



## Origins of Football and Rugby

Before 1850, sport only played a very small role in British society. In fact, even today's most popular game, football, was played by only the richest schoolboys around the nation. Rugby, and many other games we now know and love, were yet to be invented. Football and rugby are everywhere in modern British life and, even if we don't particularly like them, it is hard to escape their collective presence. So how did these sports begin?

Back in the early Victorian era, many public figures were worried about the state of school education and had concerns as to the behaviour of schoolboys. Despite strict punishments, it seemed that only their weekly games lessons got the best of them. Deciding it could help them understand the vital skills needed in life, headmasters believed that more physical education was needed.

An early form of football instantly became the most popular with school children everywhere. Each school decided on their own sets of rules and began to develop into teams and later they formed clubs. However, there was to be one major problem. When clubs began to organise fixtures, they found the other 'football' teams played with different rules. Some could pick up the ball, others argued on how many players should be allowed to play. To stop any further confusion, a meeting was arranged at a pub in London.

The meeting was the first of the Football Association. Eleven clubs joined together in 1863 and agreed upon a set of rules. These still are the basic rules of modern football. Despite this, one club called Blackheath was not supportive of the removal of one important law. This was the law on 'hacking'.

'Hacking' was the kicking of an opponent's shins in order to regain possession- considered, by some, to be a 'manly' interaction. Most teams were against the violence and were happy to see the rule taken out of the game. Annoyed, Blackheath began to develop their own code of football - Rugby.

Rugby was immediately popular and soon became the sport of choice in most British public schools. By 1871, rugby had its first international match between England and Scotland and had a lot more clubs than football. In response, Charles Alcock, the chairman of the FA, decided to create a new competition named after the Football Association. The FA Cup was born.

The tournament was an instant hit and by the start of the next decade had 62 teams competing. Some of the new teams involved were from the industrial north of England and featured local factory workers and miners. These players were incredibly skilful and liked to pass the ball rather than simply dribble like earlier sides did. After Blackburn Olympic won the cup in 1883, their victory was met with suspicion.

Many people were unhappy that the side was being paid to play. Before then, football and other sports, like rugby, were meant to be played for the sake of playing and not for financial profit. However, new clubs were having to miss work to play and so needed to be paid in order to compete. Eventually, the FA decided to allow 'professionals' to play alongside the older, more established clubs.

Rugby had prided itself on being an amateur game, but by 1895 it too had a problem with professionals. Northern sides had increasingly started to make payments to players, and this divided opinions. Those in favour of paying players split and formed the 'Northern Union' which later became The Rugby Football League.

Despite their struggles, both football and rugby continued to grow into the next century. Football managed to reach every corner of the world and now boasts more supporters than any other sport. Rugby has also grown and kept a loyal following in nations like Wales, England, Scotland and even as far as Australia and New Zealand. One thing is for sure, football and rugby's incredible beginnings should not be forgotten.



## RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. How many clubs joined the Football Association in 1863?
2. What was 'hacking'?
3. Which two countries played the first international rugby match?
4. Why did some players need to be paid?
5. Which team won the FA cup in 1883?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

- E** What is the role of the question in the opening paragraph?
- V** What does the word despite mean? Can you write a new sentence using the word?
- V** What is the main difference between a professional and an amateur?
- I** True or false? Rugby has more supporters than football. Explain your answer using evidence from the text.
- I** Why?

Answers:

1. Eleven
2. The kicking of an opponent's shins in order to regain possession.
3. Scotland and England
4. Because they were having to miss work.
5. Blackburn Olympic

E: The question establishes a link between the author and the reader. It encourages the reader to think about what they already know about the origins of the sport.

V: definition: without being affected by something. Accept any correct usage in the sentences.

V: Professionals are paid whereas amateurs do not.

I: False, evidence should reference the fact that Football has 'more supporters than any other sport.'

I: Because it was considered to be 'manly' and the team thought this was a positive.