to play Harvard. Two years later, Princeton, Columbia, Harvard and Yale met at Springfield, Massachusetts, in an attempt to agree a set of rules for a game which still had many local variations (Guttmann, 1978, p.128). From that time on, the rules and the structure of the game began to move in a direction which took the American game further and further away from its origins in rugby, with perhaps the really decisive break coming with the introduction of the forward pass, which is still illegal in rugby.

Although soccer - or at least a game which more closely resembled soccer rather than rugby - appears to have been played in some American universities, it is clear that by the middle 1870s, most colleges had opted for a game based on the rugby version of football. It is possible that in some universities, this preference may have been associated with circumstances which were particular to individual institutions. It is claimed, for example, that at Yale, which was certainly one of the early and very influential leaders in the development of football, the preference for the handling version of the game was due in large measure to a student called Schaft, who had formerly been a pupil at Rugby School, and who entered the class of '73 at Yale. Schaft is reported to have popularised the game among his classmates, and formed an association which offered challenges to other classes (Riesman and Denney, 1951, p.313). There is, as far as we know, no reason to doubt the truth of the gist of this story, though it is more reasonable to suppose that social processes - and the fact that the Americans took up the rugby rather than the soccer version of football was a social process of some significance - cannot adequately be explained in terms of the actions of a single individual. Without in any way seeking to

deny the efforts of the young Schaft, it is more plausible to assume that there were broader social processes in American society which help to account for the American acceptance of the rugby rather than the soccer version of football.

In this connection it is important to note that the early development of both soccer and rugby in the English public schools involved a number of processes, including the imposition of stricter restrictions on the kinds of physical force that it was legitimate to use, so that, at least by comparison with the earlier forms of folk football, both soccer and rugby were beginning to develop as relatively non-violent sports. However, it is clear that, of the two, it was rugby which allowed the greater use of physical force. During the early meetings of the fledgling Football Association, for example, the advocates of the rugby code objected strongly to the introduction of the rule which prohibited "hacking" - that is, kicking the shins of one's opponents - claiming that "hacking" was essential if an element of pluck was to be retained in the game, and that the prohibition of hacking would "emasculate" football (Dunning and Sheard, 1979, p.110-11).

The fact that it was rugby which allowed the greater use of physical force - in a word, that rugby was a "tougher" or more violent game - is an important clue to understanding why it was that rugby rather than soccer came to form the basis of the American game. In this context, it is important to remember that sport is always related to the wider society of which it is a part, and during the 1860s and 1870s - that is, the period when soccer and rugby were beginning to become more clearly differentiated in England, and when the rugby version was being taken up in the United States - America was, by comparison with England, a relatively violent society. To make this point is not to boast about the higher level of "civilization" in England, but simply to recognise that at that time America was still a relatively new society, and one which was at a stage of state formation which was, at least in some respects, comparable to that in Western Europe at a much earlier period. In nineteenth century America, as in the European Middle Ages, the state was relatively weak (Murphy, Williams and Dunning, 1990, p.198). In addition to the relative newness of the American state, a further reason for its relative weakness lay in the dominance of bourgeois groups in the United States and the associated "hegemonic" force in America of *laissez-faire* values which limited the penetration of

the state as deeply into the social fabric as was generally the case in Western Europe. One central aspect of the weakness of the mid-nineteenth century American state was that its hold on the monopoly of violence was relatively insecure and it was common - as it had been at an earlier period in the development of Western European societies - for people to carry arms . In short, the level of internal pacification of American society as a whole was, by comparison with late nineteenth century England, relatively low. The use of violence was both more common and, at least within certain limits and within certain contexts - one of which was sport - more acceptable.

Given this situation it is perhaps not surprising that it was rugby rather than soccer which was taken up in America, for rugby almost certainly had a greater degree of consonance with the dominant norms and values regarding masculinity - and in particular the then prevailing aggressive aspects of masculinity - in American society in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is significant that the game which was developed within the American college system provided even greater opportunities than did rugby - and considerably greater opportunities than did soccer - for the expression of violent behaviour by males, not in the form of unlicensed or uncontrolled violence, but in the form of socially sanctioned violence as expressed in violently aggressive "body contact". This was, perhaps, particularly the case in the early years of the development of American football, when not only tackling and blocking but also "slugging" - that is the punching of opponents - were apparently accepted as a legitimate part of the game. Other relatively violent tactics such as the "flying wedge" also formed part of the game at that time. This tactic involved two lines of players joined to form a V, each player except the foremost hanging on to the one in front and charging at full speed with the ball-carrier protected in their midst. Opponents would often bounce off the flying wedge when they tried to halt its progress, and sometimes received serious injuries. In 1905, no fewer than eighteen college players were killed and a further 159 were seriously injured in American football matches (Gardner, 1974, pp.99-100). That the American colleges generated a concept of masculinity which involved the acceptance of levels of violence in sport which were not always acceptable within the wider society is indicated by the fact that after a particularly bloody game between Pennsylvania and Swarthmore in

1905, President Roosevelt threatened to prohibit the game by national decree. One response to this presidential intervention was the introduction of the forward pass, a move which not only moved the American game decisively away from its English roots, but which, in the words of Riesman and Denney (1951, p.313), “gentled and at the same time speeded” the game by eliminating the bulldozing of the mass plays. Although American football today is a much less violent game than it was in the late nineteenth century it remains, at least by British standards, a relatively violent sport and indeed the relatively high level of violence which still characterises the modern game is recognised by both proponents and antagonists of the game. Even today, proponents of what is now a relatively pacified form of American football list amongst what they see as the positive features of the game its bellicosity and its similarities to actual warfare and the pain and self-sacrifice which it requires, whilst injury becomes what Guttmann (1978, p.121) has called “a certificate of virility, a badge of courage”. American football remains the arena *par excellence* in which a young man can demonstrate his masculinity. What is true today was even more so in the eastern colleges in the late nineteenth century.

It was, then, rugby rather than soccer which was adopted in the American college system. However, as Riesman and Denney have pointed out (1951, p.313), it quickly became clear that American players “either did not want to, or could not, play rugby according to the English rules”. Drawing upon Walter Camp’s and Lorin F Deland’s *Football*, published in 1896, Riesman and Denney suggest that one reason why the game changed in the course of its development in America was that there were a number of ambiguities in the English rugby rules of the time and that these gave rise to problems of interpretation, especially as the Americans had no relevant traditions or more experienced players to whom they could turn for guidance.

One such problem of interpretation concerned English rule number nine, which stated that a touchdown is when a player, “putting his hand on the ball in touch or in goal, stops it so that it remains dead, or fairly so”. The ambiguity of the phrase “fairly so” was, they suggest, increased by the preceding rule which stated that the ball is dead “when it rests absolutely motionless on the ground”.

A further problem, according to Riesman and Denney, was that the English

rules included what was in effect a legal fiction. They note that an offensive runner was allowed to carry the ball, but only if he should happen to be standing behind the scrum at the moment the ball came back out to him. A deliberate “heel out” of the ball was not permitted, and the English rules appear to have assumed that the difference between an intentional and an unintentional heel-out would be clear to everyone.

British players, they suggest, were able to tolerate such ambiguities not only because many of them had played a personal part in developing the rules of the game, but also because there were certain traditions and shared understandings concerning the meaning of the rules. Amateur playing in England at that time was restricted to a limited number of colleges and other institutions, and any differences concerning the interpretation of the rules could quickly be resolved by a discussion between the two captains. However, these conditions did not apply in America for the rules were diffused to America without the traditions and tacit understandings which accompanied them in England. In addition, the development of football etiquette in America was still in its infancy.

Americans responded to this situation by seeking to define the rules more precisely and, in so doing, they began to reshape the game along American lines. Thus, for example, players were assigned to the legalized task of picking up and tossing the ball back out of the scrum. This led to the development of the role of the centre, and the centring operation. This in turn led to other problems, such as defining the situation as one of “scrummage” or “non-scrummage”, as well as the question of the legality of passing the ball back to intended runners. These developments led to the abandonment of the English “set scrum” and the construction of a line of scrimmage across the field, with play being set in motion by snapping the ball.

Riesman and Denney also suggest that the Americans became impatient with the fact that it was possible for a team which was ahead to adopt tactics which would ensure that it retained possession of the ball until the end of the period. This, they suggest (1951, p.316-7), ran up against “a pronounced American taste for action in sports”, with the problem being resolved by the introduction of the minimum yardage-gain rule in 1882 which ensured the frequent interchange of the ball between sides.

Riesman and Denney summarize the nub of their argument concerning the early development of American football as follows:

The Americans, in order to solve the heel-out problem, set in motion a redesign of the game that led ultimately to timed centring from a temporarily fixed line of scrimmage. Emphasis completely shifted from the kicking game; it also shifted away from the combined kicking and running possible under Rugby rules; it shifted almost entirely in the direction of an emphasis on ball-carrying. Meanwhile, to achieve this emphasis, the game made itself vulnerable to slowdowns caused by one team's retention of the ball ... There is evidence that even if players had not objected to such slowdowns, the spectators would have raised a shout. The yardage rule was the way this crisis was met (1951, p.316-7).

In general terms, the Riesman-Denney thesis makes a useful contribution towards understanding the development of American football. For example, it is reasonable to suggest, as Riesman and Denney do, that there is considerable scope for innovation where a cultural practice - in this case rugby - is diffused from one society to another and where the rules governing that practice are ambiguous or otherwise unclear. It is also reasonable to suggest that where such ambiguities do exist, they are likely to be resolved in the form of new rules which reflect more closely the society to which they have been transported than the society from which they have come. In this way, then, a game emerged which was, in a number of respects, distinctively American.

However, whilst the main thrust of their argument is acceptable, it may be suggested that the Riesman-Denney thesis could usefully be supplemented by a number of other arguments. In particular, it may be suggested that if we wish to understand the social sources of American exceptionalism in sport, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of the relationship between Britain and America. Of particular importance in this regard is the fact that the United States was not only an ex-colony of Britain, but it was also the first colony to gain independence from Britain. This close but particular relationship with Britain no doubt helps to explain why the English game of rugby was initially played in the eastern colleges, but it is also an important consideration in explaining why the rule changes introduced by the Americans resulted in a game which became progres-

sively unlike the English game in which it had its origins. In other words, it is suggested that status rivalry with the former colonial power was one of the key processes which lay behind the development of a game which eventually came to have nationally distinct rules which marked it out not only as distinctively American but, by the same token, as distinctively non-British.

It is interesting to note that a similar process can be observed in relation to baseball, another sport which is often considered distinctively American but which, as we noted earlier, probably has its origins in the English game of rounders. In order for the game to come to be seen as distinctively American, it was necessary for those involved in developing the game to sever any possible link with the English game, and also to establish an American origin. Within this context, it is not difficult to see the function of the still widely held myth that Abner Doubleday created the game in Cooperstown, New York; as Markovits (1990, p.246) has noted, the Doubleday myth “was to squelch forever the British claim that baseball was a descendant of rounders”. Similar considerations underlay the announcement by the President of the National League in 1889 that “patriotism and research” had established beyond doubt the American origins of baseball, an announcement that was greeted by three hundred prominent baseball enthusiasts, including Mark Twain, with chants of “No rounders” (Cited in Markovits, 1990, p.246). One can only adequately understand such developments by locating them within the very particular context of Anglo-American post-colonial relationships.

It may be, too, that other forms of rivalry played an important part in the development of the rules of American football. As we noted earlier, a number of elite eastern schools - Princeton, Columbia, Harvard and Yale - met at Springfield, Massachusetts in 1876 in an attempt to regularize the rules of the game. The eastern schools continued to dominate the game until the late 1880s, when the universities of the Middle West began, in the words of Guttmann (1978, p.129) “to throw their weight around”. This shift in the centre of power of the game was followed shortly afterwards by another challenge to those groups which had dominated the early development of the game. There were ethnic and also class dimensions to this challenge to the established groups, and although Riesman and Denney note these processes, they appear not to appreciate their full

significance for the development of the game.

As the centre of power in the game began to move away from the eastern colleges, so the game began to attract players from a wider variety of ethnic and class backgrounds. Riesman and Denney (1951, p.129) point out that the shift in the pattern of player names on the All-American Football Teams provides an index of the changing ethnic significance of football in the period from 1889. In that year, all but one of the names suggested Anglo-Saxon origins. This Anglo-Saxon dominance was, however, soon to be challenged as, from the mid-1890s, Irish and then Jewish, Polish and Italian names became increasingly common on the All-American Team. Moreover, along with this changing pattern of ethnic participation, there was also a changing pattern of involvement along class lines, with a growing number of young men from relatively humble social origins beginning to achieve success in a game which had formerly been dominated by the upper class eastern colleges.

In the last years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries, therefore, the centre of power in American football was beginning to shift away from the eastern universities towards the Middle West, whilst the game was also being opened up to a growing number of players whose social origins were in the working class and who came from a growing variety of ethnic groups. In other words, the early domination of the game by eastern, higher class white Anglo-Saxon Protestants was increasingly being challenged. It may be significant that it was precisely at this time that we see the introduction of the rule which allowed the forward pass, a rule which is normally regarded as a landmark in the development of the game since it not only made what is perhaps the decisive break between American football and English rugby, but also made the game recognizably football in its modern, American, somewhat paradoxical sense, ie football in which the foot plays virtually no role. We know that this rule was introduced following the particularly violent game between Pennsylvania and Swarthmore in 1905, following which President Roosevelt insisted on reform. Significantly, the President called together representatives from Yale, Princeton and Harvard, that is, from precisely those elite eastern schools whose control of the game was increasingly being challenged. It is perhaps reasonable to hypothesize that the unexpected intervention of the President provided an opportunity for

the eastern colleges to reassert their former dominance and that, in the light of the growing threat to their power, they used the opportunity to mould the game in a decisive way, ie by pushing the game in a direction which expressed its distinctively American character, but an American character as defined not by recent and lower class immigrants from southern or eastern Europe, but by the old Anglo-Saxon elite.

As we have seen, American football in the early years of its development was a relatively violent sport, at least by comparison with English soccer and rugby. Moreover, and despite the fact that it is now less violent than it once was, it remains a relatively violent sport today. Insofar as the socially sanctioned violence which is associated with the game meets certain emotional needs of both players and spectators, then it is probably reasonable to argue, as Guttman does (1978, p.125), that this particular emotional function of the game is “primitive and even atavistic”. However, American football is also a modern game which expresses distinctively American concerns in its modern as well as in what we might call its “primitive” aspects. In what, then, does the game’s modernity consist?

According to Guttman (1978, p.15-55), modern sports may be differentiated from pre-modern sports by a number of characteristics, including a relatively high degree of specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification and the quest for records. It is clear that, in terms of all these criteria, American football is a highly modern game. In its social organization, for example, football has come to resemble, at least in some respects, other industries, for the production of a team involves a complex organization and staffing structure not dissimilar to those of many other highly bureaucratized industries. Centred on the team is a highly complex network of specialized relationships involving not just the players but also owners, managers, coaches, trainers, scouts, doctors, referees, groundstaff, spectators, journalists and many others.

The play itself also typically involves a high degree of specialization. Thus in contrast to traditional European folk games where there was little division of labour among the players - indeed, there was often no hard and fast distinction between the roles of player and spectator (Dunning and Sheard, 1979, p.33) - in modern American football the players are divided into twenty-two positions, not counting the “special” teams, which are

restricted to place-kicks, kick-offs, kick-off receptions and so forth. An exchange of roles is possible but not common and, where it does occur, is very temporary, with the players quickly readopting their accustomed role. Although a degree of specialization is characteristic of all modern sports, it is probably true to say that American football involves a higher degree of specialization than most, and certainly a higher degree of specialization than does soccer, where the play tends to be more fluid, with defensive players not uncommonly moving into attacking positions and vice-versa.

The high degree of specialization and rationalization of American football is also evident in other aspects of the play. Riesman and Denney, for example, have drawn attention to the highly organized structure of many set-plays in American football, and have contrasted this with the less highly structured, more open play characteristic of English rugby. "If we look ... at England" they say, "we see a game in which shouted signals and silent counting of timed movements are unknown - a game that seems to Americans to wander in an amorphous and disorderly roughhouse. Rugby, in the very home of the industrial revolution, seems pre-industrial, seems like one of the many feudal survivals that urbanization and industrialization have altered but not destroyed" (1951, p.321). We should perhaps note that many fans of soccer and rugby would no doubt claim that it is precisely the relatively fluid and less highly structured nature of those games which makes them so attractive for participants and spectators alike. However, whether one prefers the more highly structured play of American football or the less highly structured play of soccer or rugby, the contrast to which Riesman and Denney draw attention is certainly an interesting one.

There is one other respect in which, in terms of Guttmann's criteria, American football may be said to be a particularly modern game, and it is also a further respect in which it may be said to be particularly American. We refer here to the high level of quantification which is characteristic of football. Although, as Guttmann notes, the stress on teamwork is rather greater in the case of football than it is in the case of baseball, for example, so that it is difficult to attribute the result of a game to the actions of a single player, there are nevertheless numerous opportunities for the compilation of statistics in football. Thus football statistics routinely include information on yards per carry, total passing yardage, total running yardage and so forth. Books on successful teams invariably include won/lost records and

team standings, while biographies of outstanding players provide lists of individual records, making it possible to compare the records of different players. Although the structure of the game probably allows for less quantification than is the case in baseball, where the process has been taken to extremes - and in this way, suggests Guttman (1978, p.219), football may be less modern than is baseball - it is nevertheless the case that football, like baseball, involves a relatively high degree of quantification, and this, it might be noted, appears to be not only a general index of modernity, but also a particular obsession with American sports fans.

In this paper, we have examined some of the social sources of American exceptionalism in sport, and the way in which the Americans took the rugby code of football and developed from it their own nationally distinct game. It would, however, be quite wrong to imagine that soccer has never been played in the United States for, as we saw previously, the United States entered a team in the World Cup competition a full twenty years before England did so. Moreover, in the last two decades, there have been a number of attempts to establish the game as a professional sport in America, and in recent years the game has grown rapidly in popularity as a participant sport, though it remains relatively underdeveloped as a spectator sport and at the professional level.

However, in 1994, the United States hosted the soccer World Cup Finals. Claims were made in terms of new World Cup records being set in relation to tickets sold and cumulative audience figures, and one of the tangible legacies from this World Cup has been the creation of a new professional league. Some people associated with soccer in the United States clearly feel the World Cup has provided the basis for a rebirth of professional soccer in America. Thus Alan Rothenburg, President of the United States Soccer Federation, was moved to state that "Before long, soccer will take its rightful place among baseball, basketball, football and hockey, as the fifth professional sport in America" (Newsline, July 1994, p.2). It will indeed be interesting to see to what extent the situation changes as a result of this development.

Bibliography

Dunning, E, and Sheard, K, 1979, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, Martin Robertson, Oxford.

Gardner, P, 1974, *Nice Guys Finish Last*, Allen Lane, London.

Glanville, B, 1980, *The History of the World Cup*, Faber and Faber, London.

Greenberg, S, 1991, *The Guinness Olympic Fact Book*, Guinness Publishing, Middlesex.

Guttman, A, 1978, *From Ritual to Record*, Columbia University Press.

Lever, J, 1983, *Soccer Madness*, Chicago University Press, Chicago and London.

Mandell, R, 1984, *Sport: A Cultural History*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Markovits, A, 1990, 'The Other American Exceptionalism: Why is there no Soccer in the United States?', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7, No 2, 230-264.

Mason, T, (ed), 1989, *Sport in Britain: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Mason, T, 1986, 'Some Englishmen and Scotsmen Abroad: The Spread of World football', in Tomlinson, A and Whanel, G (eds), *Off the Ball: The Football World Cup*, Pluto Press, London and Sydney, pp.67-82.

Meisl, W, 1956, *Soccer Revolution*, The Sportsman's Book Club, London.

Murphy, P, Williams, J, and Dunning, E, 1990, *Football on Trial*, Routledge, London.

Newsline, 1994, World Cup Special Edition, July.

Riesman, D and Denney, R, 1951, 'Football in America: a Study in Cultural Diffusion', *American Quarterly*, 4,

Reiss, S A, 1991, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.

Soccer Industry Council of America, 1991, *Soccer Participation Survey*, SICA, Florida.

Sugden, J, 1994, 'USA and the World Cup: American Nativism and the Rejection of the People's Game', in Sugden, J and Tomlinson, A (eds), *Hosts and Champions: Soccer Cultures, National Identities and the USA World Cup*, Arena, Aldershot, pp. 219-252.

Tomlinson, A, 1986, 'Going Global: The FIFA Story', in Tomlinson, A, and Whannel, G (eds), *Off the Ball: The Football World Cup*, Pluto Press, London and Sydney.

Union of International Associations, 1995, *Yearbook of International Organizations*, Vol 3, 1994-5, K G Saur, München.