

world football, women's football, media, culture

The Global Game

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An ancestry of passing acquaintance

Soon the wistfulness of Saturday mornings will return. Listening to Scottish-football broadcasts over the Internet—a new season in the [Bank of Scotland Scottish Premier League](http://www.scotprem.com/) (<http://www.scotprem.com/>) starts on 30 July—puts us in mind of ancestry and separation. Sometime in the past, decisions of forebears cut us off from roots in the border country, from the history of deep-seated animosities and, ultimately, from the game Scots are said to have exported and transformed into a passing art from its beginnings as “dribble ’til you die.” [The Turnbells](http://www.turnbullclan.com/) (<http://www.turnbullclan.com/>) occupied land in

the [Rule Valley](http://www.bedruleparish.btinternet.co.uk/) (<http://www.bedruleparish.btinternet.co.uk/>), and it is unknown if they attach or have attached themselves to a particular football team. Our queries in this regard went unanswered last year. Evidence exists from multiple sources, however, that Turnbells traditionally were a troublesome lot—hooligan prototypes, if you will. The surname, recorded for the first time in 1315 (one year after [Bannockburn](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/britain/mid_battle_bburn.shtml) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/britain/mid_battle_bburn.shtml>), occurs frequently in the relevant editions of *Pitcairns Criminal Trials*. As for relations with neighbors, clan rivalries and the repulsion of border incursions make interesting reading in sources such as *The Clan Turnbull*:

It is recorded that twelve castles situated in the valley of the Rule were in 1545 burnt, plundered and dismantled by the English, to whom the Turnbells were most obnoxious. With all their faults, they were deadly enemies to the English and whenever a raid took place on the middle marshes, the Turnbells were always to be found.



A Turnbull crest is available as a lovely piece of embroidery.

According to Scottish folk singer [Karine Polwart](#), rugby is the game of choice in the Borders. “Football is for Northerners and English people!” she writes (personal correspondence, 22 August 2005).



A painting of the borderlands, copyright © 2001 **William Turnbull**

In Scotland as a whole, the thread of distaste toward the English continues, although not on the order of blood and soil ([note 1](#)). Even though Scottish football moves on in a beleaguered state, pride of history and the spirit of one-upsmanship remain when eyes look south.

The spirit is well presented in a two-part documentary that aired on [Radio Scotland](#) (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/radioscotland/>) last month, *It Was Us*, hosted by **Billy Kay**. The title refers to the Scots' claim to have been modernizers of association football, having advanced it in the 19th century from a crude dribbling game as practiced in England public schools to an aesthetically pleasing mix of players creating space and passing. Special notice in this development goes to [Queen's Park](#) (<http://www.queensparkfc.co.uk/>) of Glasgow, formed in 1867 by members of the YMCA. **Richard McBrearty**, curator of the [Scottish Football Museum](#) (<http://www.scottishfootballmuseum.org.uk/>) at Hampden Park in Glasgow, tells Kay about the shift from an English to Scottish ethos:

The training that these young gentlemen [in England] were getting was really to become leaders, to lead within the British Empire, whether to become generals in an army or to become a major diplomat. You had to show your individual worth. So when it came to the playing field it was the same ethos. You didn't pass the ball. That was

passing the buck—it was a cowardly act. It was all about individual prowess on the park, and Scotland is completely different. Through Queen's Park, you actually get, really, a passing game based around almost a working-class concept of coming together . . . whereby if you didn't have the advantage, you passed the ball on to your teammate who would then carry the attack on. That's the very, very important difference between early football in England and early football in Scotland.

When Scottish businessmen developed concerns abroad—in Sweden, Spain and South America, among other places—they took this passing game with them. Influence from Scotland has also been apparent in Australia, Canada, China and Africa, with football often encouraged by Presbyterian missionaries. **T. Jack Thompson** (<http://www.div.ed.ac.uk/jackthompson.html>) of the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh charts the place of football in Malawi, formerly known as Nyassaland.

The first footballs were taken out to Malawi at roughly the same time that Rangers and Celtic were being formed [1870s and 1880s], and everywhere you go, even in the smallest, poorest village, you will see little balls made up of paper wrapped together with vines from the trees and kids kicking balls about.

This historical turn has been natural with negative influences prominent on the landscape. In late May, the Enterprise and Culture Committee of Scottish Parliament, which is conducting a **formal inquiry** (<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/enterprise/inquiries/sfi/ec-sfi-home.htm>) into the future of the Scottish game, clashed with the stewards of the **Scottish Football Association** (<http://www.scottishfa.co.uk/>). Parliament has been examining ways to better organize the professional and grassroots games, having stated in an interim report that “the status quo is not the best possible option for the structure of Scottish football.” SFA chief executive **David Taylor** warned parliamentarians to tread

carefully, noting FIFA regulations barring political interference in football's governing structures. Taylor advocates more public investment in the game rather than more committee meetings: "[P]ublic sector support for football has fallen in almost inverse proportion to the time spent by politicians discussing football's problems" (note 2).

Significant debates have been occurring related to one subset of problems: the lack of adequate playing grounds. Given our mental picture of Scotland, characterized by green space and unbroken horizons of heather and wildflower, it is hard to reconcile the shortage. Of course, the challenge arises in the populated areas, with advocates such as the [National Playing Fields Association Scotland](http://www.npfa.co.uk/content/npfascotland/index.html) (<http://www.npfa.co.uk/content/npfascotland/index.html>) having to fend off incursions from developers. In one case, 22 pitches in Paisley, near Glasgow, could be sacrificed for a rail link from Glasgow Airport. While noting successful preservation campaigns, NPFA committee member **Stewart McLachlan** refers to the "secret shame . . . that deprived areas of the country were more likely to lose their playing fields than affluent towns and suburbs where people were more aware of the threat and could organise opposition better" (note 3).



The much-maligned red-blaes pitch, here at Graeme High School in Falkirk, Scotland. (<http://www.sol.co.uk/forthvalley/graeme-hs/>)

These local developments have broader implications, according to longtime observers of the Scottish professional game. **Craig Brown**, former Scotland manager, compares Scotland to Norway, which with slightly less population has proven more successful at placing players in top leagues such as the English Premiership. "I understood a major reason why this was happening when I visited Norway and saw the fantastic indoor facilities there," says Brown. "Almost every village has an artificial indoor facility. There were 12 full-size indoor pitches. Norway also have a permanent training

camp in La Manga that they can use during the winter. We haven't had that foresight" (note 4).



Crews on 18 July begin preparing Dunfermline's East End Park for a new invention: grass. (www.dafc.co.uk)

The "extreme north," including Scotland and Scandinavia, "fights the almost Arctic elements to provide some welcome to civilization," writes **Will Durant**. But Scotland, at least, appears to have been slower than others at welcoming artificial surfaces and indoor "mini-pitches" advocated by UEFA. Momentum has been gathering for plastic turf even in Hampden Park, the national stadium, and **Dunfermline Athletic** (<http://www.dafc.co.uk/>) of the SPL agreed to have XL Turf installed with UEFA seed money. Alas, the SPL board objected to the sur-

face and has forced Dunfermline to remove the recently laid plastic and to lay real grass at an estimated cost of £600,000. "This makes you think that, if **Henry Ford** had been born in Scotland, we'd still be riding around on horses," said Dunfermline chairman **John Yorkston** (note 5).

Despite the political intransigence and dissatisfaction with international results, Scotland remains a reliable caretaker of the game's spirit. The **Homeless World Cup** (<http://www.streetsoccer.org/en/tournament/edinburgh05/>) recently concluded in Edinburgh in a specially constructed facility in Princes Street Gardens. Scotland truly came to the rescue of the three-year-old event, with organizers having to scramble late last year after abandoning New York as a first-choice venue due to concerns over visa restrictions. The Scotland team emerged for its matches to the thumps of The Proclaimers' "500



Before a semifinal with Italy, the eventual champion, on 23 July. (Copyright © 2005 **Mark Shipperlee**)

Miles” and finished fourth. Earlier in July, the Shetland Islands hosted the **NatWest Island Games** (<http://www.shetland2005.info/>), including women’s and men’s football competitions.

The bonds of clubs and history remain strong. Rich anecdotal detail is readily available surrounding the first entry of a British team, **Hibernian** of Edinburgh (<http://www.hibernianfc.co.uk/>), into the European Cup competition in 1955. Before a second-leg home fixture against German champions Rot-Weiss Essen, late replacement **Jock Buchanan** “was at his mum’s house eating two helpings of mince and tatties when he was told he was needed at Easter Road.” This tidbit comes from **Lawrie Reilly**, one of the Famous Five Hibernian forward line that also included **Gordon Smith, Bobby Johnstone, Willie Ormond** and **Eddie Turnbull**. Now 82, Turnbull was the first British player to score in the European Cup. He recalls the presence of soldiers from the



The “Famous Five” of Hibernian FC.
(www.hibernianfc.co.uk)

British Army of the Rhine in the first leg at Georg Melches Stadium on 14 September 1955, as well as devastation that remained in Essen from Royal Air Force bombing runs during the Second World War. “[W]e had the biggest support because a lot of British troops were still in Germany,” says Reilly. “Most of the terracing fans were in uniform, that’s the one thing that stands out even now, that we got good support

from the Tommies” ([note 6](#)). At a friendly match to commemorate the 50th anniversary—held in Georg Melches Stadium on 23 July—Hibs reprised its earlier victory, 3–0. They helped make Turnbells everywhere again feel part of football.

Notes

1. Such generalities could in no way be substantiated, but we are attracted to the sweeping characterization from historian **Will Durant**: “The Scots, anciently Celtic, mediævally mingled with Irish, Norse, Angles, Saxons, and Normans, had by 1500 merged into a people narrow as their peninsula in feelings and ideas, deep as their mists in superstition and mythology, proud as their promontories, rough as their terrain, impetuous as their torrents; at

once ferocious and tender, cruel and brave, and always invincible" (*The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin, 1300–1564*, vol. 6 of *The Story of Civilization* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957], 602).

2. **Rob Robertson**, "Taylor Wants More Action and Less Interference from Politicians," *The Herald* (Glasgow), 1 June 2005.

3. **Martin Hannan**, "Fielding Questions," *Scotland on Sunday*, 13 March 2005 «<http://www.selfbuildland.co.uk/development-threat.htm>».

4. **Paul Newman**, "Fading Power of Scotland in Dire Need of International Rescue," *The Independent* (U.K.), 23 March 2005.

5. **Mark Wilson**, "Fever Pitch for Campaigners Ahead of Vote," *The Herald* (Glasgow), 10 March 2005. In a column in the *Sunday Herald*, **Ian Bell** takes a positive view of advancements: "For Scottish schoolboys in the 1960s, ironically enough, grass was sometimes hard to come by. Conspicuous among the street furniture of the average housing scheme was a doleful, Presbyterian sign attached to every patch of green: No Football. By Order. You played on tarmac, on concrete, on gravel. If you were allowed use of the local park, you were granted a rutted, oddly sloping dogs' toilet. In the west, a lot of football was conducted on hellish, lacerating stuff they called red blaes" ("Artificial Argument Should Be Settled by Players," 13 March 2005).

6. For more on the Hibernian story and the Turnbull connection, see **Richard Wilson**, "European Union," *The Times* (London), 17 July 2005 «<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2093-1697588,00.html>»; and **Colin Leslie**, "Turnbull Proud to Be a Euro Pioneer," *The Scotsman*, 22 July 2005 «<http://sport.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=1664912005>».

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