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Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL AND IRISH SOCIETY DURING THE INTER-WAR PERIOD, 1918-1939

by

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Abbreviations

IFA – The Irish Football Association, formed in 1880 in Belfast.

LFA – The Leinster Football Association, formed in 1892 in Dublin.

Co. Antrim FA – The County Antrim Football Association.

GAA – Gaelic Athletic Association, formed in 1884 in Thurles.

FAI – Football Association of Ireland, formed in Dublin in 1921.

IRFU – Irish Rugby Football Union, formed in 1879 with the amalgamation of the Irish Football Union and the Northern Football Union of Ireland.

FIFA – *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*, formed in 1904.

IFAB – International Football Association Board.

FFF – *Fédération Française de Football*, formed in 1919 in Paris.

FAIFS – Football Association of the Irish Free State (the title used by the FAI between 1923 and 1937).

English FA – The Football Association, formed in 1863 in London.

Scottish FA/SFA – The Scottish Football Association, formed in Glasgow in 1873.

IOC – International Olympic Committee, formed in 1894.

IRA – Irish Republican Army.

IRB – Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Dundalk GNR – Dundalk Great Northern Railway Football Club.

MFA – Munster Football Association, formed in 1901.

CFA – Connacht Football Association, formed in 1928.

GAU – Guinness Athletic Union.

IAAA – Irish Amateur Athletic Association.

PRONI – Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.

UCD – University College Dublin.

NACA – National Athletic and Cycling Association.

USFSA – Union of French Societies of Athletic Sports.

Introductory Notes

1. The organisational structure of association football in Ireland consisted of three distinct levels of participation for players. The senior level was the highest stage on which the game was played, and was theoretically a national structure. Before the split of 1921 the Irish League served as the senior league competition, consisting of six teams from Ulster and two from Dublin. While the Irish League continued as the senior competition in the territory governed by the IFA, the League of Ireland became the senior league competition in the southern twenty-six counties after the split. Below the senior game existed the intermediate level, which in southern Ireland consisted of the Dublin-based Leinster League and the Cork-based Munster Senior League. This structure consisted of emergent clubs that aspired to the senior level and the reserve teams of established senior clubs. On occasion it was possible for intermediate clubs to be elected to the League of Ireland, while a strong performance in the national intermediate cup could result in access to the senior FAI/Free State Cup for the following season. The third tier on the organisational structure of the sport was the junior level. This was essentially the ground-level entry point for the plethora of clubs that emerged throughout the country during the inter-war period, and the majority of clubs participated in regional and local competitions within the construct of the junior game.
2. The Irish League, established in 1890, is the senior league competition under the auspices of the IFA in Belfast, and is the second oldest national league structure in the world behind the English Football League. The Irish Cup, established in 1881, is the annual knock-out competition held under the auspices of the IFA. The League of Ireland, established in 1921, is the senior league structure in the territory governed by the FAI. It was established by eight clubs from Dublin after the split between the IFA and the LFA, and was organised throughout the inter-war period with up to twelve teams competing at certain junctures. Between the years of 1923 and 1937 the League of Ireland was referred to as the Free State League. The FAI Cup, established in 1921, is the annual knock-out competition organised by the FAI. Like the League of Ireland, it came into existence after the split, and was referred to as the Free State Cup in the years between 1923 and 1937.

3. The Home Championship was a tournament that was played annually between the national associations that held membership of the International Association Football Board (IFAB), namely Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.
4. The International Football Association Football Board (IFAB), or International Board, was an administrative structure that oversaw the organisation of international football in the British Isles, and considered alterations to the rules of the sport. It consisted of two representatives from each of the four British associations (the Football Association of England, the Scottish Football Association, the Welsh Football Association and the Irish Football Association). The two remaining seats on the board were allocated to representatives of FIFA.
5. The Football Association of Ireland is referred to as the FAI within the text relating to the period between its formation in 1921 and 1923, at which point it becomes the FAIFS. The association is referred to as the FAIFS in discussion relating to the period between 1923 and 1937. The association is once again referred to as the FAI in the text relating to the period between 1937 and 1939.
6. The League of Ireland Shield competition was a secondary tournament organised to fill the calendar of the association football season (September to April) and was generally carried out after the completion of the league. The shield typically saw league members play against each other in a league system that consisted of both single game formats and home and away formats at different junctures.
7. Attendance figures used to portray the popularity of association football throughout this thesis are generally representative of crowds that attended league games. Attendances at FAI/Free State Cup fixtures were often higher as the thrill of knock-out football attracted larger crowds, although in the context of examining the size of crowds it is felt that figures pertaining to league attendances are more representative of the sport's popular appeal.

Introduction

The historiography of Irish sport is an emergent area of academic study that has been relatively underdeveloped and overlooked. When Ireland's unique sporting culture is considered in conjunction with the prominence of sport within the lives of the Irish people over generations this is quite surprising, and although great strides have been taken in the field during the course of the last twenty years further examination of the relationship between sport and society is certainly warranted. Paul Rouse describes the manner in which issues relating to church and state took precedence over social concerns in much of the modern historical analysis produced during the twentieth century, with most references to the history of Irish sport tending to focus on the political characterisation of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and its prominence as a cultural institution.[1] Even within the remit of social history considerably more scholarly attention has been devoted to the study of literature, art and music in commentary on leisure and pastime, despite the fact that such entertainment forms offer relatively narrow viewpoints from the perspective of the educated and elite classes. As Mike Cronin correctly asserts, without diminishing the importance of the arts as areas of historical research, the study of sport affords an opportunity for academics to gain a broader and more inclusive insight into the processes that shaped wider society, as the social practices and routines of the masses can be observed through the window of popular engagement with sporting activity.[2] In this context sports history can provide a less conventional portrayal of past societies through the eyes of those whose voices have been lost with the passing of time, and the body of academic work that has emerged within the field in recent years is a striking testament to its growing importance as a scholarly endeavour.

While a popular fascination with sport has led writers to produce related historical commentaries from the time that rising literacy rates provided an expanding audience for such accounts, much of the discourse within works concerning Irish sport during the late nineteenth and twentieth century has been tinged with implicit bias and has been

[1] Paul Rouse, review of Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: the case of Westmeath*, (review no.679), at http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/679 [27 June 2013].
[2] Mike Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, soccer and Irish identity since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), p. 19.

created under the influence of certain agendas. Writers typically approached their assignments from the perspective of supporters or members of sporting clubs or associations, and as such much of the work that emerged was primarily concerned with promotion or acclamation of particular sports and the bodies that oversaw their organisation. For example, the work of a number of prominent GAA writers throughout the twentieth century concerned itself with espousing the virtuousness of Gaelic games in their perceived role as sporting representations of a distinct Irish culture without critical assessment of the organisation's history or policies. Likewise, the sparse commentary that was available on association football generally took the form of self-serving celebratory commemorations of significant anniversaries or milestones achieved by clubs and administrative bodies. A more structured and objective approach to the historical study of Irish sport began to emerge during the 1990s when the pioneering work of a number of scholars laid the foundation for the development of the field as a serious and respected academic pursuit. Individuals such as Alan Bairner, John Sugden and Mike Cronin produced outstanding publications which cover the unique relationship between Irish sport and politics. These works focused on issues surrounding the cultural and sectarian characterisation of certain games, while the 1990s also saw a reappraisal of a GAA history that had become slanted over the course of the twentieth century through Paul Rouse's interpretation of the organisation's exclusionary policy.

Although the emergent historiography of Irish sport is based on the more established British model, it does differ from its international counterpart in some aspects.[3] While issues surrounding class are very much to the fore in the analysis of British historians, the question of nationalism casts a particularly long shadow over discourses on Irish sport. This is resultant of the existence of a distinct Irish sporting culture that is the consequence of the emergence of codified games during an era of nationalist agitation against the forces of imperialist rule. As the nationalist push for independence from Britain gathered pace during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sports and games, like many areas of Irish society, were duly impacted upon, and the cultural representations that became attached to particular Irish sports will be discussed at length within this thesis. The historiography of Irish sport certainly has much in common with the British model however, and concerns described by historians such as Martin Johnes,

[3] Rouse, review of Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: the case of Westmeath*.

Mike Huggins, Douglas Booth and Tony Collins, in their assessment of the characterisation of British sports history also apply to the case of Ireland. Johnes argues that issues surrounding class, economics and a sense of place and identity feature prominently within the narrative of historical analysis of sporting processes in Britain, and these factors also invariably frame discussion on the history of Irish sport.[4] Organised Irish sports were in effect a product of the British model that had been borne of a post-industrial sporting revolution that has been covered by countless sports historians. This can be seen in the identical administrative structures and processes that British and Irish sports shared, and in some regards even Irish sporting bodies that professed nationalist ideologies can be considered as progenies of their British counterparts.

As Rouse once again states, Irish sports history gradually gained acceptance as a legitimate scholarly undertaking early in the new millennium when noted historians such as Vincent Comerford and Diarmaid Ferriter included discussion on the political, cultural and social significance of sport within broader surveys of modern Irish history.[5] The last decade or so has also seen the emergence of an expanding academic community that has provided subsequent examinations of Irish sport within the context of the historiography established by individuals such as Bairner, Sugden, Cronin and Rouse. Within this context the works of scholars such as Paul Hassan, William Murphy, Dónal McAnnallen, Cormac Moore and Tom Hunt, among others, have added substantially to the field in their quality and scope. While some have built upon the earlier research of their contemporaries, others such as Hunt, Liam O'Callaghan, Conor Curran and Richard McElligot have tended to focus on regional histories which provide detailed analysis of the processes that have shaped both sporting structures and local societies in various parts of the country. Works such as these undoubtedly serve as considerable contributions to the wider genre.

Recent research in the field of sports history has also benefited from funding programmes that have highlighted its growing mainstream acceptance and have led to the publication of a substantial catalogue of ground-breaking work. In the prelude to the 125th anniversary of its formation, the GAA exhibited an admirable willingness to

[4] Martin Johnes, 'United Kingdom', in D. Levinsen and K. Christensen (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of World Sport*, (Great Barrington, 2005), pp 2-5; Martin Johnes, Historiography of sport in Britain, article available at https://swansea.academia.edu/MartinJohnes [2 Feb. 2014].
[5] Rouse, review of Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: the case of Westmeath*.

promote an objective history of the organisation in providing funding to the collaborative GAA Oral History Project. This was done with a view to gathering information, perceptions and outlooks from those connected with Gaelic games across generational, geographic, demographic and gender divides. Through the interpretation of interviews and empirical research Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse have produced two works from the project to date, the 2009 title *The GAA: a people's history* and the 2011 study *The GAA: county by county*, both of which are unprecedented in their commentary on the social characterisation of the organisation. Likewise, funding from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of Arts, Heritage and Community have allowed Cronin, along with Roisín Higgins, to produce a fascinating publication on Ireland's sporting heritage, which examines the history of Irish sport in the context of the spaces in which games were, and continue to be, played. Such undertakings, along with the aforementioned contributions of others, are evidence of the prominent position that sports history has come to occupy within wider academia during recent years, although it must be stated that the genre remains a relatively new research area that affords endless possibilities for further development.

It is within this framework that this thesis has been produced, and it is hoped that the content within the following chapters will stand as a worthy contribution to Irish sports history and to the historiography of association football in particular. Despite the recent emergence of sports history as a mainstream area of academic research, the historiography of association football in Ireland is relatively sparse and is lacking in depth. While historians such as Tony Mason, James Walvin, Robert Jeffrey, David Goldblatt and David Winner, among many others, have produced numerous works on the early development of the sport in Britain, similar undertakings have yet to be attempted within the Irish context. The exception to this assertion is the commentary provided by Neal Garnham in his study of the early development of the three main football codes found in Ireland in his 1999 publication, *The origins and development of Irish football*, while he focuses predominantly on association football to great effect in the 2004 work, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*. Other telling contributions to the historiography of association football have been made by individuals such as the late Malcolm Brodie, particularly in his commemorative *One hundred years of Irish football*. Peter Byrne's 2012 publication, *Green is the colour: the story of Irish football* and David Needham's *Ireland's first real World Cup: the*

story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic football team of the same year serve as the most recent contributions to the field. While the work of Garnham and Brodie has tended to focus primarily on the north of the country, this thesis is more reflective of Byrne's line of enquiry in that it is predominantly concerned with charting the history of association football in the area that would become the Irish Free State, and later the Irish Republic, particularly after the seminal episode that led to the formation of the Football Association of Ireland in Dublin in 1921, and a lasting split that has defined the Irish game ever since.

The methodological approach that has been utilised in the construction of this thesis largely falls into the category of an empirical and analytical study of a single institution in the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), and the manner in which it interacted and developed relationships with an array of additional organisations, bodies and influences within the context of wider Irish society. From its contact with fellow association football bodies and those that governed other sporting codes within the unique Irish sporting landscape to relations with external forces, such as the state and the church, this project charts the development not only of association football as a game that was becoming increasingly popular in inter-war Ireland, but also that of the organisation that was responsible for fostering the sport. Such processes are observable at both a micro and macro scale, and throughout the period under review members of the Football Association of Ireland can be considered to have been involved in an exhausting battle to establish the organisation and the sport at a variety of levels. At national level the association was required to simultaneously entrench itself on two fronts. The first can be viewed within the context of the association's efforts to establish itself independently of its former parent body in the Irish Football Association (IFA) in Belfast, while secondly it was also forced to withstand sustained nationalistically-motivated ideological attacks from sections of society that felt association football was incompatible with the idyll of a post-independence Gaelic utopia. In addition, the structure of association football compelled the Football Association of Ireland to operate at an international scale, and in many ways the position of the organisation would come to be defined by the relations it enjoyed with its contemporaries across Europe, and beyond. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the organisation was required to instil a reverence for the association code within local communities, as failure to effectively do this would render its activities at national and international level

superfluous, and the success of the Football Association of Ireland as an institution was wholly dependent on its ability to effectively disseminate and develop the sport at local level.

Before beginning a discussion of association football and its position within Irish society during the inter-war period it is necessary to provide a background to the earlier history of Irish sport. Sport has always captivated the inhabitants of this island and formed an integral part of Irish culture. It has been evident in the annals of Irish history, from the games of the ancient festivals of Aonach Tailteann and the fables of Cú Chulainn to subsequent references to ball games that appeared across many centuries.[6] As was the case throughout the world, sport played a prominent role in entertaining the population, while serving as an outlet for the portrayal of social and cultural identification and self-expression. In the period before the cataclysmic Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century sports such as throwing contests, hurling, boxing, rowing, cricket, horse racing, animal blood sports, and indeed early incarnations of football were prominent components of a vibrant sporting culture. These games were typically disordered and informally organised however, and bore little resemblance to those in existence today. While the hunger, disease and emigration that was resultant of the famine decimated popular participation in sport throughout the country, the games that did survive were soon considered incompatible with what Cronin and Higgins describe as the 'rationality' of a Victorian society that was characterised by an increased propensity to regulate the lives and behavioural patterns of the population. As was the case in Britain the concept of time became important, and the emergence of schedules and routines effectively destroyed the archaic sporting processes that had previously existed. In addition, changing attitudes towards morality and religious devotion in the outlooks of Victorian elites and the Catholic hierarchy were also important influences in the emergence of new sporting structures.[7]

The values that framed this more ordered and structured Victorian society increased the importance of team sports, which were acclaimed for the role that they played in instilling discipline and a collective work ethic into the characters of young men that

[6] Neal Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of M.R. Peter's annual of Irish football 1880* (Belfast, 1999), p. 1.
[7] Mike Cronin & Roisín Higgins, *Places we play: Ireland's sporting heritage* (Cork, 2011), p. 29.

were being prepared for service to the empire.[8] The connection between the Irish middle-classes and the British education system ensured that this ideal of 'muscular Christianity' was transported to Ireland by pupils who attended prominent public schools in England, and from the mid-nineteenth century games such as rugby and cricket were becoming increasingly popular in Irish universities such as Trinity College Dublin, and beyond. Mike Cronin, in responding to an article written by Gerry Finn on Trinity College's influence on the development of Irish sport,[9] downplays the importance of such institutions as disseminators of sport in Ireland however. Cronin highlights the prominence of a variety of additional outlets and social variables in spreading and organising Irish sport, and it is clear that the development of games at both national and regional scales were a product of numerous intertwining factors.[10] By the 1870s associations such as the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) were emerging to organise and to regulate various sports on a national basis, while the same modernising processes, which Cronin and Higgins identify as increased levels of industrialisation, urbanisation and the improvement of transportation systems, that were shaping the aforementioned 'sporting revolution' in Britain were also taking effect in Ireland.[11] It is within this context that association football surfaced in the northeast of the country. The introduction of the sport is popularly credited to James McAlery, who organised an exhibition game between two Scottish teams in Belfast in October 1878 shortly after witnessing the game for the first time while in Scotland, although this account is certainly contested.[12] What is beyond doubt, however, is the fact that Belfast's industrial character and its close links to Scotland made the city the ideal breeding ground for the association code, and its steady growth in popularity led to the emergence of local clubs and the subsequent formation of the Irish Football Association in 1880.

Although the IFA was established with a mandate to foster association football throughout the entire country, Neal Garnham describes how its initial expansion was uneven and fragmented, and as it transpired the IFA was generally indifferent to the prospect of promoting the sport outside of its north-eastern stronghold. Additional

[8] David Winner, *Those feet: an intimate history of English football* (London, 2006), p. 23.
[9] Gerry P. T. Finn, 'Trinity mysteries: University, elite schooling and sport in Ireland', *The international journal of the history of sport*, vol. 27, no. 13 (September 2010), pp 2255-87.
[10] Mike Cronin, 'Trinity mysteries: responding to a chaotic reading of Irish history', *The international journal for the history of sport*, vol. 28, no. 18 (December 2011), pp 2753-60.
[11] Cronin and Higgins, *Places we play*, pp 19-29.
[12] Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: the case of Westmeath* (Dublin, 2007), p. 170.

influences were complicit in the emergence of association football in various parts of the country however, and again the social connections between Ireland and the British mainland were instrumental in dissemination processes. The former students of British schools were to the fore in advancing the sport in Dublin from the early 1880s, while interaction between the army and indigenous populations in provincial towns throughout the country was also conducive to its development.[13] Although popular participation in association football was relatively limited, the manner in which Irish people were becoming involved in games of British origin caused unease within the nationalist psyche amid the Gaelic revival of the late nineteenth century. Within this context of nationalist fervour the Gaelic Athletic Association was formed in Thurles in 1884 to promote and regulate distinct Irish games in accordance with the model that had been developed during Britain's sporting revolution. The GAA's founding members had recognised that indigenous games had fallen into a state of disrepair, and the organisation was established with the aim of reinvigorating and formalising them within a more centralised structure.[14] The emergence of the GAA, and the organisation's ideological outlook, fed a unique political and cultural characterisation within Irish sport that would later lead to complications and conflict, and the distinction that was drawn between 'indigenous' and 'foreign' games will be discussed at greater length within this thesis.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the character of association football was changing in the south of the country. Changing attitudes towards the resident crown forces as a result of growing nationalist fervour and the onset of the Boer War duly diminished the army's influence on Irish sport. As had been the case in the north-east of Ireland during the latter part of the previous decade, improved working conditions, rising wages and increased amounts of free time among the masses also contributed to greater working-class participation in sport.[15] Association football was relatively cheap to play, its rules were easy to follow, and it could be engaged in within the spatial constraints of towns and cities, and in this regard it became the most practical sporting option for certain urban populations. The sport was also beginning to develop in terms of its administrative structure, and the Leinster Football Association (LFA), which had come into existence in Dublin in 1892, was one of five regional affiliates, the others

[13] Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland*, p. 112.
[14] Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan & Paul Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history* (Cork, 2009), pp 1-34.
[15] Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), p. 8.

being the County Antrim Football Association, the Mid-Ulster Football Association, the County Fermanagh Football Association and the Northwest Football Association, operating under the governance of the IFA.[16] Overall the game was progressing steadily in the south of the country in the 1900s. Dublin had begun to be allocated international fixtures, the Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs from the capital were sporadically challenging the dominance of their northern counterparts on the playing fields, while the growth of the LFA led the organisation to seek greater respect from the IFA and greater representation within the sport's administrative structure.[17]

In 1901 the Munster Football Association (MFA) had also been formed to provide structure to a burgeoning association football scene in the Cork area, and although the organisation encountered significant levels of hostility from those portraying strong nationalist outlooks, the future certainly appeared bright for a sport that was rapidly becoming imbedded within Irish sporting culture.[18] In the years before the Great War association football in the south of the country remained largely untouched by both the professionalism and the worrying episodes of sectarian violence that infiltrated the game in Ulster. Despite growing discontent with the governance of the IFA from within Leinster circles, the general outlook that framed association football in Ireland in 1914 was one of optimism, and there is no doubt that the sport was in a healthy position. It was more popular than ever among an expanding support network, while the performance of the Irish national team had improved greatly at international level. In terms of association football's place within Irish society Garnham argues that by 1914 the 'lines of demarcation' had been drawn between the country's three foremost sporting movements. While rugby was the favoured game of the middle-class population, holding its greatest strength in the bastions that were the most prominent educational establishments, Gaelic games had become imprinted on the communities of rural Ireland. In this model association football is propagated as primarily a working-class urban concern, although there is no doubt that such assertions are over-simplistic.[19] Firstly it must be noted that the GAA was certainly held in reverence in many urban areas. Likewise, association football, while clearly most popular in the cities of Dublin and Belfast, was also played in numerous rural outposts by 1914, while

[16] Joe Dodd, 'The first sixty years', in George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds), *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), p. 26.
[17] Ibid., p. 30
[18] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 22.
[19] Ibid., p. 32.

in many cases it was the favoured game of middle-class patrons, most famously in the membership of the Bohemian club of Dublin, as described by Ciarán Priestley in his pamphlet on the club's early history.[20] Association football was also to the fore among middle-class students at the country's leading universities, which competed annually for the inter-varsity Collingwood Cup well into the inter-war period, and care must certainly be taken to refrain from making generalisations of the sport as the preserve of the urban masses.

This thesis will highlight the role occupied by association football within urban societies however, and will begin by building upon the foundations established by Garnham in assessing the impact of the Great War on the development of association football in Ireland in the first chapter. It will examine the forces that shaped sport and society during a tumultuous period that was characterised by the nationalist push for political autonomy from Britain. The post-war recovery of association football in Ireland will also be charted, with the opening chapter drawing comparisons between the position of the game in Belfast and Dublin. This will be followed by discussion of the issues that caused the decisive split between the IFA and the LFA, which ultimately led to the formation of the FAI in the capital and a situation whereby two opposing national administrations were claiming governance of the sport throughout the entire country. The second chapter examines the fractious relationship that existed between the FAI and the IFA during the inter-war period, as well as intermittent attempts that were made to find a resolution to the ongoing dispute that continued to characterise association football in Ireland. It also describes the FAI's pursuit of the administrative recognition that it determinedly sought in its attempts to develop relations with the European sporting community. In addition the association's efforts to gain access to the considerable spoils of participation in the British international football schedule will be discussed.

The third chapter will discuss the role of the FAI and the Irish Free State's national association football team in furthering the sport both at home and abroad during a period when international football was growing in stature and importance. Within this context the relations that existed between the FAI and contemporary national associations from across Europe will be analysed. The legitimacy of the organisation's

[20] Ciarán Priestley, The Bohemian Football Club: the enduring legacy of an idle youth, available at http://www.dublinheritage.ie/media/bohemian_football_club_text.html [23 Dec. 2013].

claims to be considered as a genuine sporting representation of the Free State and the Irish people will also be assessed. The following chapter will chart the processes of dissemination and development that characterised association football in the territory that would become the Free State within the context of a post-conflict social exuberance that was evident within Irish society during the 1920s. Similar processes will also be considered in chapter five, this time within the context of the socio-economic deprivation that typified the difficulties faced by large sections of the state's population during the 1930s, with the emphasis placed upon the deteriorating financial condition of association football as a sporting movement. The sixth chapter will analyse the cultural characterisation of Irish sport through the glare of conflicting perceptions of what were widely considered to be indigenous and foreign sports, namely Gaelic games and association football, within the popular consciousness. The discussion will aim to determine the impact of ideology on the processes that were shaping the Irish sporting landscape, while addressing cultural representations of association football within a myopic society that remained hostile to any reminders of the British occupation. The thesis will then conclude with an examination of the concept of a defined association football community that existed within the wider sporting construct, with the narrative focusing on the role of football clubs that emerged as important social nuclei during the inter-war period, as well as on the behavioural patterns of those that increasingly engaged with the sport.

The content of the chapters raises a broad range of themes that a historical survey of the position of association football within a tumultuous and developing Irish society must address, and it is contended that the subject matter within this thesis provides a thorough and original portrayal of the sport from an academic viewpoint. A diverse and extensive range of sources have been used to construct this thesis. The opening chapter is heavily dependent on the records of the IFA, located in Belfast at the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, which serve as the basis for the information provided on the period surrounding the split between the Belfast and Dublin-based administrations. The archive is also an essential source in establishing the northern perspective on the ongoing dispute between the IFA and the FAI during the inter-war period, while it can also be utilised to draw comparisons between the position of association football in Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in certain instances. When researching the period after the split the records of the FAI are clearly fundamental to the themes

developed within this thesis. This archive has recently become available for scholarly research as a result of the FAI's relocation from its central Dublin headquarters to new premises at Abbotstown in late 2007, at which point the association's records were placed in the care of the University College Dublin School of History and Archives to be catalogued by Peter Byrne. The depth of this archive makes it the foundation on which this project is based, and the records available with the kind permission of the FAI have provided a wealth of material that has been relevant to most areas of discussion within this thesis.

The records of the FAI were vital in researching the association's pursuit of international recognition and its nationalistic aspirations, themes which are raised in chapters two and three, and when delving into the relationship between the FAI and the IFA it has become increasingly clear that the English Football Association played a pivotal role in the episode. As such, records from the comprehensive archive of the English FA held at the recently refurbished Wembley Stadium in London, which include those of the International Football Association Board (IFAB), have been incorporated to add greater depth and a more rounded portrayal of some of the issues raised in the opening chapters. The records of the GAA, which are based at the association's headquarters at Croke Park in Dublin, were also vital to this study and were extensively used in the construction of chapter six. This archive affords an interesting insight into the outlooks of prominent GAA figures, and their perception of the threat posed to Irish society, and indeed their own games, by foreign influences during the period, while they also add significant subtext to the ideological and cultural characterisations of Irish sport. Other archival material was also utilised throughout this project with varying degrees of importance. In discussing the theme of industrial paternalism in the context of the association football community defined in chapter seven, the records of the Guinness Athletic Union, held at the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, were particularly useful. Conversely, the records of the LFA, which are located at UCD along with those of the FAI, were quite scant, and provided relatively little information on the issues surrounding the split, which was particularly disappointing.

A further disappointing feature of the archival material pertaining to the historical research of association football was the unavailability of club records. An impression of the often chaotic manner in which association football clubs were managed during the inter-war period will emerge from this thesis, and within this framework it is

unsurprising that a lack of care appears to have been taken with club records. This lack of preservation of records is a feature common within all sporting codes, and it is a lamentable fact that archival material did not continue in the possession of individual clubs but was lost to private ownership and subsequently discarded. The absence of club records has had the effect of increasing the dependency of this project on newspaper archives, and such material has been utilised throughout the thesis to enhance the information provided by accompanying sources, as well as in the portrayal of the popular perspective on the processes that were shaping association football during the inter-war period. Chapters four and five are particularly reliant on newspaper archives in determining the position of the sport at both a national and regional scale, and as such a broad range of publications have been sourced during the course of this project. While newspaper archives undoubtedly provide the most voluminous source material their limitations as a scholarly tool must also be recognised. When using newspapers to research association football care must be taken to distinguish fact from fiction, and truth from exaggeration in certain cases. That said, newspaper archives from the inter-war period are generally trustworthy, and when approached with a certain degree of caution are vital to a project such as this.

In terms of secondary sources the availability of material relating to association football is somewhat less comprehensive, which can be considered as both a challenge and an opportunity for historical research. A number of important works that enhance the historiography of association football do exist however, and information portrayed in publications from individuals such as Seán Ryan, Brian Kennedy and Dónal Cullen has been consulted in creating this thesis. Surveys produced by historians such as Comerford, Ferriter, Dermot Keogh, John A. Murphy, Charles Townsend and R.F. Foster have also been used to gain an understanding of a wider Irish society during the inter-war period, while regional histories have also been important in framing the complexities of local social processes in the towns and cities in which association football was developing. The obstacle provided by the dearth of archival material from clubs has been partially overcome by the availability of a number of publications on the histories of individual clubs, and although such works are produced outside of academia for supporter consumption, they are certainly useful in adding colour and a personal characterisation to source material. Expertly researched works such as Phil Howlin's *Bohemian Times*, Frank Lynch's *101 Years of Athlone Town FC*, Jim Murphy's *The*

History of Dundalk FC, and Robert Goggins *A Chronological History of Shamrock Rovers FC*, provide a wealth of relevant information and discussion, and certainly merit high praise. Other sources that have been used include kind donations of personal works from individuals such as Neal Garnham and Plunket Carter, while in some cases surviving film footage and photographic sources have been used. Oral interviews with local historians and club archivists have also been undertaken as a means of gaining additional information, while even discussions within contemporary parliamentary debates have proved valuable.

Although there has been a steady increase in the amount of historical commentary produced on association football in Ireland in recent times, academic analysis is relatively sparse when compared with the body of work that exists on the GAA, and therefore it is intended that this study will add to the existing historiography of the sport. While Neal Garnham's research has focussed on the emergence of the game during the late nineteenth century, and its development during the early twentieth, additional academic undertakings have tended to focus on supporter culture in a more recent period when the profile of association football was raised by the qualification of the national team for the 1988 European Championships and the 1990 World Cup competition. As such much of the academic work produced on this era can be considered within the context of sociological surveys, and the fact remains that historical analysis of the sport during the post-independence era is conspicuous by its absence. The importance of the inter-war period as an epoch for the development of association football is a theme that will be propagated throughout this thesis. From the fallout from the split between the IFA and the LFA in 1921 to the FAI's attempts to gain acceptance from its peers both at home and abroad, and from an unprecedented expansion of a sport that continued to prove culturally divisive within a society that was yet to recover from the scars of British occupation to the financial constraints that would cause the near implosion of the entire sporting structure, the inter-war period provided the backdrop for an age that would define the position of association football within the Irish sporting landscape for generations to come. It is within this glaring chasm in our understanding of Irish sports history that this study has been produced.

Chapter 1: Post-war recovery and split

Introduction

By the time tensions between Europe's imperial powers led to armed conflict in 1914 the game of association football in Ireland had reached the peak of its development. Teams from both Belfast and Dublin competed against each other at unprecedented standards of play in the Irish League,[1] while the Irish national team had just accomplished the feat of claiming its first outright victory in the Home Championship,[2] an achievement that would have been unimaginable just a few years previously. Although the game was more popular than ever in the cities of Belfast and Dublin, the onset of the Great War posed a significant threat to association football in Ireland however. As the conflict intensified in Europe the networks of communication between the two main centres of the game in Ireland were all but dissected, with the sport becoming regionally administrated by the divisional bodies affiliated to the Irish Football Association. The numbers of football players and supporters that were acquired for military service, and who were set to experience first-hand the horrors of war on the continent, posed a further threat to the durability of the game. Likewise, the fallout from the nationalist push for independence, which had been gathering pace since the late nineteenth century, and the subsequent heightening of political tensions between unionist and republican factions, particularly after the Easter Rising of 1916, was set to test the already tense relationship between the IFA and the Dublin-based Leinster Football Association. The connection between the two organisations had been a tenuous one. The strength of association football in Belfast, in terms of its professionalised structure and the greater numbers that played it, led the Leinster game to be dwarfed in many ways in terms of its development. As such, Leinster interests had been frustrated in their efforts to establish themselves as a force within the Irish game, and consistently portrayed long-standing grievances regarding the indifferent and domineering attitude shown towards the LFA by its parent body in Belfast. In this regard, the process of re-establishing a working and functional relationship was fraught with difficulty, as attempts were made to repair the divide in communications and

[1] See introductory note 2.
[2] See introductory note 3.

relations between the administrations in Belfast and Dublin, which had been severed by the necessities of wartime.

Irish football did experience a post-war recovery as the downturn in army recruitment and the return of war veterans once again led to an increase in participation on the playing fields and in attendance on the terraces, but whether the game could once again aspire to its previous stature was yet to be determined. Conversely, ladies' football, a pursuit which had come into its own in Britain during the latter years of the war, achieved new levels of appeal and popularity, as it reflected the wider tendency of females to enter previously male-dominated spheres of society. The prospects for ladies' football were invariably intertwined with those of the men's game however, and the return to relative normality after the war was set to change prevailing attitudes to women's participation, as conservative societal perceptions once again came to prominence in the absence of the distraction of combat. Problems were also to manifest themselves within the confines of the male sporting realm. It would not be long before the post-war recovery of association football was threatened by the continuing animosity that resided in Leinster towards the IFA, and by the failure of the Belfast organisation to adequately address the concerns of its divisional affiliate. A bitter split between the ever-strengthening LFA and the insular IFA would ultimately occur, but was the breakdown in the relations between Belfast and Dublin an inevitability given the fractious nature of the connection from the formation of the Leinster association, and how much was the split a reflection of the wider political environment during the Anglo-Irish War? The answers to these questions are complex and difficult to establish, but what is certain is that association football in Ireland was about to be transformed beyond recognition and beyond what anyone connected with the game could have foreseen during a tumultuous inter-war period.

Irish football and the Great War

Association football in Ireland had developed significantly in the period from its reported arrival from Scotland during the late 1870s until war enveloped Europe during 1914. By the early twentieth century, the elements within the genteel classes, who had played an important role in initially fostering and diffusing the game in Ireland, had since retreated from the sport amid an infiltration of their perceived social inferiors. This working-class element had been attracted to association football by the simplicity

of its rules, its relative safeness and cheapness to play, and by the ease in which it was possible to play in the restricted spaces of urban areas. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the ability of the working-classes to become involved in sport, and association football in particular, had also been facilitated by greater adherence to the concept of time and a structured working day, as well as by the introduction of more liberal industrial legislation during the nineteenth century.[3] This led to drastic improvements in working conditions, with employees enjoying unprecedented free time which was used by many to participate in or attend football games. Likewise, improvements to transportation networks within Irish towns and cities increased the mobility of the public, allowing people to travel over greater distances to play or to watch football.

On the eve of the Great War Irish association football was undoubtedly strongest in the cities of Belfast and Dublin, where the game had developed under differing circumstances and conditions. Despite the fact that Dublin clubs had taken great strides in playing standards, becoming competitive at national level with their northern counterparts by 1914, there remained a clear demarcation between the industrial character of the game in the north, where professionalism had become an accepted, if sometimes reviled component of the structure, and the more white-collar southern game, which remained almost completely amateur in its character and outlook. The sport was also in a relatively healthy position in isolated provincial outposts in regions such as Cork, Westmeath, Sligo and Louth, where a heavy military presence in the larger towns had cultivated a strong local interest, and had proved conducive to the development of what critics labelled the 'garrison game'.[4] The growing popular appeal of the sport during the early twentieth century also led to a significant increase in attendances at association football matches in Ireland. Meanwhile the progress of the Irish national team, which had emerged from the considerable shadow of its British contemporaries in claiming that first outright victory in the Home Championship in 1914, instilled a sense of both satisfaction and optimism in the mindset of football enthusiasts.[5] The financial solvency of the IFA was also a source of pride for those that had overseen the transformation of the sport in a relatively short space of time, although

[3] Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), p. 11.
[4] Ibid., p. 18.
[5] Malcolm Brodie, *100 years of Irish football* (Belfast, 1980), p. 11.

the positivity that abounded, and the momentum that had been gained, was set to be curbed by the conflict that loomed large on the European horizon.[6]

Although the country was disconnected from the Great War in geographical terms, the effects of the conflict on association football in Ireland mirrored what transpired across Europe, where the game was disrupted and retarded by the upheaval and desolation of war. A large percentage of those who played or attended football were of the requisite age and gender for military service. As such the sheer numbers of young males that were drafted to the frontlines from every participating nation unsurprisingly led to the cessation of official competitions throughout the continent, and the complete termination of the game in a number of countries. Football's resources, both human and structural, were now needed for the war effort. In places such as England, where the Football Association's premises in London were commandeered by the British War Office, and Germany, where playing pitches were sequestered for the planting of vegetables to combat civilian and army food shortages, the practicalities of the conflict destructively impinged upon the game. Likewise, the human cost of the conflict can be seen in the number of registered players, who failed to return to football after the armistice, having perished on the battlefields, or been rendered physically or mentally disabled during service.[7] In Ireland, the development of the game was sharply interrupted by the conflict on the European mainland. Unlike the rugby code, which immediately halted its activities on the outbreak of war, Irish association football, which supported the war effort from the outset, continued to operate, as it had done in England, where the failure of the football authorities to close down the game drew strong criticism from those who felt that sporting concerns were now secondary to the more pressing issues at hand.[8] Despite the continuation of the game, the amount of football being played under IFA auspices was significantly reduced. Competitions came to be administered on a more regional basis, with the Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs, Dublin's two representatives in the Irish League, withdrawing from the

[6] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 160.
[7] David Goldblatt, *The ball is round: a global history of football* (2nd ed., London, 2007), p. 173.
[8] James Walvin, *The people's game: the history of football revisited* (2nd ed., Chippenham, 2000), p. 119.

competition in 1915 to participate in the localised Leinster competition, [9] before the league itself was formally halted later in the year.[10]

The Irish game was affected to differing extents in its two main strongholds during the war years. In both Belfast and Dublin the human loss was felt on both the playing fields and the terraces as players and supporters were enlisted for military duty. In the northern city attendances fell drastically in the first years of the war, while the professional footballers that were left behind found that their livelihoods were being threatened by severe wage reductions.[11] Despite this, association football continued to provide Belfast's population with a representation of normality. It also offered a much needed source of entertainment and escape from the realities of working-class life during the harrowing war years, and by late 1916, despite the ongoing conflict, attendances in Belfast were once again rising towards pre-war levels.[12] The northern game was by now benefitting from the complete cessation of the professional game in England. This was resultant of the inclination of professional players from the British mainland to travel to Belfast in search of a wage for participation in football, while the downturn in the numbers being recruited for army service was also significant.[13] Ironically, the war, which had so dramatically damaged the game since its commencement, had now become intrinsic to football's revival, as the demand for output from the city's factories led to increased industrial wages which in turn allowed spectators to once again pay for entry to football grounds in large numbers.[14]

In Dublin the situation was different however. The level and significance of southern Irish enlistment to the British army during the Great War has often been downplayed contemporarily as what Charles Townsend describes as 'collective amnesia discarded as a British experience'.[15] Despite this, an exodus to the frontline undoubtedly occurred up until 1916. This included association football players and followers alike, and the most striking example was that of the Bohemian club, which saw up to forty of its

[9] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 168.
[10] Minute book of the council of the Irish Football League, meeting of league management committee, 17 July 1915 (P.R.O.N.I., Irish League archive, D4511/1/31).
[11] Neal Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland: being a reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880* (Belfast, 1999), p. 24; Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 168.
[12] Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland*, p. 24.
[13] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 5 Feb. 1919 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[14] Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland*, p. 24.
[15] Charles Townsend, *Ireland: the 20th Century* (2nd ed., New York, 2010), pp 68-70.

members sent into combat.[16] As the numbers watching and playing association football in the capital decreased, interest in the game waned, and by 1916 the amount of clubs affiliated to the LFA, which stood at almost 150 in 1914, had been cut in half. The fragile position of the Dublin game was exacerbated by the fallout from the Easter Rising of spring 1916, which despite causing minimal direct disruption to the sport, led to an increasingly tense and politically charged environment where travel restrictions caused association football to become even more regionally confined. Amid this uncertainty the Irish Cup was the sole tournament to be organised at a national scale.[17] There was little sign of revival within the Dublin game during the second half of the war period, and the desperate position of association football in the capital deteriorated even further between 1917 and 1918. By the beginning of 1918 attendances for games involving Bohemians, arguably Dublin's most famous and popular club, were as low as 600,[18] while an *Irish Independent* article from June that year lamented that the money taken at gates in the city during the previous season had been the lowest on record.[19]

The reasons for the initial withdrawal of Dublin's senior clubs from the Irish League were both practical and necessary. Despite this, the lack of contact with Belfast had undoubtedly damaged Leinster football, as the attraction of the large professional northern clubs had been lost to a public that was far from enthused by the prospect of the ad hoc and informal programme that now existed. In another sense, unbeknownst to those involved in the game during the war period, the separation of the Belfast and Dublin games during the conflict would be of great significance during subsequent years. Although prevailing circumstances had necessitated the LFA's governance of the sport in Leinster independently of any input from Belfast, and despite the problems that southern football had faced, the LFA had been endowed with a confidence and self-belief that would become increasingly apparent as tensions between the Belfast and Dublin administrations later intensified. Such concerns were for a later date however, and in the meantime while the game's professional structure in Belfast, which was now more than ever assisted by the city's industrial character, had the ability to entrench itself against the initial adversities it had faced, the Dublin game was in no such

[16] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland,* p. 171
[17] Joe Dodd, 'The first sixty years', in George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds), *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), p. 40.
[18] *Irish Independent*, 18 Feb. 1918.
[19] Ibid., 5 June 1918.

position. By the end of the war it was apparent that association football in the capital was badly in need of rejuvenation.

The post-war recovery of association football

After the end of hostilities on the European frontier in late 1918 those that may have envisaged a serene return to the relatively encouraging and harmonious pre-war position of Irish association football were to be disappointed as it quickly became apparent that further problems would have to be surmounted. The fractious political nature of Irish society, further fuelled by Sinn Féin's electoral victory of 1918, was set to impinge upon the game, along with numerous pre-existing concerns, which came to prominence in the years between 1918 and 1921.[20] Before these issues led to an insurmountable crisis, greater stability within the sport became a necessity, and if northern conviction was to be an indicator of the state of Irish football in 1918 the outlook was quite positive. The financial position of the northern game was relatively solid, as the IFA had retained its pre-war financial balance of almost £2,000,[21] while a recent inter-league fixture had brought the Irish League out of debt.[22] The Co. Antrim FA, the association to which most of the north's large professional clubs were affiliated, was also in 'sound condition' in mid-1918, with almost 150 clubs within the structure of the organisation. In light of this the IFA claimed that 'notwithstanding the war, the game suffered no serious consequences', as it discussed the prospect of a return to the pre-war football schedule.[23] The assertion that the Irish game had not been deeply damaged by the war shows a lack of understanding of the realities of what had transpired over the course of the south's hiatus from Belfast governance however, and such an insular outlook clearly portrays the IFA's indifference to the game outside of its north-eastern stronghold. The reality was that association football in the Munster area had been decimated during the war years, while in Leinster the game continued to struggle with no apparent recovery in sight.[24]

The Dublin press, recognising the gravity of the situation in the south, called for the immediate reintroduction of international and representative fixtures in late 1918 'to

[20] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (2nd ed., London, 2005), pp 183-4.
[21] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 160.
[22] *Irish Independent*, 1 Jan. 1918.
[23] Ibid., 13 May 1918.
[24] Nigel O'Mahony (ed.), *Century of Cork soccer memories*, magazine produced by *Cork Evening Echo* (Cork, 1995), p. 7.

relieve the monotony of the leagues' in a football scene that was described as 'dull' and in need of 'bucking up'.[25] The number of people that were attending football matches in the capital suggests that spectators shared a similar view, and even games between Bohemians and Shelbourne attracted miniscule gates in comparison with similar fixtures in Belfast, and with pre-war figures in Dublin.[26] In monetary and statistical terms the position of Leinster football was no less alarming. The LFA, at its annual meeting in the summer of 1918, had announced a financial loss on the previous year, while a mere seventy-seven clubs were now affiliated to the association.[27] It was clear that the Leinster game was in need of assistance, and the LFA duly turned to its parent body in Belfast in the expectation of financial support. The southern affiliate requested the sum of £300 to comply with an IFA directive to place the Leinster game back on a sound footing, although the IFA saw fit to allocate a paltry £50 grant to the LFA. This was viewed as a contemptuous act by Dublin-based administrators considering that a single northern club, Glenavon of Lurgan, had recently received double that amount from the IFA.[28] The IFA had also refused to grant any financial support whatsoever to the Munster Football Association, whom it considered a defunct organisation, and despite administering the additional sum of £200 to the LFA the following year, the reluctance of the IFA to fund the revival of southern football led to the re-emergence of long-standing grievances that had existed within the Leinster administration over a protracted period of time.[29]

It could not be argued that the IFA did not possess the financial capability to contribute to the plight of Leinster football. Crowds attending football in Belfast had continued to increase during the intervening months and upwards of 20,000 spectators were attending some of the more attractive games in the city in early 1919, whilst the fiscal position of the IFA was also strengthening.[30] An important source of revenue for the association, international football, was restored, and further income was generated through the unusually high number of drawn games in the Irish Cup competition.[31] These drawn fixtures necessitated profitable replays, while the number of clubs paying

[25] *Irish Independent*, 2 Dec. 1918.
[26] Ibid., 30 Sept. 1918.
[27] Ibid., 1 Jun. 1918.
[28] Peter Byrne, *Green is the colour* (London, 2012), p. 55.
[29] Minute book of the council of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the council, 24 Jun. 1919 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/A/3).
[30] *Sunday Independent*, 13 Feb. 1919.
[31] Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland*, p. 27.

membership subscriptions to the IFA also continued to increase.[32] Despite the lack of assistance from Belfast, there were also signs during 1919 that the Leinster game was finally experiencing a slow rejuvenation. Crowds of 8,000, a post-war record, turned out for two fixtures between Bohemians and Shelbourne early in the year, which provided Dalymount Park with 'something of an old-time appearance',[33] while the 5,000 spectators that watched the Leinster Cup final between Shelbourne and St James's Gate later in the season also gave grounds for optimism.[34] The largest gates in the capital were saved for the much-anticipated visit of northern clubs in the Irish Cup however, with Shelbourne's semi-final against Linfield in the spring of 1919 commanding a crowd of over 14,000, the second highest on record in Dublin.[35] This figure provided the evidence, if it was needed, that there remained a strong demand for association football in Dublin, although the demand was clearly for the high standard of football that could only be provided by the northern clubs and the return of the Irish League competition.

Overtures had been made to re-include Dublin-based clubs in a revived Irish League competition as soon as the war had ended, but surprisingly given the poor condition of the game in the capital both Bohemians and Shelbourne were quite indifferent to the prospect of rejoining. The Shelbourne club had refused an invitation to compete in the 1918-19 season on the grounds that the club was unprepared, while the Bohemian club, which was more open to the idea, left the matter in the hands of its delegate to the league.[36] With the predominantly Catholic-supported Belfast Celtic club also refusing to re-enter, the competition failed to materialise, and it is clear that the volatility of the political atmosphere in the country was a factor. Both Dublin clubs informed the annual meeting of the LFA in 1918 that they would 'reconsider the matter if the situation changed', which evidently occurred a year later as both were included in the Irish League programme for the 1919-20 season.[37] The return of the Irish League in August 1919 was an undoubted tonic for senior football at national level, and was an obvious attraction for the public, although with the primary focus of Dublin's two foremost clubs now fixated elsewhere the wider Leinster game was set to suffer as a result.

[32] *Sunday Independent*, 11 May 1919.
[33] *Irish Independent*, 20 Jan. 1919; 3 Feb. 1919.
[34] Ibid., 18 Mar. 1919.
[35] Ibid., 9 Mar. 1919.
[36] Ibid., 29 June 1918.
[37] Ibid., 28 Aug. 1919.

Controversially, Shelbourne completely withdrew from the Leinster Senior League, which served to diminish the prestige of the competition.[38] It was also apparent that Dublin clubs were finding it difficult to replace the players who had been lost to the game during the war period, as they placed recruitment advertisements in the press, in which places in the team were seemingly guaranteed for applicants that possessed any ability whatsoever.[39] The lack of playing resources within Leinster football clearly stunted the revival of the sport in the province, and the ongoing plight is perhaps best surmised in an *Irish Independent* article from May 1919, which laments the effects of the war on the game, with so many having made 'the supreme sacrifice that clubs are now depleted'.[40] It is clear that although recruitment to the British army did not reach the levels that were prevalent in the north, it was certainly at a sufficient scale to heavily impact upon association football in the south of the country. In this regard the 'collective amnesia' that Townsend refers to in relation to Irish participation in the conflict is applicable to the representation of sport in Ireland as such connectedness became increasingly incompatible with nationalist ideology at later historical junctures.

Despite the ongoing problems, association football was undoubtedly in recovery in the capital by 1920 as the public once again flocked to Irish League games, despite poor performances from the participating Dublin clubs, which drew strong criticism from the media.[41] The financial stature of the LFA had also improved, while the number of clubs affiliating to the association was rapidly increasing. The 1919-20 season was said to have been 'one of the most successful seasons on record' in Leinster, although the strengthening of the game's position and its subsequent development in the province would soon become a significant factor in the conflict that would occur between the LFA and its parent organisation in Belfast.[42] The IFA also recorded 'one of the most successful seasons in the annals of the organisation' in 1919-20,[43] despite a revocation of the wartime permission that had allowed Irish clubs to employ professionals that were registered with English clubs, and the game in Ireland had undoubtedly recovered significantly within a short period of time.[44] Its resurgence was clearly visible to

[38] *Sunday Independent*, 31 Aug. 1919.
[39] *Freeman's Journal*, 24 Mar. 1920.
[40] *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1919.
[41] Ibid., 15 Sept. 1919.
[42] Ibid., 2 June 1920.
[43] *Sunday Independent*, 30 May 1920.
[44] Minute book of the management committee of the Irish Football League, meeting of the management committee, 17 Apr. 1919 (P.R.O.N.I., Irish League archive, D4511/1/31).

contemporary observers, with one commentator in the *Irish Independent* remarking after witnessing 30,000 spectators attend an international between Ireland and Wales in 1920 that 'if people had put the same amount of energy and enthusiasm into the revival of industry after the war as they have put into the revival of sport, trade would now be booming in the United Kingdom'.[45] The triumphant 1919-20 season would prove to be the peak of the recovery however, as increasing civil unrest and the tense political environment that developed amid the ongoing Anglo-Irish War caused the postponement of the forthcoming Irish League campaign during the summer of 1920. This had the effect of once again severing the football ties between Belfast and Dublin, where the respective administrations had not been afforded enough time to rebuild a functional relationship that had practically ceased to exist a number of years previously.

The revival of Irish association football was an uneven process, and by no means inevitable after the end of the Great War. In Belfast, the recovery had been in motion for as long as two years before the climax of hostilities in Europe, and continued apace, with the IFA and the Irish League both emerging in a surprisingly healthy position when the disjointed nature of the game during the war years and the lack of a national league programme is considered. Likewise, the exodus of the British professionals that had found refuge in Belfast did not lead to a diminishment of public interest in the game, and by 1920, with a full Irish League programme once again re-established, the future looked relatively bright for association football in the north of the country. Football proved to be a magnetic attraction for the population of Belfast as it attempted to return to normality, although it was swiftly becoming apparent that the economic prosperity that enveloped the northern city during the latter years of the war was about to dissipate as the demand for production decreased, and thousands of war veterans returned home to find themselves displaced in terms of employment and marginalised within society.[46] The socio-economic problems that were fermenting in Belfast, along with heightened political tensions due to the ongoing nationalist push for independence, were set to threaten the revival of northern football and its future prospects, and as the national football programme was once again curtailed in the summer of 1920 a wave of uncertainty and unease once again engulfed the sport.

[45] *Irish Independent*, 16 Feb. 1920.
[46] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 184; Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000*, p. 271.

The outlook for southern football was even more uncertain, and a revival in Dublin took far longer to transpire than had been the case in Belfast. The number of clubs affiliated to the LFA had been decimated during the war, while the presence of a more ingrained nationalist sentiment among larger sections of the population in the wake of the 1916 Rising, and the unsettled conditions that ensued in the capital, did little to facilitate the recovery of association football. Although involvement in, or connection with, association football was no barrier to participation in the nationalist campaign for independence for many individuals, a stigmatisation of the sport as an imperialist mechanism was increasingly developed within certain outlooks as hostilities intensified.[47] The recovery of the Dublin game did slowly occur however, and the brief revival had clearly begun before the return of the Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs to Irish League football.

The Irish League programme had once again provided the Dublin public with the opportunity to regularly witness the adept professional northern clubs, and despite ongoing problems concerning the lack of available players at junior level and the weakening of the local Leinster Senior League, there had certainly been cause for optimism regarding the immediate prospects of association football in the capital. This sense of optimism was to be short-lived however, and as Neal Garnham explains it, 'the disturbed state of the country had served to sever another link in the Irish football network, as a further separation of the Belfast and Dublin games in 1920 came to pass'.[48] In regionalising the game once again administrators had reopened the chasm in the relationship between the Belfast and Dublin administrations, which had been afforded little time to narrow after a lengthy interruption. Northern and southern football planned for the 1920-21 season independently of each other, and teams from the respective regions would meet only in the national cup competitions, from where controversy and conflict would arise to aggravate what had already become a fractious and tenuous link between the IFA and the LFA.

[47] David Toms, 'Not withstanding the discomfort involved': Fordson's cup win in 1926 and how 'the old contemptible' were represented in Ireland's public sphere during the 1920s', in *Sport in history*, 33, no. 4, 2012, available on eprint.
[48] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 176.

The ladies' game

One of the most consequential effects of association football's post-war recovery in Ireland was the damage it inflicted on the ladies' game, which had shown obvious signs of development during the latter part of the war period. The requirements of the Great War had shifted accepted trends in the social order, and women had an important role to play, as they increasingly found themselves in occupations in industries and factories throughout Britain in the absence of the young male population who were sent to the frontlines in Europe. Exuding a new-found social confidence, and mirroring their infiltration of the male workplace, women increasingly become involved in association football, and a number of factory teams, including the renowned Dick Kerr's Ladies team from Preston, came into existence throughout Britain.[49] With the official male football programme suspended during wartime females filled the vacuum. Ladies' football became both widespread and popular, with reports of over 50,000 spectators witnessing games in the years immediately after the war.[50] Ladies' football made a substantial contribution to the war effort by raising money, and its devotion to the cause continued in the post-war period, as it generated much needed financial support for war charities and victims' benefit funds. This feature was certainly evident in Ireland, particularly in the north of the country, where ladies' teams garnered much public attention. Matches such as those that were played between the Belfast Whites and the Boy Blue Pantomime teams at Grosvenor Park, Belfast in January 1918,[51] and between two Lurgan-based selections the following month, were attended by large crowds and raised large sums of money,[52] while in September 1920 a ladies' international that was staged in Belfast between Ireland and England attracted 6,000 spectators.[53] The ladies' game certainly had its supporters in Ireland, and during the summer of 1920 Belfast Celtic director, Hugh McAlinden,[54] arranged a tour involving a ladies' team from France, where the game was also on the rise, that would see the visitors play in both Belfast and Dublin.[55] If press reports are an indication of the presence and popularity of ladies' football it would appear to have been more of a northern phenomenon however,

[49] Vic Duke & Liz Crolley, *Football, nationality and state* (London, 1996), p. 132
[50] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, p. 181.
[51] *Irish Independent*, 29 Jan. 1918.
[52] Ibid., 11 Feb. 1918.
[53] Ibid., 1 Oct. 1920.
[54] Ibid., 9 Sept. 1919.
[55] *Freeman's Journal*, 15 May 1920.

and coverage in the southern media, both national and regional, was extremely infrequent.

Ladies' football was certainly more organised and mainstream in the north of the country, although the fact that the media was not reporting on it in the south during the post-war period does not necessarily signify its absence. In fact, the amount of discussion that appeared on the role of women in society, and their involvement in football in editorial contributions and responses suggests that ladies' football was more common than is apparent at first glance. There were strong opinions on female involvement in football, many of which were disparaging and critical, with many contributors apparently threatened by what they saw as an inversion of the accepted social order. The primary opposition to the ladies' game centred on the role of women, which mainstream society viewed as being within the household, and a contributor calling himself Alphonse, writing in the *Southern Star* in July 1921, suggested that it was acceptable for women to play sports only before marriage, as newly-weds were encouraged to 'make 'hubby' your hobby and all will be well'.[56] Others were more scathing in their attacks on female footballers. One critic claimed in the *Irish Independent* in October 1921 that 'ladies (so-called) who deck themselves in togs and jerseys to play football before spectators are not worthy of the name',[57] while others, such as W.J.M, writing in the *Sunday Independent* on Christmas Day 1921, questioned the physical suitability of women for the playing of sports. He went on to claim that 'if women could only see themselves in the playing field they would realise that they are not graceful in athletics', before adding that 'a lady in knickers racing up a field is a most ungainly sight'.[58] Throughout various contemporary publications the femininity of sportswomen was routinely questioned in this manner. Yet another respondent in the *Freeman's Journal* later argued that 'the nearer they approach to man's physical powers the more they destroy their womanly attributes',[59] while many remained more fixated on the form of the ladies themselves rather than their football ability. This was strikingly evident in the *Irish Independent* profile which described Carmen Pomies, the

[56] *Southern Star*, 2 July 1921.
[57] *Irish Independent*, 14 Oct. 1921.
[58] *Sunday Independent*, 25 Dec. 1921.
[59] *Freeman's Journal*, 20 Nov. 1924.

captain of a visiting French team in 1925, as 'a brunette of attractive appearance' rather than commenting on her achievements on the playing field. [60]

Despite verbal reprisals from female footballers and supporters of the ladies' game, a return to a more conventional post-war societal structure was to render women's football obsolete and marginalised as swiftly as it had emerged. In Britain the popularity that the ladies' game had achieved in the years immediately after the war was undoubtedly a threat to the resurgent men's game. In 1921 the English FA banned the Ladies' Football Association, which by now had as many as 150 clubs under its umbrella, and warned its members against assisting women's football in both practical and monetary terms.[61] In Ireland similar outlooks prevailed, and the IFA openly distanced itself from the ladies' game in refusing to meet a deputation which sought the cooperation of the association in organising future benefit games in 1920. The IFA was eager to stress that it had 'no jurisdiction' over the ladies' game, and without the support of the official football structure the practice was inevitably consigned to a peripheral role.[62] Despite this, infrequent reports throughout the inter-war period indicate that women's football continued to attract large crowds and provide a focal-point for young sportswomen, albeit on the margins of Irish society.[63]

Despite the pace of its development ladies' football was cast aside readily and easily by the football authorities in both Britain and Ireland. The organisers of the sport had ruefully accepted the practice during a period when it went some way to filling the void that had been left by the absence of full programmes of men's football, but were completely unwilling to entertain the prospect of allowing females to participate in what was deemed the male realm of organised sports under normal conditions. The women's game was effortlessly discarded due to the fact that it had never been fully requisitioned or facilitated by the authorities, who had tolerated the game rather than excepting it. In Britain the ladies' game was more popular and viewed as more of a threat to the established framework than in Ireland, although the indignation portrayed in the Irish media, particularly during the 1920s, highlights the fact that the issues that arose from female involvement in the game were no less controversial or topical. Ladies' football

[60] *Irish Independent*, 12 May 1925.
[61] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, p. 181.
[62] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 7 Oct. 1920 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1); *Irish Independent*; 25 May 1925; 24 May 1927; 2 Sept. 1927.
[63] *Irish Independent*, 25 May 1927.

caused nothing short of outrage within certain quarters, where it was felt that the playing of the game by females was a dangerous reversal of the conventional social order, and a threat to society that went far beyond sporting connotations. The association football structure was certainly not alone in denouncing female participation in sports. Sporting bodies including the GAA also proscribed ladies' matches during the period,[64] although the force with which such attacks were made may be considered surprising given the degree to which women were becoming involved in society through organisations and groups established for the betterment of their rights, and given the level of their involvement in nationalist politics during the push for independence and beyond.[65] In simple terms, the role of women within sports and society had been altered by the necessities of the Great War, and when relative normality was restored women were expected to return to their conventional positions of devotion to the family and the household without fuss in a society that was clearly not as progressive as many had deemed it to be.

The prelude to the split

By the middle of 1920 the lines of communication between the IFA in Belfast and the LFA in Dublin had once again been obstructed by the impact of military conflict, and the relationship became increasingly strained as long-standing grievances and hostilities became more pronounced. Tensions between the administrations in Belfast and Dublin had been evident since the formation of the LFA in 1892, and as the sport in the capital developed and became established in its own right the threat of a breakaway from within the ranks of the IFA was certainly a distinct possibility on more than one occasion. The most notable of these episodes had occurred during the 1911-12 season when a splinter group, which included prominent clubs such as Shelbourne, had formed over a dispute as to how gate receipts from junior international fixtures were being disposed of.[66] Despite the problems that were encountered by the LFA during the Great War period and beyond, the association was once again in the ascendency by 1920. This is evidenced by the satisfactory tone that engendered the association's annual

[64] Ibid., 18 Sept. 1920.
[65] Townsend, *Ireland: the 20th century*, p. 98.
[66] David Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup: the story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic football team* (Dublin, 2012), chapter 2, available on kindle.

meeting at the beginning of June, where it was reported that there had been an increase of forty-seven clubs on the seventy-three that had been affiliated the previous year.[67]

A sense of confidence was also surely attained from the knowledge that the post-war recovery of the organisation had been achieved with minimal financial or practical assistance from its parent body in Belfast. As previously described, Leinster officials had, by the time that the Irish League was once again suspended and the game re-localised, learned to organise and run the southern game with almost full autonomy from the IFA. The Leinster game had undoubtedly strengthened, and much of the credit for this was directed towards the LFA's astute secretary, Jack Ryder, a man who would devote over forty years service to both the LFA and the Football Association of Ireland before his death in November 1935. Ryder, who lived at an address at Sandymount Avenue in Dublin,[68] acted in the role of secretary for both organisations, and later became the first full-time secretary of the FAI during the summer of 1928 at a salary of £350 per annum.[69] He was a founding member of the 'old' Drumcondra club during the 1896-97 season, while he had also served as secretary of the Leinster Junior League until he became involved in the LFA.[70] Armed with the self-belief that resulted from the administrative achievements of Ryder and others southern officials were no longer prepared to be dictated to by their northern counterparts in the manner of previous relations. The LFA had long felt resentment towards the IFA, and one of the earliest and enduring points of contention between the two bodies was the process of selection for the Irish national team. Within a year of its foundation, LFA accusations of bias had appeared in the Dublin press that charged the Belfast-based selection committee of overlooking Leinster footballers for participation in the national team,[71] and the perceived lack of consideration shown towards southern players was an issue that caused 'much soreness' within the LFA right up until the inter-war period.[72]

The absence of international players affiliated to clubs under the jurisdiction of the LFA during its short existence was perhaps understandable, as the standard of play in the professionalised Belfast game was superior, for the most part, to the standard set in

[67] *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1920; *Sunday Independent*, 1 June 1919.
[68] *Irish Press*, 2 Dec. 1935.
[69] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1921 – Apr. 1931, meeting of the finance committee, 11 July 1928 (U.C.D., FAI Archive, P137/11).
[70] *Irish Independent*, 29 Nov. 1935.
[71] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 162.
[72] *Irish Independent*, 8 Apr. 1921.

Dublin where coaching and training techniques, as well as player athleticism, lagged someway behind. The IFA's international selection committee also considered it prudent to select members of the same club, who were familiar with each other's play, for participation in the national team in an attempt to transfer club form to the international stage. In hindsight this appears a sensible policy, and interestingly, the dissenting voices from Leinster became somewhat less audible when the national team was performing well. According to Garnham, at junctures when the senior national team was competing effectively in the Home Championship there was a general acceptance of the selection policy of the IFA.[73]

IFA policy also alluded to the premise that it was practical to select northern-based players that were known to spectators for international games that took place in Belfast and southern-based players for encounters in the capital. Again, this theoretically appears a rational and prudent strategy, although when the number of senior internationals that were played in Dublin, a mere six before the Great War, is considered, it is easy to understand the feeling of discontent that had manifested in Leinster.[74] The discontent intensified during the post-war period, as the first international since the conflict was staged at Windsor Park, Belfast, with no Dublin-based player in the team, despite the strong recent performances of both Bohemians and Shelbourne in the Irish Cup competition,[75] while successive international fixtures were set for Belfast in October 1919 and January 1920 'notwithstanding strong appeals from the Dublin delegates'.[76] There is no doubt that the IFA was quiet indifferent to the dissatisfaction in Leinster, and the excuse it provided for its failure to contact a Dublin-based player regarding his selection for junior international duty in May 1919 clearly shows the apathetic attitude of its selection committee to southern football. On this occasion the association claimed that it did not know where the player in question lived and had not seen fit to make enquiries to find the necessary information, and with the LFA simultaneously growing in stature there was no desire in Leinster to accept such impertinence.[77]

[73] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 37
[74] Ibid., pp 164-5.
[75] *Sunday Independent*, 20 Apr. 1919.
[76] *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Jan. 1920.
[77] *Sunday Independent*, 11 May 1919.

The IFA can be considered far more culpable in its mistreatment of Leinster in terms of international football during the post-war period. The number of Irish players playing with British clubs had been greatly reduced, and the national team was no longer the preserve of cross-channel talent, as it had previously been. The IFA could certainly have enforced a fairer policy of selection for the national team, that would have somewhat placated southern officials who were by now becoming increasingly disillusioned with Belfast governance. The decision to completely exclude Dublin from its post-war international programme can be considered an error of judgement and shows a lack of understanding of the situation in Leinster, although it would be false to consider mere naivety and ignorance of the LFA's position as an act of deliberate antagonism. The IFA undoubtedly viewed the LFA as a junior partner, and Leinster football as inferior. It was simply disposed to governing the game on its own terms, and as it saw fit, although what is beyond question is the bitterness that the IFA policy stirred in Leinster circles, where there was now no desire to accept a lesser role in international football affairs.

The debates surrounding the IFA's alleged bias towards the northern game were not confined to issues relating to international football. There was a strong feeling, emanating from Dublin, that the country's governing body exhibited a clear favouritism towards Belfast's professional clubs, who apparently wielded far too much power within an IFA structure that was far too eager to acquiesce to their demands.[78] In May 1918, Dublin delegates to the IFA called on the association to take a firmer hand with the professional clubs. They called for more transparency in their activities, amid suspicions that the clubs were gaining an unfair advantage by paying rates beyond the maximum wage to their players, and the IFA's continued tendency, deliberate or otherwise, to facilitate the interests of northern clubs in variance to those affiliated to the LFA would soon come to prove significant.[79] The failure of the IFA to properly promote and support the game outside of its east-Ulster stronghold was also a grievance that persisted into the post-war period, with the aforementioned reluctance of the association to financially stimulate the game in Leinster and Munster after the resumption of relations highlighting the ambivalence of the IFA to the provincial

[78] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 163.
[79] *Irish Independent*, 23 May 1918.

game.[80] Criticisms of the association were also present from provincial Ulster, where the IFA policy of suspending players who played football outside of the official season, during the summer months, greatly hindered the development of the rural game, as teams that were already struggling to fill their rosters lost potential players from their teams, and became unable to fulfil fixtures.[81] The lack of post-war support from the IFA for provincial football as it attempted to recover after the war is evident in the sheer lack of enthusiasm for a 1919 proposal aimed at reinvigorating the sport. The proposal in question would see the association waive its claim to half of the affiliation fees of clubs under its auspices.[82] With the IFA apparently unwilling to assist the development of the sport in Leinster, LFA officials, such as Laurence Sheridan, a man who would later serve as chairman and honorary secretary of the FAI, as well as honorary secretary of the League of Ireland,[83] were now openly drawing attention to the injustice of junior team that continued to pay affiliation fees to an IFA that was providing them with no support.[84]

The LFA, emboldened by its increasingly strong position, began to question the mechanics of the IFA, its committees, its processes and its procedures. Frequent protests and complaints emanating from Leinster made their way into meetings of IFA committees and into the newspaper columns, as the southern association increasingly began to query the financial contribution it was making to the IFA in affiliation fees and gate receipts when it was receiving so little in return.[85] The LFA came to feel that it was in effect lining the pockets of its parent organisation, which was a drain on the finances and development of Leinster football.[86] The cost of hosting the visit of Belfast clubs to Dublin also became a concern for the capital's senior clubs. Apparently the high-profile games against northern teams were not proving as financially beneficial as might have been imagined, and the Shelbourne club lobbied the IFA for a larger monetary guarantee for its matches, arguing that it cost almost twice as much for a Dublin club to host a northern team as it did for the northerners to host them.[87] Shelbourne also felt

[80] *Sunday Independent*, 11 May 1919.
[81] Minute book of the junior committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of junior emergency committee, 19 Oct. 1920 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/P/2).
[82] *Sunday Independent*, 11 May 1919.
[83] Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup*, chapter 9.
[84] *Irish Independent*, 16 Sept. 1920.
[85] *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Dec. 1919; 16 Sept. 1920.
[86] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 196.
[87] *Freeman's Journal*, 12 June 1920.

victimised on the occasion that its 1919 Irish Cup semi-final against Linfield was decided in favour of the Belfast club after extra-time when it had been under the impression that a drawn game would see a replay set for Dublin as had been the case in previous years,[88] while constant accusations against northern clubs, who allegedly poached players from the south, added further strain to an already tense relationship between the game's administrators in Belfast and Dublin.[89]

The chasm between the IFA and the LFA was undoubtedly growing wider as perceived Belfast indifference to the southern game was increasingly questioned. It is perhaps unsurprising that the IFA was inclined to favour the professional northern clubs, who were the mainstay of the organisation, over their southern counterparts, although in all likelihood this was not a conscious policy, spoken or unspoken, and was merely a tendency that had become the norm over time as alliances and factions had developed. The fact that the Belfast Celtic club, one of the biggest assets to the northern game, had long felt aggrieved by its treatment at the hands of the IFA, not least by the manner in which the club had been held solely responsible for damages to the Cliftonville ground that resulted from crowd trouble involving rival supporters in early 1920, is quite telling.[90] This highlights the reality that it was not just Leinster clubs that called foul. These issues and protests did little to quell the assumption that the IFA was acting in the interests of Protestant and unionist inclined clubs, despite its vigorous portrayal of an outward apolitical character. Such allegations are difficult to prove or dismiss, but what is certain is that the growing level of discontent within Leinster football appears to have been misinterpreted and underestimated by the IFA, who would surely have done more to placate its southern affiliate if the seriousness of the situation that was developing in the south had been fully understood.

The friction between the IFA and LFA stemmed from sporting concerns, although as the tension between the two associations intensified in the post-war period, it coincided with a period of great political upheaval throughout the country that was set to impact upon the sport and add a different dimension to the ongoing hostility. At administrative level association football in Ireland was at pains to remain devoid of political and

[88] *Irish Independent*, 20 Mar. 1919.
[89] Ibid., 13 May 1918.
[90] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, special meeting of the emergency committee, 19 Mar. 1920 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1); Padraig Coyle, *Paradise lost and found: the story of Belfast Celtic* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 39.

sectarian motivation. It did so with relative success, until the post-war period, when the heightened political tensions that were resultant from the Anglo-Irish War began to impinge upon the game. Sectarian tensions had long been intermittently apparent at football grounds in Belfast, most notably during the violence that ended in gunshots at a riot involving Linfield and Belfast Celtic supporters in 1912 around the time of the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill.[91] Despite this, the first serious post-war sign of political trouble between northern and southern football interests occurred in Dublin in October 1919, when a pitch invasion resulted in a physical attack on members of the Ulster selection that had travelled to play against an LFA representative team. The severity of the incident forced the LFA to issue an apology in Belfast, while in the north the sectarian character of a crowd that attended a game between Belfast Celtic and Glentoran, where open hostility once again resulted in shows of political defiance followed by gunfire, was enough to force the Belfast Celtic club to completely withdraw from football amid concern for the future safety of its players and supporters.[92]

Political tensions were clearly heightening in both Dublin and Belfast, and by the summer of 1920 the situation in the capital was increasingly unsettled, with the military controlling access to the city.[93] Tensions were also high in Belfast, where Catholic workers were being removed from employment in the city's docks and factories at the beginning of a pogrom that would claim well in excess of four hundred Catholic and Protestant lives over the following two years.[94] The displacement of the Belfast Catholics undoubtedly led to greater hostility towards northern unionists in southern Ireland, as fleeing refugees brought accounts of their persecution to public awareness in the south.[95] With political sentiment continuing to rise the situation in the capital had become so volatile that observers increasingly felt that it was 'not judicious' for Belfast teams to play football in Dublin.[96] As previously described, prevailing circumstances led to the postponement of the Irish League programme, as well as the junior cup competition, before the 1920-21 season. As a result the introduction of sectarian politics into the 'sacred' sporting arena was lamented as Irish association football

[91] Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland*, p. 22.
[92] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 176.
[93] *Freeman's Journal*, 12 July 1920.
[94] Coyle, *Paradise lost and found: the story of Belfast Celtic*, p. 47; Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, pp 276-7.
[95] *Irish Independent*, 4 Aug. 1920; 21 Aug. 1920.
[96] Ibid., 21 Aug. 1920.

reverted to regional and local schedules, with the post-war recovery of the game lying in pieces.[97] Tensions showed no sign of abating in Belfast, or in Dublin, where the Anglo-Irish conflict tragically impacted upon Irish sport when crown forces opened fire on a gathering at a Gaelic football match at Croke Park in November 1920. The following January Belfast Celtic, Bohemians and Shelbourne were excluded from the City Cup competition, and any thoughts of an impending return to normality were dissipating.[98]

The split of 1921

One area in which the IFA and the LFA continued to enjoy relations was the international sphere, and in February 1921 a junior fixture was organised between Ireland and France in Paris. After the team entered the field to the strains of 'God Save the King', much to the chagrin of the Leinster representatives and players involved, an IFA official allegedly demanded that two Sinn Féin flags that were on display in the crowd be removed from view before the game could begin.[99] In the following days the episode came to light in the Dublin media, causing great embarrassment to the LFA delegation, which claimed it had been unaware of the flag incident until the journey home, whilst the Dublin-based players who took part in the game publically registered their displeasure, feeling that there had been 'a slur cast upon them' by the incident.[100] The incident left the LFA and the players open to accusations of being unpatriotic through association with the IFA, as southern publications, such as the *Irish Independent*, wrote of an 'unedifying manifestation of anti-Irish prejudice, as they saw it, within the sport'.[101] In light of this the association and the players attempted to avert such indictments by claiming that they had not stood for the anthem and were as surprised as anyone by its appearance.[102] As media coverage of the incident continued in the Dublin press the LFA became more outwardly incensed by the flag incident, and sought an explanation from the IFA at a meeting the following month. The LFA representatives, led by Laurence Sheridan, 'pointed out that politics had never been introduced into football in Dublin',[103] while Sheridan also asserted that 'soccer was not favoured by a section of the community there, and this incident had seriously injured the

[97] *Sunday Independent*, 29 Aug. 1920.
[98] *Irish Independent*, 14 Jan. 1921.
[99] Ibid., 12 Feb. 1921.
[100] Ibid., 15 Feb. 1921.
[101] Ibid., 12 Feb. 1921.
[102] Ibid., 15 Feb. 1921.
[103] *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Mar. 1921.

game in Leinster'.[104] In response the IFA chairman, James Wilton, attempted to provide justification for the removal of the flags, by arguing that as the IFA were a 'non-political and non-religious body', Sinn Féin flags, which in his view had political connotations, could not be tolerated in the Irish game.[105] Wilton stated to loud applause that he 'did not believe that there was any sportsman, either in Belfast or Dublin, who would not have deprecated the introduction of political emblems into association football matches',[106] although his background as a leading member of the UVF and prominent unionist politician renders his apparent even-handedness somewhat facetious.[107]

Leaving aside any political agenda that may have existed within the IFA hierarchy, the LFA would surely have been quite aware that it had been IFA policy to ban political insignia from football grounds since the violent scenes described earlier in the chapter around the time of the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill in 1912. This was undoubtedly a stance that was demanded by the fragility of the string that held both sides of the political and religious divide together within the structure of association football. The request from an IFA official to have the flags removed would in all probability have been carried out with less vociferous protest in bygone years, but within the contemporary political climate such an action was deemed unjust and highly insulting. The IFA stopped short of apologising for the incident, although it did state its regret at the offense caused, which was insufficient for the LFA. The furore that erupted in the Dublin media following the episode, where the LFA was accused of 'slavish submission' to Belfast, undoubtedly led the association to place more emphasis on the matter than it would otherwise have done.[108] The wider political climate in Ireland was undoubtedly a factor, and if the removal of the flag by the IFA officials was a political act, the reaction of the LFA can certainly be deemed likewise. Lingering sectarianism had finally reared its head within the national administration of association football, and by now the southern organisation probably realised that its future in the nationalist south, which had recently been administratively separated from the north of

[104] *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 Mar. 1921.
[105] *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Mar. 1921.
[106] *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 Mar. 1921.
[107] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 186.
[108] *Sport*, 5 Mar. 1921.

the country,[109] would be defined by its relationship with what many perceived as a Protestant and pro-unionist northern body.[110]

The LFA was now in a state of exasperation with its parent body, and the final slight which would ultimately prove to be the breaking point in the relationship between the Belfast and Dublin administrations occurred one month after the Paris flag incident when the northern body once again showed its inclination to favour the interests of its Belfast-based affiliates over those of Dublin clubs. The Shelbourne club had reached the semi-final of the Irish Cup where it faced Glenavon in Belfast in March 1921. After the game finished in a draw, Shelbourne assuming that the replay would be staged in Dublin, as was IFA protocol, were aghast when the association once again set the tie for Belfast, breaking with procedure and infuriating Leinster football as a whole.[111] Feeling mistreated, Shelbourne informed the IFA that it would return to Belfast 'under no circumstances' and the tie was swiftly awarded to Glenavon in the Dublin club's absence.[112] Apparently the Glenavon players had voiced their concerns about playing in Dublin, which continued to be engulfed by a state of civil disorder that was adversely reported in the northern media, to the club's management committee. The club had then approached the IFA who agreed to change the venue of the game. The LFA immediately took up the case of the Shelbourne club, which had its similarities with an earlier situation involving the St James's Gate club of Dublin, who withdrew from the intermediate cup the previous January after its semi-final, which had originally been set for Dublin, was later moved to Belfast.[113] The association justifiably claimed that the political situation was no less tense in Belfast, where sectarian tension was widespread, while the Dublin press described the decision of the IFA as 'astounding' and 'a monstrous injustice'.[114]

There existed a large degree of sympathy for the treatment administered to the LFA, and its clubs, from within northern circles, although many agreed that it was simply not practical or safe for Belfast teams to play in Dublin amid such public unrest. Indeed,

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[109] Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 271.
[110] Mike Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin, 1999), p. 121.
[111] Minute book of the protests and appeals committee of the Irish Football Association, 1912-1922, meeting of protests and appeals committee, 7 Mar. 1921 (P.R.O..N.I., IFA archive, D4196/K/2).
[112] *Irish Independent*, 11 Mar, 1921; Minute book of the protests and appeals committee of the Irish Football Association, 1912-1922, meeting of protests and appeals committee, 17 Mar. 1921 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/K/2).
[113] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 191.
[114] *Freeman's Journal*, 8 Mar. 1921; *Sport*, 12 Mar. 1921.

there had been no games whatsoever in Dublin between local and northern clubs that season, and the recent memory of the Croke Park attack, together with the fact that six republican prisoners were set to be executed in the capital just two days before the proposed replay undoubtedly weighed heavily on the minds of the Glenavon players.[115] The players in question had been witness to unsavoury crowd behaviour when they faced Shelbourne in Dublin a year earlier, and it is likely that they feared becoming the target of reprisals.[116] The LFA were in no mood to accept such reasoning however, and Leinster chairman, Robert Richey, questioned the motives of the IFA at a Belfast meeting in the wake of the incident, when he stated that if the IFA wanted football 'to be confined to Belfast and district the sooner the Council expressed that opinion the better'. The LFA had some justification for its line of enquiry when the comments of IFA council member, J. MacBride, are considered. He unapologetically claimed that the hosting of the game in Dublin 'would not pay the dinner', which highlights the financial motivation that may have been behind switching the game to Belfast, and the fact that concerns over civil unrest were not the solitary reason behind the IFA position. The IFA was justified in highlighting safety concerns in Dublin, however, given the admission from the Shelbourne club itself that it would have been 'injudicious' for Belfast teams to play league football in Dublin the previous autumn,[117] while the cancellation of important fixtures in the capital during previous months also validates the defence provided by Belfast delegates.[118] Recognising the gravity of the situation, the IFA did attempt to appease the Leinster association, with J. Ferguson sympathetically admitting that it was equally as dangerous for Dublin clubs to play in Belfast, in imploring the southern delegates not to take any action that 'would tend to sever the relations between the Irish Football Association and the Leinster Association'.[119]

It is clear that the IFA were by now aware that a split between the Belfast and Dublin football administration was a distinct possibility, and although it could do little to remedy previous transgressions, it seems finally to have grasped the seriousness of the LFA's discontent and displeasure with northern governance. Unfortunately this

[115] *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 Mar. 1921
[116] *Freeman's Journal*, 16 Mar. 1921.
[117] Minute book of the management committee of the Irish League, 1914-24, adjourned meeting of the management committee, 20 Aug. 1920 (P.R.O.N.I., Irish League archive, D4511/1/31).
[118] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Leinster Football Association, 23 Dec. 1902 – 20 Oct. 1924, meeting of the emergency committee, 13 Apr. 1920 (U.C.D., LFA archive, P239/36).
[119] *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 Mar. 1921

realisation was made too late to reverse the process of severance between Belfast and Dublin which, in truth, had been in the offing since the two associations had been isolated from each other during the Great War. The treatment of Shelbourne at the hands of the IFA had proved to be the final offence against Leinster football, and it provided the LFA with the incentive and the justification to cast off the shackles of Belfast domination. Recent political developments, in the guise of the Government of Ireland Act of December 1920, provided the Leinster association with the legislative legitimacy to do so, and despite the hope in Belfast that the situation could be resolved, there existed no such sentiment within the administration of the LFA, which finally had the impetus to instigate a split. The summer of 1921 saw a cessation of the hostilities between British and Irish forces in the Anglo-Irish War with negotiations between both sides pending, although in terms of association football it was too late for dialogue between the warring parties, who were about to be irreparably divided.

Although the decision to split from the IFA had, to all intents and purposes, by now been arrived at by the LFA hierarchy, it realised that the support of its rank-and-file membership was vital to any actions that were to be taken. In April 1921 the association lobbied its affiliated clubs in an attempt to garner the existing sentiment on the possibility of severance from Belfast.[120] The Dublin media, feeling that the game in the north was in decline, was in no doubt that the southern game would be best served by a separation from the IFA, while the vast majority of Leinster clubs agreed, and informed the LFA that support for a split would be forthcoming.[121] By now the Leinster organisation was acting almost independently of its parent body, as it granted an extension to the football season in its area of jurisdiction in May, a measure that needed to be rubberstamped by the IFA the previous year.[122] At the beginning of June the LFA 'almost unanimously' voted to end its affiliation with the IFA, although there was some opposition from within the organisation, most notably from Richey, who vacated his post as chairman in protest.[123] LFA secretary, Jack Ryder, formally wrote to Belfast the following week to inform his former colleagues of the decision that had been taken.[124] An almost thirty year association between the LFA and the IFA had now come to

[120] Coyle, *Paradise lost and found: the story of Belfast Celtic*, p. 44.
[121] *Sport*, 23 Apr. 1921.
[122] Minute book of the council of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the council, 20 May 1920 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/A/3).
[123] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 66.
[124] *Irish Independent*, 9 June 1921.

conclusion in a matter of weeks amid much bitterness and hostility. The future of both bodies was now more uncertain than ever, as the IFA pondered the loss of what had become in recent years its largest affiliate, and as the LFA, with a mixture of excitement and trepidation, was faced with the prospect of governing its own affairs with complete independence from Belfast.

The aftermath of the split

The IFA was undoubtedly unprepared for the eventuality of the split, and although it had been aware of the dissatisfaction that existed in Leinster, members of the association had mistakenly been of the opinion that dissenting southern voices could once again be appeased and pacified as they had been in the past. The action of the LFA was a very real threat to the very fibre of the IFA, whose area of control was now essentially confined to the six counties which would comprise the Northern Irish state. It reacted as such by issuing a strongly-worded warning to all Leinster clubs in late June 1921, reminding them of the primary position of the Belfast body in all matters concerning Irish football, and providing them with a deadline to reaffirm their allegiance to the association or be faced with ostracism from IFA activities.[125] The IFA also attempted a divide-and-conquer approach by threatening individual club members and players with isolation from football. In addition it forcefully reminded the LFA of its position and standing within the international structure, in cautioning that southern football would be cut off from involvement in the lucrative and prestigious international programme, as well as from potential relations with British clubs.[126] Undeterred, the Leinster clubs remained firm in their stance, while the LFA pushed ahead with the process of independently organising the game in its own jurisdiction.[127]

During the summer of 1921, the members of the council of the LFA drew up draft rules for the formation of a new association. They resigned their posts on the Leinster council, seeking re-election on the first council of the Football Association of Ireland, with Robert Richey becoming chairman, James Harrison vice-chairman, Jack Ryder secretary, Laurence Sheridan honorary secretary and P.H. Stewart honorary treasurer,

[125] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 24 June 1921 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[126] *Freeman's Journal*, 2 July 1921.
[127] *Irish Independent*, 9 June 1921.

while the LFA was transformed into a divisional affiliate of the new organisation.[128] With the Munster Football Association defunct, and the Connacht game existing in an isolated state, the LFA membership had assumed the right to establish a new national association, which it readily set about doing. The IFA by now realising that control of the game in the south of the country was rapidly slipping from its grip became more conciliatory, as it offered the LFA greater representation on the IFA council, as well as a larger stake in international fixtures.[129] It also offered the next IFA senior and intermediate cup finals to Dublin, with the season's showpieces to be alternated between the capital and Belfast thereafter, while it cautiously courted both the Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs, who had not yet made a final decision regarding which association they would affiliate with.[130] Both clubs had much to lose by relinquishing access to profitable games against northern opposition. After a summer of hesitation and administrative stalling both finally informed the IFA and Irish League of their decision to register with the new Dublin-based association in August 1921, and compete in the new League of Ireland competition, which was inaugurated the following month.[131]

The importance of the decision of Dublin's two foremost clubs to affiliate with the new association cannot be overstated, as the FAI was immediately provided with an authority and legitimacy that would have been lacking had the leading clubs in its territory been registered with another association. Likewise, the full participation of both clubs in the southern game was certain to raise both public interest and standards of play. Conversely, the refusal of Bohemians and Shelbourne to remain connected to the IFA left the association appearing even more isolated in its north-eastern stronghold, while the absence of Dublin teams from competition in Belfast was set to be significantly felt by all concerned. The FAI received a further boost, and administered a blow to IFA interests, by acquiescing to a request from the twenty-eight clubs that comprised the Falls and District League, an organisation based in the Catholic Falls Road area of Belfast, to join the southern association.[132] The FAI now not only had full

[128] Derek Foley, 'The split', in George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds), *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), p. 72.
[129] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 68
[130] Minute book of the council of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the council, 6 June 1921 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/A/3).
[131] Minute book of the management committee of the Irish Football League, 1914-24, meeting of the management committee, 8 Sept. 1921 (P.R.O.N.I., Irish League archive, D4511/1/31).
[132] *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1921.

control of the game outside of Ulster, but had made inroads into IFA territory. The IFA, appreciating the seriousness of its situation, was now more eager than ever to explore the possibility of reaching a favourable settlement with its southern counterpart, and was careful not to be seen to be taking actions that could be considered antagonistic to the FAI.[133] It surely felt that the split would be remedied in the short-term, and as will be discussed in the following chapter, attempts at reaching agreement and initiating reconciliation between the associations would be an ongoing feature of the inter-war period. The early success of the new southern body, and the game under its auspices, immediately rendered a return to the pre-split position of Irish football unrealistic and impractical however. In conjunction with these early successes the official political partition of the country that occurred along the northern boundary in late 1921 was also significant as it provided the practical validation for the actions that had been taken in Leinster, and further legitimacy for the continued existence of two rival national associations.

Although the split in Irish association football had occurred along the lines of the political partition of the country after the Anglo-Irish War, it would be misleading to suggest that political motivations were the single driving force behind the conflict that saw the breakdown of the relationship between the IFA and the LFA. The role that the political situation in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War played in the split between the IFA and the LFA has been both overestimated and understated by writers and historians, with observers such as Peter Byrne emphasising the political character of the split, while others such as Neal Garnham have attempted to play down the influence of politics in the episode. What is certain is that those that held membership within the associations involved in the split were preoccupied with disassociating themselves from political motivation in the actions that were taken, despite the presence within both organisations of individuals with strong political opinions and outlooks.[134] The dynamic of Irish association football, which was played by a wider stratum of society and across greater politico-cultural divisions than any other sport, was dependent upon the governing associations being viewed as apolitical organisations in the interest of equality and fairness, and there is little suggestion that the pre-war grievances of the LFA were predominantly or exclusively as a result of political or cultural bias. The

[133] Minute book of the council of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the council, 7 July 1921 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/A/3).
[134] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 186.

resentment that existed in Leinster circles towards the IFA was initially sporting in its nature, although as political tensions heightened throughout the country during the nationalist push for independence this resentment became magnified by the increasingly tense political conditions.

It was almost impossible for any area of Irish society to remain unaffected by events surrounding the Anglo-Irish War, and it is unsurprising that the administrative structure of association football was eventually impacted upon by sectarianism. Political tension and opinion was high in both Belfast and Dublin, and it is inconceivable that members of the IFA and the LFA remained devoid of sentiment during such a volatile period, despite outwardly attempting to do so. In the north, the decision of the Falls and District League to seek affiliation with the FAI clearly indicates the presence of a politico-sectarian element to the dispute that is in conflict with the image that those involved in the split attempted to portray. Likewise, a later FAI claim that Munster clubs would leave the association rather than be governed by a northern body signifies a similar outlook.[135] In the south of the country, association football officials were in a difficult position, as many observers viewed the game as a British cultural practice, and the IFA as a pro-union organisation. The public association of southern administrators with the IFA left their nationalist credentials open to criticism, and in light of this LFA members undoubtedly felt pressurised into taking a stand against their northern compatriots, particularly in the wake of the Paris flag incident. To remain in a position of subservience to the IFA would have been to diminish the nationalist credentials of association football, and those involved in it, and threaten the already fragile position of the game in any new republican state that may emerge. In this regard the treatment of the Shelbourne club at the hands of the IFA during the spring of 1921 merely served as the catalyst for a process of severance that was unavoidably forthcoming. The fact that the association football administration was unique among Irish sporting bodies in dividing along the demarcation of the political partition of the country, which officially occurred almost six months after the split, does not necessarily indicate a more pronounced political nature of the dispute between the IFA and the LFA. The division of the country simply provided the vehicle for the Leinster association to later legitimise the severance of its ties with the IFA.

[135] *Irish Independent*, 9 Feb. 1923.

Whether the split would have been inevitable without the backdrop of the Anglo-Irish War is unclear and open to interpretation, but there is no doubt that the LFA had become disillusioned with IFA governance long before hostilities were augmented by armed conflict. With many long-standing grievances against the parent association in its psyche, and with a period of relative autonomy during the Great War period behind it, it is almost certain that a similar conflict between the LFA and the IFA would have eventually come to pass, given the continuance of the latter's perceived transgressions. The fact that other sporting bodies, such as the IRFU, remained thirty-two county administrations during the partition period indicates that the existing association football structure could possibly have survived intact in differing circumstances. David Needham makes the point that 'the only all Ireland activity the IRFU engaged in was organising a national team' however, and it must be noted that this was undoubtedly a significant factor in avoiding the prospect of internal division within the rugby body.[136] The same could certainly be said of other sporting organisations operating in Ireland, and perhaps the fact that association football was played across sectarian and class divisions made it more vulnerable to the prospect of a split. What is certain is that the IFA and the LFA were on a collision course almost from the moment that the southern organisation came into being. Any compromise that would have come to pass in the inevitable dispute would undoubtedly have required the IFA to have taken a more inclusive and less conservative approach to administering the game on a more even basis, while the LFA would have been bound to accept its secondary role within the existing football structure which had its immovable foundation in Belfast. The continued growth of the southern association, which held its residence in the capital, like the majority of the country's national sporting bodies, and its growing reluctance to be dictated to by a northern organisation, would eventually have made this outcome impossible, and with the IFA's refusal to relinquish any of its control from the area where the Irish game had its roots, a parting of the ways was surely an inevitability.

Conclusion

The development of Irish association football, which had just reached unprecedented levels of progression locally and nationally, was stunted by the onset of the Great War in Europe, as the game lost large numbers of its players and supporters to army

[136] Needham, *Ireland's first real World Cup*, chapter 3.

recruitment, while economic and communicational restrictions necessitated the reduction of football programmes to regionally-administered competition. The downturn in the fortunes of the game were to prove short-lived however, as the northern wartime economy led to a recovery of Belfast football long before an end to the continental conflict was in sight. In Dublin a slower recovery process was also showing signs of occurring even before the administrations of the IFA and the LFA were reconnected and the sport returned to its pre-war structure in 1919. The re-establishment of relations between Belfast and Dublin brought further problems for Irish football however. The LFA, which had learned to govern its affairs without the imposition of the IFA during the war interval, was loathe to return to the pre-war position of subservience to the northern association, and became increasingly discontented at the indifferent and apathetic attitude of the IFA towards the game outside of its north-eastern stronghold. The re-emergence of long-standing grievances, such as a lack of representation and involvement in international fixtures and alleged favouritism towards the prominent northern clubs, coupled with the IFA's reluctance to fund the revival of the southern game, increasingly led LFA officials to question the value of affiliation to an organisation that they saw as indifferent to Leinster football, and eventually enough resentment was generated to cause a split between the administrations in Belfast and Dublin.

The process of the split between the IFA and the LFA was undoubtedly accelerated by the heightened political tensions within in Irish society as a result of the nationalist push for independence. From the 1916 Rising onwards the LFA found itself in a complex position in being governed by what many in the south saw as a Protestant, pro-union organisation. Although both associations were outwardly eager to disassociate themselves with any political motivation in the administration of Irish football, it was impossible that individuals on both sides could have remained devoid of sentiment and opinion, particularly as the Anglo-Irish War escalated, and political and sectarian agitation spread to the streets of both Belfast and Dublin. The survival of Irish football, which encompassed a broader cultural and social stratum than other Irish sports, as a thirty-two county entity depended on the organisations that administered the game remaining withdrawn from perceptions of political bias. This was to prove impossible however, and the flag incident in Paris serves as indicator of political tension that resided within the structure of the game. The increased visibility of politics within the

sport at a time of such widespread tension and volatility was to prove too much to overcome. The LFA, aware that its standing within the new southern state that was now in sight would be determined by its relationship with the IFA, chose to instigate a breakaway after a final slight against Leinster football in the wake of the Shelbourne cup semi-final affair. The IFA, despite being all too conscious of the discontent in Leinster, appear to have been completely unprepared for the eventuality of the split, and faced with its impending reduction in power and jurisdiction, it attempted to reverse the process with a mixture of threats and concessions. The newly-formed FAI had no desire to return to the pre-split status quo however, and set about organising the game in the southern twenty-six counties with complete independence. Despite the fact that the political environment of pre-independence Ireland hastened and necessitated the split, a parting of the ways between the Belfast and Dublin administrations would in all likelihood have been forthcoming in any case. As the LFA outgrew its position as a mere divisional body, answerable in all its actions to a northern parent organisation, and as the conservatively-minded IFA remained unwilling to relinquish any of its control or adequately accept its southern affiliate into the decision-making process or administration procedures of Irish football, there was simply no way in which the game could be continued to be organised within the established administrative structure.

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Chapter 2: The Football Association of Ireland and its pursuit of international recognition

Introduction

From the moment that the Football Association of Ireland came into existence during the summer of 1921 its future was fraught with uncertainty. Even before plans were put in place for the organisation of the impending football season it was glaringly apparent that the new association's survival depended on its ability to gain acceptance from other national associations, and the bodies that governed the sport at international level. The oldest of these organisations was the powerful and influential International Football Association Board. The International Board was established in 1886 by the national football associations of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales to standardise the rules of association football.[1] According to H.F. Moorhouse, the board also served as a regulatory body that fostered relations between the administrators involved in the British associations, while it also acted as a reference point on issues such as player eligibility for international representation and the prospect of players signing for clubs outside of their national association's jurisdiction.[2] During the early twentieth century another international organisation emerged on the continent with the mandate of administrating association football relations between national bodies. The *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) came into existence on 21 May 1904 in Paris. David Needham credits the emergence of FIFA to two men, Robert Guérin, secretary of the Union of French Societies of Athletic Sports (USFSA), and Carl Anton Wilhelm Hirschman of the Dutch Football Association. FIFA initially boasted seven members, the national associations of France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, while those of Germany, Austria and Italy would join within a year of its formation. It would take until 1908 for the fledgling FIFA to organise its first international tournament however, and there is no doubt that it was dwarfed in its influence by the International Board during the pre-war era.[3]

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[1] See introductory note 4.
[2] H.F. Moorhouse, 'One state, several countries: Soccer and nationality in a 'United Kingdom', in J.A. Mangan (ed.), *Tribal identities: Nationalism, Europe, sport* (London, 1996), p. 59.
[3] David Needham, *Ireland's first real World Cup: the story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic team*, (Dublin, 2012), introduction, available on kindle.

Despite the fact that the members of the International Board held FIFA, and association football outside of the United Kingdom, in little regard the English FA had joined the organisation in 1905, while the Scottish FA and the IFA had followed suit in 1910.[4] Although the British associations had left FIFA by the time that the FAI came into existence the prospects of the new Irish body gaining recognition in the international sphere were complicated by the position of the IFA. While the split had effectively reduced its influence to its north-eastern territories the prestige of the IFA within the international association football community had remained intact, and it continued to be deemed the sole legitimate national association in Ireland. Relations that had been forged between the IFA and its fellow International Board members had become solid and inter-dependent during the pre-war era, and despite the challenge posed by the new southern body Belfast officials were justifiably confident of the support of their British counterparts in maintaining their association's traditional position at the summit of the Irish game. The British football associations were certainly conservative and insular bodies, and were far from receptive of change, and from the outset it was apparent that the internal truncation of the IFA's area of jurisdiction had not altered its international standing. Such outlooks were clearly detrimental to the aspirations of the FAI. Its members realised that the association could not exist in isolation from the connectivity or the financial sustenance provided by international competition, and efforts aimed at altering the perception of the International Board were a preoccupation of the association's hierarchy as they began the task of independently administrating the sport from Dublin.

The IFA had cast no aspersions in threatening Leinster dissidents with exclusion from the global structure of the sport in the aftermath of the split, and its members were certainly of the opinion that a prolonged period of confinement would eventually necessitate the return of their former colleagues on terms favourable to Belfast. It was true that negotiation with the IFA was undoubtedly the most obvious mechanism available to the FAI in its pursuit of recognition from the International Board, and in the weeks and months that followed the split popular opinion in both Belfast and Dublin anticipated a settlement that would bring the conflict to an agreeable conclusion for both parties. Although the lines of communication between the IFA and the FAI remained open after the split, a return to the previous position of subservience to Belfast was not

[4] Ibid.

on the agenda of southern officials. With the decision to sever connections taken, the unflinching determination of the FAI to define itself independently of Belfast was obvious, although whether the mere resolve of its membership would be sufficient to overcome the rigid barriers to participation in the international sphere was highly doubtful. The FAI would come to see the best possibility of achieving international recognition in the political developments that transformed the southern Irish state after the Anglo-Irish War, and the unique political environment of inter-war Ireland would become the basis on which FAI claims were developed. Whether arguments based on political intricacies carried any weight in international sporting terms was yet to be determined however, and it is quite apparent that the self-confidence and enthusiasm that had been generated by the split from Belfast was in real danger of evaporating with immediate effect as the FAI faced the possibility of being left to languish in the international wilderness.

Initial attempts at settlement with the IFA

The manner in which IFA indignation and threats had been replaced by conciliatory gestures as the FAI began the process of organising the 1921-1922 football season with complete autonomy from Belfast has been discussed in the previous chapter, and it is clear that northern sentiment favoured a speedy resolution to the dispute and the swift reintegration of the southern game within the previous national structure. A number of influential Dublin administrators, such as Saul Wigoder and Robert Richey, were also openly supportive of reconciliation, although this outlook was not shared by their colleagues who were disinclined to entertain the prospect of re-entering into a relationship that had previously caused untold levels of aggravation and bitterness.[5] The Leinster officials that had initiated the split had been somewhat vindicated in their decision by encouraging signs of growth and expansion within the southern game by the time that the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and the political partition of the country, further legitimised the severance in December 1921. In truth there appeared to be no real appetite to enter into any negotiations with the IFA. The FAI's initial approach to the International Board members in March 1922 somewhat altered this outlook however,[6] as its application for recognition was refused owing to both 'the unsettled condition of football management in Ireland', and the intervention of the IFA, which sought to

[5] *Irish Independent*, 2 Feb. 1922.
[6] See introductory note 4.

protect its position of primacy in terms of international football.[7] The International Board made it clear that it considered the IFA as the legitimate national association in Ireland, and would continue to do so under prevailing conditions.[8] After a further application was dismissed by the board three months later on the grounds that 'no country could be represented by two Associations', the FAI came to recognise that it could not simply usurp the status of the IFA without undermining its claim of representation over the entire country.[9]

The FAI felt that its position may be looked upon more favourably in Britain if it was seen to be receptive to the prospect of negotiation and relations with Belfast. With this in mind it surprisingly offered the presidency of the association to Sir Henry McLaughlin, an individual with strong northern connections, and a man that Needham describes as 'a Freemason and British establishment figure'. McLaughlin was a former footballer at the Cliftonville club of Belfast, and had come to Dublin to manage the office of his family firm, the McLaughlin and Harvey building contractor. He had been heavily involved in army recruitment during the Great War, for which he was made a Knight Commander of the Orders of the British Empire in 1919, and his appointment by the FAI can be considered quite controversial considering the nationalist characterisation that it was attempting to propagate during its formative years.[10] Dialogue between the FAI and the IFA during late 1922 culminated in the organisation of a conference at Dublin's Shelbourne Hotel early the following year, and it is apparent that both media and popular sentiment was in favour of a resolution to the conflict as a large crowd gathered outside to hear news of the outcome.[11] Hopes of a settlement were also high within the IFA delegation that had travelled south for the conference, although it quickly became apparent that the northerners had arrived with a far more conciliatory disposition than their former colleagues within the FAI who proceeded to demand that the headquarters of any amalgamated association be based in Dublin. Unsurprisingly this suggestion was completely unacceptable to the Belfast delegation which dismissed

[7] Meeting of the council of the Football Association, 27 Mar. 1922 (Wembley, FA archive, FA minute book 1921-22).
[8] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, T. Robbins, secretary of the Welsh FA to J. Ryder, 24 May 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[9] Minutes of the annual general meeting of the International Board, 10 June 1922 (Wembley, FA archive, FA minute book 1922-23).
[10] Peter Byrne, *Green is the colour: the story of Irish football* (London, 2012), p. 78; Needham, Ireland's first real World Cup, chapter 2.
[11] *Sunday Independent*, 4 Feb. 1923

it out of hand, and it was agreed that the time was not 'opportune' for further negotiations as talks reached stalemate.[12] The FAI contingent was effectively proposing the relegation of the IFA to the role of a regional affiliate, and was undoubtedly aware that such a proposal would be firmly rejected by the IFA. It appears as though the southern association was not genuinely interested in reaching an agreement at this stage. The suggestion that the IFA would effectively hand control of Irish football to an organisation that had been in existence for less than two years was inconceivable and was considered little short of contemptuous by those in attendance, who returned to Belfast disappointed with the outcome.[13]

The audacious stance of the FAI had dispelled any lingering expectations of a return to the pre-split position, while serving to portray a facade of attempted conciliation for the British associations who were once again lobbied in the immediate aftermath of the aborted conference.[14] The approach of the FAI to the negotiations had also alienated any remaining sympathy for the grievances that led to the split within the Belfast media, which derogatorily claimed that 'now the tail would like to wag the dog' in reference to the LFA's former subservient position.[15] Relations between the two associations deteriorated even further as a result of the press coverage in the days after the conference, and the fact that the IFA had apparently leaked details of the demands made by the FAI infuriated the southerners, who accused IFA chairman, James Wilton, of a 'gross breach of faith'.[16] Those connected with the FAI strongly disputed mounting accusations that political, and not sporting motivations, were behind their refusal to reasonably enter into negotiations, and counter-claims were made by the southerners against the condescending and dismissive attitude that had been shown towards them by their northern counterparts. To his credit, Wilton wholeheartedly attempted to defuse the situation in claiming that there had been a mere misunderstanding and by asserting that he remained confident of the possibility of a future settlement, although it was by

[12] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder's notes from the conference between the FAI and the IFA at Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, 3 Mar. 1923 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[13] *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Feb. 1923.
[14] Correspondence from J. Ryder to the Football Association, 20 Feb. 1923 (Wembley, FA archive, FA minute book 1922-23).
[15] *Irish Independent*, 6 Feb. 1923.
[16] Ibid., 9 Feb. 1923.

now clear that profound difficulties needed to be overcome for such an outcome to be achieved.[17]

FIFA membership and early efforts at gaining international recognition

While the FAI was contacting the British associations in its initial pursuit of international recognition it had simultaneously been making overtures to national associations in continental Europe, where the sport was experiencing an unerring post-war development. In early 1922 FAI secretary, Jack Ryder, had contacted the *Fédération Française de Football* (FFF) with a view to organising an international fixture against the French national team.[18] Ryder's counterpart in Paris, Henri Delauney, responded in the negative however, insisting that his team was not in a position to acquiesce to a match as the FAI did not hold membership of FIFA.[19] Delauney strongly advised Ryder to seek admission to FIFA at the earliest possible date, although the FAI had already been in contact. Similarly to the International Board the initial approach to FIFA was unproductive, as the organisation informed Dublin that it was not within its protocol to recognise two separate national associations from the same country. Although the IFA did not hold membership of FIFA, having left in protest after the readmission of the national associations of the defeated Central Powers along with its fellow International Board members in 1920, FIFA was reluctant to facilitate the FAI application. It requested clarification on the legitimacy of FAI claims to supersede the IFA and enquired whether 'fusion' between the Dublin and Belfast administrations was possible,[20] before writing later in 1922 to explain that the political situation in Ireland was too unstable and unclear for any membership application to be considered.[21]

The FAI was certainly disappointed with the outcome. Assurances of support from a number of continental associations and the self-imposed exile of the British associations

[17] Ibid., 15 Feb. 1923.
[18] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to the *Fédération Française de Football* (FFF), 6 Feb. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archives, P137/1).
[19] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, H. Delauney (Secretary-general of FFF) to J. Ryder, 10 Mar. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[20] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, FIFA to the FAI, 19 Feb. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[21] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, C.A.W. Hirschman, (Treasurer/Secretary of FIFA) to the FAI, 16 Oct. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).

had given the FAI hope that entry to FIFA would be forthcoming,[22] and despite an intimation from FIFA that a further application may be successful when more settled conditions prevailed in Ireland, the IFA threat of complete isolation appeared to be coming to fruition.[23] By the summer of 1923 a membership application from the FAI was once again under the consideration of FIFA and was placed on the agenda to be discussed at the organisation's forthcoming annual congress in Geneva, the first to take place since the climax of the war. The creation of the Irish Free State in December the previous year had strengthened the claim of the FAI during the intervening period by establishing a clear political divide between the IFA area of influence and that of the southern body. In an attempt to add legitimacy to its case the Dublin association duly changed its title to that of the Football Association of the Irish Free State (FAIFS) to exhibit the exact territory that it now asserted governance over.[24]

The FAIFS pursuit of international recognition can be considered the sporting parallel of the government's yearning to promote the state globally during the early 1920s. Although association football was certainly not considered a national sport by many within the state apparatus the nature of the campaign that was in many ways concerned with establishing 'self-definition' from perceived British and unionist influences was looked upon favourably by the Executive Council.[25] The association, through the tireless work of prominent administrator Robert Murphy,[26] successfully gained state assistance in its application to FIFA in the form of an official letter from the Ministry for External Affairs,[27] while a representative of the Free State government was commissioned to attend the Geneva congress in person.[28] Murphy, a French speaker, was renowned within association football circles for his negotiating skills, and his role was vital to any success that the FAI campaign for international recognition would

[22] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, Turkish Football Association to J. Ryder, 25 Mar. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1); International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, United States Football Association to J. Ryder, 29 Apr. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[23] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, A.W. Hirschman to the FAI, 16 Oct. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[24] See introductory note 5.
[25] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (2nd ed., London, 1989), p. 516.
[26] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 82.
[27] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, O. Grattan Esmonde to J.F. Harrison, 3 May 1923 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[28] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).

achieve. Like a number of FAI members, Murphy worked as a civil servant,[29] while he also dabbled in journalism, acting as a correspondent for the *Irish Independent* newspaper during the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924.[30] He would later serve as vice-president of the FAI, and was the ideal candidate to forward its case to the Free State government and FIFA.[31] Dialogue between the FAIFS and FIFA in the weeks leading up to the congress offered few clues as to the possible outcome of the membership application until August when Murphy received unofficial word from a French acquaintance that the application had been accepted.[32] The FAIFS received official confirmation that the association had been granted provisional membership pending clarification of the political status of the Irish Free State from the British Foreign Office from the now FIFA secretary, Carl Anton Wilhelm Hirschman, a few days later, and after two years of existence the infant body had acquired a measure of the recognition that it so desperately required.

The FAIFS had gained recognition from association football's international structure relatively fast in comparison with the Irish Free State's acceptance into the global sphere, and its application had undoubtedly been assisted by the continued absence of the English, Scottish, Welsh and IFA members from the ranks of FIFA. It appears that the International Board had indeed tried to influence FIFA in its decision on the Free State application, although later correspondence between Jack Ryder and the Ministry for External Affairs suggests that a number of FIFA delegates had taken exception to being dictated to in an arrogant manner by the English Football Association in particular.[33] Great satisfaction was justifiably felt by the FAIFS membership on the association's admittance to FIFA. Despite this access to FIFA was surely viewed as a stepping stone to what was truly desired; recognition from the International Board and access to international fixtures against England, Scotland and Wales. Matches against British opposition held the potential to be far more financially lucrative to the association than the games that it was now permitted to organise with its fellow members of FIFA, and it is also likely that FAIFS officials would have privately shared

[29] Interview with Maighréad Ní Mhurchadha of Skerries, County Dublin (15 Nov. 2012).
[30] Needham, *Ireland's first real World Cup*, chapter 9.
[31] Ibid., chapter 5.
[32] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, M.A. Duchenne, (Gallia FC) to R.F. Murphy, 7 Aug. 1923, (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).
[33] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).

a similar outlook towards the perceived inferiority of continental football that more obviously manifested in Britain during the 1920s.

The 1923 Liverpool conference

With the FAIFS now holding membership of FIFA the International Board acknowledged that the Irish dispute was unlikely to be resolved internally. As such a conference that aimed at bringing the two national associations into agreement on the governance of the sport in Ireland was duly organised in Liverpool in October 1923 under the mediation of the president of the English FA, Charles Clegg. The FAIFS was finally provided with the opportunity to argue its case directly to the International Board members, and an optimistic and well-prepared delegation, led by the association's chairman, James Harrison, arrived at the city's Lime Street Station Hotel with five demands. These demands included a request that the IFA recognise FAIFS jurisdiction over the southern twenty-six counties, the recognition of suspensions administered by the southern body, fair access to the IFA's international programme, the facilitation of competitions between northern and southern clubs, and a request for the IFA to alter its title to one which was representative of the territory it governed, as the FAIFS had recently done. The IFA delegation was far less conciliatory in its approach than on the occasion of their most recent meeting with Dublin officials however, and agreed only to the first two demands. As the negotiations once again reached an impasse little in the way of progress in the attempt to resolve the dispute between the feuding Irish associations had been made. This was despite a number of recommendations from the mediators, the most significant of which would see the FAIFS recognised by the International Board as an association with 'dominion' status, placing it on a par with football associations from Commonwealth regions such as Canada and South Africa.[34] Theoretically this development allowed the Free State national team to play international fixtures against the British associations, while southern Irish clubs could engage in matches with British opposition. The excitement that this development evoked in the Dublin media was swiftly tempered, however, by the realisation that the British associations were highly unlikely to play international fixtures against a

[34] Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), p. 182.

'dominion' association, and the reality was that they would, in all likelihood, continue to play an annual fixture against only one Irish national team.[35]

The Liverpool conference proved to be detrimental to the aspirations of the FAIFS, and it is likely that the delegation that attended were not fully aware of the significance of accepting 'dominion' status. It was a situation of their own making however, as correspondence reveals that Jack Ryder had in fact suggested such an arrangement just four months before the conference when asking for membership of the International Board, 'or in the alternative, to [be granted] such recognition as will enable the clubs of this country to meet clubs of Associations comprising your Board'.[36] By accepting such a proposal the FAIFS had unwittingly cast itself in a position of inferiority in its relationship with the IFA, and it was an outcome that would lead to significant problems in the intervening years. For its part the International Board considered the outcome of the conference as the 'satisfactory conclusion of a difficult matter'.[37] The conference did result in some positive outcomes however. The most notably of these was the acceptance of FAIFS jurisdiction over Free State territory, and the prevailing mood on the return of the delegation was mixed, with some enthusiasts viewing the recognition that the FAIFS had achieved, however small it may have been, as a step in the right direction, and a prelude to full access to international football against the British nations.[38] There was little to substantiate such hopefulness in the weeks that followed the conference however, and requests for fixtures against both Wales and Scotland were predictably and politely rejected in late 1923, as it became all too apparent that access to such prestigious and lucrative games depended on an agreement being reached with Belfast.[39]

Aborted settlement and strained relations

The FAIFS did directly approach the IFA in late 1923 with a view to discussing possible access to its international schedule. Although members of the northern association felt that there was little left to talk about in the wake of the Liverpool

[35] *Sunday Independent*, 4 Nov. 1923.
[36] J. Ryder to members of the International Board, 7 June 1923 (Wembley, FA archive, FA minute book 1923-24).
[37] Meeting of the council of the Football Association, 22 Oct. 1923 (Wembley, FA archive, FA minute book 1923-24).
[38] *Sport*, 20 Oct. 1923.
[39] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 91; International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, Scottish Football Association to J. Ryder, 20 Dec. 1923 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/1).

conference they reluctantly agreed to a meeting in Belfast to take place in March of the following year.[40] The press coverage of the ongoing dispute in the weeks before the meeting gave little cause for optimism. Representatives of the FAIFS openly spoke of the injustice, as they perceived it, of a body with control of a mere six counties claiming governance over the entire country, while the IFA countered by pointing out that although its geographical territory was smaller the number of clubs affiliated to the organisation eclipsed the amount operating under the auspices of the southern association.[41] In view of the prevailing bitterness, the announcement that a settlement had been reached at the meeting was greeted with both shock and delight in the media. As it transpired, the IFA had conceded much ground, with the main point of settlement involving the appointment of a joint international committee that would have equal representation from Belfast and Dublin. A similar body would also be formed to oversee proposed all-Ireland club competitions, as well as the formation of a football association, which would include representatives from clubs throughout the country, to administer issues which were outside the jurisdiction of the existing regional associations.[42] The IFA clearly felt that allowing access to its international programme would placate the FAIFS while at the same time placing it in a position of dependency on the northern body, while the northern game, which the Dublin media portrayed as in a state of decline, would also be stimulated by a return to all-Ireland club competitions.[43] The FAIFS, for its part, had by now realised that its claims had been damaged in Liverpool, and that the most likely means of gaining access to international fixtures with British opposition was through settlement with the IFA. This realisation made members of the southern association far more affable in their negotiations and manner than had been the case in previous discussions, although when the Free State delegation returned to Dublin they were soon to be made aware that they had been much more appeasing than their colleagues were willing to support.

When the particulars of the settlement were presented to the FAIFS council the prevailing exuberance and optimism that was resultant from the Belfast meeting was replaced by acrimony and frustration as it became clear that the agreement was

[40] Minute book of the council of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the council, 10 Dec. 1923 (P.R.O.N.I. IFA archive, D4196/A/3).
[41] *Irish Independent*, 28 Nov. 1923.
[42] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 183; *Irish Independent*, 10 Mar. 1924.
[43] *Irish Independent*, 19 Nov. 1923.

unacceptable to the majority of council members and was not going to be ratified. The single point of contention was the proposal that the chairman of the IFA would hold permanent chairmanship of the international selection and organisational committee.[44] This would ultimately provide the Belfast association with the casting vote and final say on all matters pertaining to the affairs of the Irish national team. This was a huge embarrassment to the FAIFS delegation that had travelled north for the discussions, as they had made the agreement in good faith, while the IFA had already ratified the settlement in the expectation that the FAIFS would do likewise.[45] The issue caused a division of opinion within the Free State association, with many within the organisation, including Harrison, who had once again led the party in Belfast, feeling that it was indeed an acceptable outcome, and one which was as favourable as they could expect to achieve. Other officials, feeling that they had agreed too readily to a settlement that was not in the association's best interests in Liverpool, were eager to avoid any repetition of previous mistakes, and were of the opinion that the FAIFS should remain firm in holding out for absolute equality in international affairs.[46]

Members of the press, most of whom favoured the proposed settlement, immediately became critical of the FAIFS in the wake of its decision not to ratify the agreement, while the IFA was understandably perturbed by the events. The Belfast association publicly questioned the mechanisms of the FAIFS by implying that the delegates that negotiated the settlement lacked the authority to do so, and lacked the trust and support of their association.[47] There was validity in such assertions, and although some FAIFS members felt that negotiations had been productive and a significant step towards a future resolution, such sentiment was not in evidence in Belfast where patience had undoubtedly worn thin. The episode was certainly an embarrassment for the Free State association, and serves to highlight its administrative inadequacies as there appears to have been no clear discussion on what an acceptable outcome would have been before the delegation travelled north. Perhaps the conciliatory approach of the IFA caught the southern delegates off guard, and they felt that such concessions should be reciprocated, although to acquiesce to an agreement without the authority to do so can only be described as imprudent. Although the process was questionable, it was probably in the

[44] Ibid., 10 Mar. 1923
[45] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 183.
[46] *Irish Independent*, 20 Mar. 1924.
[47] *Ibid*, 2 Apr. 1924.

best long-term interests of the FAIFS to refuse the terms on offer however, as financial control of Irish international fixtures would have remained in the hands of the IFA. In light of the further deterioration of the relationship between Dublin and Belfast in the wake of the aborted settlement, the FAIFS's immediate prospects of achieving the desired access to international competition against British opposition had diminished even further, and the association was now forced to pursue other means of achieving recognition from the International Board.

The developments at Liverpool did allow greater intercourse between the clubs in the north and south of Ireland from the mid 1920s without any objection from the IFA or the FAIFS, although the lines of communication with Belfast in terms of gaining access to the British international schedule had been exhausted by the southern association. This led the FAIFS to appeal directly to the English Football Association, which was considered the most powerful and influential member of the International Board, and protests regarding the IFA's continued mandate to select an Irish national team that was representative of the entire country were dispatched to London in late 1924.[48] Although FAIFS complaints received a muted response, the English FA did write to Belfast to encourage the IFA to come to some form of agreement on the outstanding issue of alternate chairmanship of a proposed international committee.[49] In fact by early 1925 the English association even hinted that the annual fixture with Ireland could perhaps be dropped if a compromise was not reached.[50] The IFA responded by stating that if the chairmanship of any joint international committee was the only issue to be resolved the association would be open to a settlement, but by now the FAIFS was pushing for an equal share in the extensive revenue generated through the Home Championship programme.

While the IFA had been willing to allow conditional access to its international schedule throughout prior negotiations, the sharing of the revenue that it generated was a different matter. The association made its refusal to entertain such a prospect quite clear amid suggestions that the demands of the FAIFS were continuously shifting.[51] Surprisingly, the IFA appears not to have fully grasped the primary motivation of the

[48] *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Oct. 1924.
[49] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 22 Dec. 1938 (P.R.O.N.I. IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[50] *Irish Independent*, 17 Feb. 1925.
[51] Ibid., 2 May 1925.

FAIFS throughout the episode, which was clearly monetary gain. The prestige of competing with the British national teams was certainly to the forefront of FAIFS outlooks, as was the legitimacy that such fixtures would provide for the association. The financial rewards on offer undoubtedly eclipsed all other concerns however, and it seems quite implausible that the IFA was unaware of the expectations of its southern counterpart. Perhaps it had countenanced on the FAIFS being content with mere access and representation within the international structure, and deduced that separate fixtures against continental opposition would provide sufficient income for the Dublin association, although such assumptions certainly fail to appreciate the position of the FAIFS.

Any hopes that the English FA would intervene in the matter quickly dissipated at a meeting of the International Board in March 1925 when all parties agreed that their national teams would continue to play just one annual international fixture against the Irish team selected by the IFA.[52] This was a significant blow to the FAIFS which, after a failed attempt by J.P. Rooney, a Dublin-based journalist, to find a compromise between the two associations in 1926, turned its attention to a concerted campaign to correct what it described as the 'abuse' of the IFA's continued use of the title 'Ireland' in promoting the organisation and the national team that represented it.[53] The entitlement of the IFA to claim governance of the entire country in relation to international football had long been contested. By 1927 Jack Ryder in particular had become visibly more determined to address what was deemed a glaring slight on the status of the FAIFS as he directly lobbied the IFA to alter its articles and title to reflect the true nature of its geographical jurisdiction in extremely forceful correspondence. In response, IFA secretary, Charles Watson, predictably informed his southern counterpart on behalf of his association that no alteration would be made.[54] The FAIFS subsequently proceeded to contact a number of its continental allies in an effort to raise support for its argument, which it intended to place on the agenda of the 1927 FIFA congress in Finland.[55]

[52] *Sunday Independent*, 15 Mar. 1925.
[53] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 14 Dec. 1926 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[54] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 22 Feb. 1927 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[55] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 13 May 1927 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).

The case of the FAIFS was received favourably at the congress, where a recommendation to the effect that the IFA should indeed alter its title to that of the 'Northern Irish Football Association' was made.[56] This significant result was further validated by the fact that neither the English or Scottish delegates that had been present had raised any objection to the ruling.[57] Free State enthusiasm at the recommendation was tempered by the lack of influence that FIFA had within the International Board however, as the actual ability of the organisation to implement such a ruling was effectively non-existent. FIFA, and the sport on the continent, was still looked upon with indifference, condescension, and even disdain, in the insular outlooks of the British football administrations, and although it held two of the ten seats on the International Board, FIFA opinion was of little consequence to the English, Scottish, Welsh and IFA members.[58] Its influence was further diminished by the withdrawal of the British associations over FIFA's interpretation of amateurism in the sport and its support of broken-time payments to amateur football players in 1928, just four years after their return to the organisation, and FIFA does not appear to have pressed the International Board, or the IFA, on the issue.[59] The IFA defended its position by claiming that nothing had changed since the FAIFS had wilfully accepted 'dominion' status in 1923, and in truth the episode did little other than highlight FIFA's ineffectuality and its lack of influence with the British associations.[60]

Relations deteriorate further

Feeling that it had run out of options in bringing the IFA to task through association football's international administrative structure, the FAIFS next attempted to persuade the Free State government, through the Ministry for External Affairs, to intervene in the dispute in 1930. This can be considered quite a controversial and desperate approach in light of the tendency of British sporting bodies to steer clear of obvious association with political subtexts or agendas.[61] In his correspondence with the Ministry for External

[56] *Irish Independent*, 6 June 1927.
[57] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[58] See introductory note 4.
[59] *Irish Independent*, 22 Feb. 1928.
[60] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the emergency committee, 10 Apr. 1929 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[61] Peter J. Beck, 'England v Germany 1938: Football as Propaganda', in *History today* 1982, vol. 32, no. 6, available from http://www.historytoday.com/peter-beck/england-v-germany-1938-football-propaganda [26 Oct. 2012].

Affairs Ryder attempted to appeal to its nationalist sentiment. He portrayed the FAIFS as a nationalist organisation that was attempting to establish itself in the face of opposition from an oppressive pro-union body in the north. The perceived injustice inflicted upon the FAIFS was depicted by Ryder as a slight against the Free State itself in his claim that the IFA position amounted to 'warrantable aggression on the rights of the citizens of the Saorstát',[62] while 'the absurdity of the north-east team masquerading as Ireland' was also identified.[63]

Ryder's appeal to the nationalist consciousness of the Ministry for External Affairs was somewhat contradictory considering that the desired outcome of government intervention was closer relations with British organisations, although it was clearly viewed as a necessary approach. It proved to be successful in garnering government support and led to the enlistment of the Office of the Irish High Commissioner in London, who proceeded to contact the English FA in the hope that it might assist in persuading the IFA to either alter its title or acquiesce to sharing the rights to its international schedule.[64] The response from the English FA was once again cool however, and the hopes of the FAIFS were crushed when it was intimated that nothing could be done in London to effect change within the processes of the IFA. In notifying the FAIFS of the negative response, Seán Murphy, secretary to the Minster for External Affairs, informed the Free State association that it had done all it could and suggested a more favourable outcome may be achieved through direct communication with Belfast.[65]

Given the fact that Ryder had referred to the IFA as his association's 'deadly rivals' in previous communication with the ministry this prospect was far from appealing.[66] Any potential dialogue became even more remote when the English FA went on to forward its correspondence with the High Commissioner's office to Belfast, where the IFA

[62] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, 'Copies of Correspondence in the Year 1930 relative to the Association's position in regard to International Matches in which the name 'Ireland' is used', 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[63] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to the Minster for External Affairs, 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[64] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, Office the Irish High Commissioner in London to the Football Association, 28 Mar. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[65] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, S. Murphy, (Secretary to the Minister for External Affairs) to the FAIFS, 8 Sept. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[66] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, 'Copies of Correspondence in the Year 1930 relative to the Association's position in regard to International Matches in which the name 'Ireland' is used', 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).

lamented that 'this matter now seems to have entered into the arena of politics'.[67] The FAIFS's controversial tactic had backfired spectacularly as no progress had been achieved through the intervention of the Free State government, while the IFA had been further provoked by the unethical nature of the approach. By 1930 the FAIFS was arguably in a worse position than at any previous juncture having apparently exhausted all the possibilities that were available in its pursuit of international recognition. The IFA had been alienated, the International Board was unwilling to intervene, FIFA had proven to be incapable of effecting change, and the Free State government had achieved nothing in its enquiries. The established structure of British association football had proven impossible to penetrate and a sense of dejection must surely have been added to the prevailing sense of injustice and anger that had been evident within the FAIFS throughout its campaign for recognition.

What followed next can only be described as an antagonistic gesture as the IFA proceeded to select three players that were born in the Free State, and more significantly, that played for clubs based within the jurisdiction of the Free State association for an amateur international fixture against England in November 1930. While the IFA had regularly selected British-based players that had been born in the Free State for international matches since the split, it had desisted from doing so in regard of those that played in the territory of the FAIFS. This indicates that at in line with the Liverpool agreement of 1923 there was recognition of the FAIFS, and the nationality of Free State citizens, from within the ranks of the IFA, although evidently this was nullified when the individuals in question played their football outside of the Free State. The alteration of this policy appears to have been a reaction to the southern association's attempt to commission the Free State government to do its bidding. The timing of the selections certainly support this view, although there were suggestions that the primary reason that the IFA had not selected southern-based players on previous occasions was due largely to the perception that they were inferior in playing standard to their northern counterparts. The results of inter-league and club fixtures between northern and southern teams during the late 1920s somewhat discredits this hypothesis however, and references to the episode in the IFA archives reveal that the association was very much aware that its selection policy could be interpreted as somewhat

[67] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the emergency committee, 14 Apr. 1930 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).

contentious.[68] This is supported by the provisions that had been made for replacements in the event of the players in question, Alex Morton, Fred Horlacher and Jimmy Bermingham, all of the Bohemian club of Dublin, being unable or unwilling to accept their selection. The FAIFS did indeed forbid their participation in the fixture before once again contacting the Ministry for External Affairs and the British associations to highlight the 'discourtesy and arrogance' of the IFA,[69] which in the view of Jack Ryder had been 'emboldened, apparently, by the immunity enjoyed in respect of its previous aggressions'.[70]

The decision of Morton, Horlacher and Bermingham to ignore the directive of the FAIFS and participate in the match in Belfast further complicated the issue. Determined not be undermined from within its own jurisdiction the association immediately suspended the players, who had reasoned that their status as amateurs entitled them to play football whenever and wherever they desired. Feeling that their reputations and characters had been tarnished by the suspensions, the players launched legal proceedings against the FAIFS, and a case was brought to the High Court of Mr Justice Meredith in December 1930.[71] From the outset it was clear that court proceedings transcended the issue of the players' involvement in the Belfast fixture and the case developed into a forum for the FAIFS to publicly air its grievances with the IFA, which had also recognised its importance by financing the legal expenses of the plaintiffs.[72] After lengthy and heated discussions that lasted a number of days Meredith ruled in favour of the FAIFS, stating that the three players could not expect to play under its auspices while simultaneously disregarding its rules, and the suspensions were upheld.[73] The IFA predictably proceeded to inform its southern counterpart that it would not recognise the suspensions, in what was described as a 'discourteous and hostile' correspondence by the FAIFS, which in turn threatened further legal action.[74] The High Court judgement was an important outcome for the FAIFS, whose claims of

[68] Minute book of the international committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the international committee, 12 Nov. 1930 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/D/1).
[69] *Irish Independent*, 11 Nov. 1930.
[70] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 12 Nov. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[71] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 120.
[72] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 10 June 1938 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[73] *Irish Independent*, 9 Dec. 1930.
[74] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to C. Watson, 19 Dec. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).

legitimacy were threatened with irreparable damage by the episode. A legal ruling in favour of the players from within the Free State would undoubtedly have undermined the association's position, and invalidated the arguments that its campaign for international recognition was based upon. It had vigorously defended its stance from internal threat and it is apparent that the ruling injected a new sense of vigour into its efforts to achieve a favourable outcome.

The dispute between the two football associations, which had by now raged for almost a decade, had transcended sporting subtexts, and despite the publicity and exposure that the conflict had attracted, an end to the hostilities appeared a distant and forlorn hope. Although the English FA had disagreed with the selection policy of the IFA, it had refrained from taking any action 'out of a desire not to make the position of the IFA more difficult than necessary'.[75] The Scottish FA also propagated a stance of non-intervention, and the response of unconditional support for the IFA that was received from Glasgow drew an angry rebuttal from the FAIFS.[76] The Scottish FA had remained the staunchest supporter of the IFA throughout the dispute. A strong relationship had been forged through a mutual desire to maintain unity against the potentially overbearing influence of the English FA,[77] while the SFA was itself aware of the perils of internal mutiny having been threatened with a breakaway by its intermediate body as recently as 1927.[78]

With the Ministry for External Affairs unwilling to revisit the issue, and with FIFA remaining ineffectual in forwarding the claims of the FAIFS, the association once again sought the intervention of the English FA during the summer of 1931. By now relations between Dublin and Belfast had led to a proscription of competition between northern and southern clubs, which caused a large degree of discontent among some club committees in the Free State that depended on the revenue from fixtures against

[75] 'Observations on the football situation in Ireland and the defeat by the International Board on June 13th, 1931, at Gleneagles, of The Football Association Proposal to add to the Agreement of June, 1895: 'In International Matches the qualification of players shall be birth', the words, 'within the area of the National Association'. The Scottish, Welsh, and Irish Associations voted against the proposal, and The Football Association and the International Federation in favour' (Wembley, FA archive, FA minute book 1931-32).
[76] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to the Scottish Football Association, 30 Dec. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[77] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 7 Feb.1930 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[78] Minute book of the council of the Irish Football Association, 1925-1944, meeting of the council, 15 Aug. 1927 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/A/4).

northern opposition during an increasingly difficult financial period. The FAIFS considered it a necessary measure however, and it seems that officials had hoped that the clubs within the IFA's jurisdiction would be inclined to pressurise their association to reach an agreement with the south to have the lucrative games against southern clubs reinstated. The FAIFS remained resolute in the belief that the IFA should either consent to its demands for an equal share in its international schedule, or alternatively adopt the title 'Northern Ireland' to portray its actual area of governance. On this occasion its correspondence with London gave some cause for optimism as Frederick Wall, secretary of the Football Association, suggested the arrangement of a conference between the FAIFS and the IFA at a venue in Britain.[79]

The IFA was far less enthused about the prospect of a conference under the mediation of the English FA however, and informed London that it was more desirable that any settlement would be resultant of direct negotiations between the two Irish associations.[80] The IFA had become increasingly eager to keep the English FA on the sidelines after it had clashed with English officials after they had proposed an alteration to existing International Board rules that would see the selection of players representing national teams restricted to their country of birth. Although the proposal had been made purely in the self-interest of the English FA, the IFA recognised that its introduction could potentially undermine its position in Ireland and reacted strongly in accusing London officials of interference and of being involved in secret negotiations with the FAIFS.[81] Of course there was no substance to such allegations, although the paranoia of the IFA indicates that its members felt that the unconditional support that it depended upon from London throughout the 1920s may have been weakening. Meanwhile, the FAIFS took further solace from the refusal of the Cardiff City goalkeeper and staunch nationalist, Tom Farquharson, to accept an invitation from the IFA to play for its senior international team in the autumn of 1931 on the premise that as a citizen of the Free State he could not in good conscience represent a northern team.[82] In what was propagated as a moral vindication of the association's claims, the FAIFS revelled in the publicity of Farquharson's stance, awarding the player a framed parchment as a gesture

[79] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, F. Wall to L.C. Sheridan, 30 Sept. 1931 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[80] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 4 Nov. 1931 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[81] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, minutes of the meeting of the council of the Football Association of England, 24 Aug. 1931 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[82] *Sunday Independent*, 13 Sept. 1931.

of its gratitude.[83] Despite this, the episode was nothing more than a slight embarrassment to the IFA as individuals that were born in the Free State continued to willingly accept their selection throughout the inter-war period, in spite of the aspersions being increasingly cast upon their character by the Dublin media and by members of the public, who in some cases sent threatening letters to players that were viewed to be acting unpatriotically.[84]

The 1932 Conference and aftermath

Although the International Board had provided the IFA with permission to continue to select players that had been born in the Irish Free State in the wake of the amateur international episode, the association recognised that support for its actions had not been universal. As such, in an attempt to portray a more conciliatory facade the IFA contacted the FAIFS towards the end of 1931 in regards of its future selection policy.[85] The FAIFS responded by informing its northern counterpart that it was free to select players from the Free State that were based with British clubs, although it was not permitted to select players that were currently based within the Free State.[86] This shows that the FAIFS conformed to earlier IFA perceptions of what constituted nationality in terms of association football representation, and it appears that when an individual left the Free State to play in Britain his nationality was in some ways diluted. The IFA was visibly disappointed by the response from Dublin, although the tone of the correspondence between the two associations had been far more courteous than in previous communications. This encouraged the FAIFS to dispatch a fresh request for discussions on the current position of the dispute to Belfast. After gauging the opinion of the Scottish and Welsh associations on the prospect of a conference, the IFA agreed to meet with representatives of the FAIFS at Jury's Hotel in Dublin in February 1932,

[83] *Irish Press*, 14 Dec. 1931.
[84] *Irish Independent*, 22 Sept. 1931.
[85] 'Observations on the football situation in Ireland and the defeat by the International Board on June 13th, 1931, at Gleneagles, of The Football Association Proposal to add to the Agreement of June, 1895: 'In International Matches the qualification of players shall be birth', the words, 'within the area of the National Association'. The Scottish, Welsh, and Irish Associations voted against the proposal, and The Football Association and the International Federation in favour' (Wembley, FA archive, FA minute book 1931-32).
[85] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to the Scottish Football Association, 30 Dec. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[86] Minute book of the international committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the international committee, 4 Nov. 1931 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/D/1).

where amicable and progressive discussions on the proposals of both parties took place.[87]

Careful to avoid a repeat of the 1924 debacle, both delegations decided to return to their respective associations to discuss the proposals. The IFA proceeded to inform its southern counterpart that it would agree in principle to the formation of a joint committee that would oversee international affairs, with equal representation from Belfast and Dublin, and with alternate chairmanship, the stumbling block to the aborted settlement of eight years previous.[88] As the Free State delegation travelled north to meet their IFA counterparts in Belfast for a follow-up summit a month later, there was every reason for optimism and an all-Ireland national team and access to international fixtures against British opposition was now firmly within the grasp of the FAIFS. The meeting progressed in a cordial manner until Dublin official, Laurence Sheridan, belatedly raised an issue that had not been discussed in Dublin; Free State representation on the International Board. The IFA held two of the ten seats on the board, and the FAIFS had assumed that equality in international affairs would entail one of these seats being occupied by a Free State official. The IFA did not share this view however, and contested that as the FAIFS was a member of FIFA it was already represented on the International Board, and not entitled to one of the IFA seats.

The FAIFS strongly contested this view by claiming that FIFA was a separate organisation with its own agenda, and thus the FAIFS was only indirectly represented on the International Board through FIFA.[89] The FAIFS was certainly not going to settle for the arrangement on offer, and reaction to the breakdown of the latest attempts at reconciliation caused anger and frustration in Belfast, where the IFA had by now lost all patience with the Free State organisation, and where the media portrayed the FAIFS as childish, unreliable and inconsistent.[90] When an invitation for further discussions was refused by the Belfast association, which curtly informed the FAIFS that it would not consider relinquishing one of its seats on the International Board, and that any future

[87] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, correspondence from the Free State League to the FAIFS, 10 Jan. 1932 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/4).
[88] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, correspondence from the IFA to the FAIFS, 3 Mar. 1932 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[89] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to C. Watson, 17 Oct. 1935 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[90] *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 Mar. 1932.

meeting would be pointless,[91] the Dublin media predicted that the International Board would intervene in the dispute.[92] The IFA contacted the English FA to notify any interested parties that discussions had once again amounted to nothing because of Free State belligerence,[93] only to find that the FAIFS had already written to London falsely claiming that the IFA was open to an agreement that would see the FAIFS represented on the International Board if the other British associations would assent to the proposal.[94] This underhand approach further soured relations between Belfast and Dublin, leading to an angry exchange between Watson and Ryder, and by now any lingering optimism in the south had undoubtedly been dispelled by a return to open hostility.[95]

Once again a settlement to the long-standing dispute had been within grasp, and yet again an eleventh hour change of tack from the FAIFS had led to the capitulation of the progress that had been made. It is unclear whether the Dublin delegates simply presumed that any agreement that would see their association gain equality in the international affairs of an all-Ireland team would entail equal representation on the International Board, or whether the delegation chose to keep the issue off the agenda until a favourable agreement had been all but negotiated. What is clear is that the IFA had not countenanced such an arrangement forming part of the settlement. It felt that acquiescing to the demands of the FAIFS would not only put the Dublin association in a position of greater influence when its membership of FIFA was considered, but would also weaken the IFA position in relation to the other British associations. The fact that the conference descended into a heated verbal altercation highlights the residual animosity and distrust between the members of the two Irish associations, and unbeknownst to the FAIFS, it had undoubtedly used up whatever generosity and goodwill that existed towards it in Belfast. While the FAIFS mistakenly applauded a perceived progression in the dispute, the IFA had placated its critics in Britain having been seen to have made a genuine attempt at reconciliation. It was now in a position to reject future overtures from Dublin on the premise that it had already done all it could to involve the FAIFS in its international programme.

[91] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, correspondence from the IFA to the FAIFS, 14 Apr. 1932 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[92] *Irish Independent*, 3 May 1932.
[93] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, correspondence from the IFA to the Football Association, 5 May 1932 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[94] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 133.
[95] Ibid., p. 133.

Stalemate and reinvigorated hope

The huge crowds that were attending international fixtures in Britain during the early 1930s, where games between England and Scotland regularly attracted over 100,000 people, made the FAIFS even more determined to gain entry to such a potentially lucrative market.[96] With hopes of accessing the IFA's international schedule diminished the association escalated its campaign to convince the British associations to play against the Free State as an autonomous entity. Its approaches were based on the fact that other FIFA affiliates were granted games by the British associations and that there should be no reason why the Free State should not be considered in similar terms.[97] No success was forthcoming however, and by 1935 the FAIFS felt that the time had come to once again attempt to open a direct line of communication between Dublin and Belfast. The FAIFS proceeded to contact the IFA in the hope of organising fresh discussions between the two associations. After seeking clarification on what exactly it was that the Free State body intended to discuss, the IFA rejected the approach, stating that 'no good purpose would be served by further negotiations' as its position on the issue of representation on the International Board had not changed.[98]

Affronted by the latest rebuff from Belfast, the FAIFS became less cordial and conciliatory in publicly criticising the attitude of its northern counterpart before embarking on a highly contentious and antagonistic course under the instruction of Joe Wickham, who had replaced the late Jack Ryder as secretary of the association in early 1936. Thus began a lengthy period of service to the Irish game that matched that of Ryder's, as Wickham would continue in the role of secretary until his death while on a trip to Poland with the national team in 1968. By the time of his death at the age of seventy-eight he was the longest-serving secretary attached to any national association. Before becoming secretary of the FAIFS Wickham had worked as an apprentice with the *Freeman's Journal* and as a supervisor in the coach-building workshop of the Midland Great Western Railway.[99] He had also been a founding member of the Midland Athletic club before becoming honorary treasurer and secretary of the

[96] *Irish Press*, 8 Apr. 1935.
[97] Ibid., 8 Nov. 1934.
[98] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 17 Oct. 1938 (P.R.O.N.I, IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[99] *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1968.

Bohemian club.[100] Wickham was somewhat more militant in his approach to the issue of international recognition than his predecessor. He immediately made his presence felt by promoting the international fixture that the association had arranged with the Swiss Football Association in March 1936 not as 'the Irish Free State v Switzerland', but as 'Ireland v Switzerland'. Wickham had predicted that this contravention of the 1923 Liverpool agreement would cause an outrage in Belfast that would lead to discussion of the issue within the International Board, while a reprimand from FIFA would also be likely. The expected levels of condemnation from Britain failed to materialise however. The reality was that FIFA was indifferent to whatever title the FAIFS chose to promote its national team under, while even the Dublin press was ambivalent to the policy, pointing out the absurdity of the situation that saw two separate national teams from the same island playing under identical titles.[101]

The increasingly aggressive character of the FAIFS was further apparent in its correspondence with English FA secretary, Stanley Rous, in April 1936 when Wickham referred to the Football Association's continued support of the IFA as 'a sham',[102] while a year later a further dispatch to London described the current situation as a great injustice.[103] In an effort to garner more publicity Wickham began to threaten legal action against newspaper companies that continued to refer to the national team as 'the Free State' in correspondence that exhibits the desperation that had come from a policy that had not achieved the desired results.[104] Despite the fact that the decision to promote the southern national team as 'Ireland' had undoubtedly irritated the IFA, a reinvigoration of the debate had not been forthcoming, and it was not until the FAIFS controversially selected three players born in the north for its international tour of France and Switzerland during the summer of 1937 that the provocation caused the desired reaction. The IFA wrote to the International Board in pursuit of a ruling on what it deemed the contemptible behaviour of the Free State association,[105] although the FAIFS remained unperturbed and unapologetic. The association even had the temerity

[100] Ibid., 15 May 1964.
[101] Ibid., 19 July 1937.
[102] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to S. Rous, 16 Apr. 1936 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[103] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Wickham to W. Pickford, 15 Sept. 1937 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[104] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Wickham to the editor of the *Daily Sketch*, 25 Nov. 1936 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/5).
[105] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 4 May 1938 (P.R.O.N.I, IFA archive, D4196/N/1).

to send a number of officials to Belfast in October 1937 to scout players that were representing the IFA in an international fixture for future participation with the southern national team.[106] While the new approach of the FAIFS had been controversial, its boldness had succeeded in placing the issue of its international recognition firmly back on the agenda of the International Board at a time when political developments once again threatened to change the dynamic of the Irish association football dispute, and subsequently alter the country's sporting landscape.

After further efforts to entice FIFA, which had by now grown tired of the constant barrage of correspondence from Dublin, into acting on its behalf had once again failed to achieve results,[107] and after continued requests for an audience with high-ranking English officials were denied, the nature of the Irish football conflict was apparently transformed in 1937.[108] The adoption of Eamon de Valera's new constitution, which had been developed in the wake of the British abdication crisis of 1936, was a significant development in the Irish association football dispute as it altered the Anglo-Irish agreement to theoretically create a legitimate and independent Irish state.[109] The southern Irish state now became known as 'Éire', or 'Ireland', and gained international diplomatic legitimacy in the form of acceptance from the League of Nations. This in turn led the FAIFS to argue that as the title of 'Ireland' was now recognised in Britain in political terms a similar recognition should also pertain to the state's sporting organisations.[110]

In support of this assertion, the association officially changed its name to the 'Football Association of Ireland (FAI)' in December 1937, stating that the reversion to the original title was 'compulsory' in light of recent political developments. Circulars detailing the reasons for the change, as well as copies of the new constitution, were swiftly dispatched to the offices of the International Board members and to continental associations alike.[111] Joe Wickham took particular pleasure in forwarding the

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[106] *Irish Press*, 25 Oct. 1937.
[107] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Wickham to I. Schricker, 7 May 1937 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[108] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Wickham to S. Rous, 20 Apr. 1937 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[109] John A. Murphy, *Ireland in the twentieth century* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1989), p. 88.
[110] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, FAI to P.J. Bauwens, 10 Jan. 1938(U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/4).
[111] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the FAIFS to P.J. Bauwens, 10 Jan. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/4).

particulars of the title change to Belfast, and was adamant that the new title should be immediately incorporated in any further correspondence.[112] Predictably the IFA refused to acknowledge the name change however, and continued to refer to the southern association as the FAIFS despite the fact that the Irish Free State no longer existed. Wickham, portraying a hauteur that can be attributed to his association's increasingly strong case for recognition, proceeded to write to Belfast in early 1938 to remind the IFA to refrain from using the outdated title on the premise that it was doing so simply 'through inadvertence'. His correspondence achieved little in the way of results however, and the response from Belfast was to abruptly inform its southern counterpart that the IFA could not see its way to using the new title, and that nothing had changed in sporting terms despite the recent political developments.[113]

Steadfastly supported by the Scottish FA, the IFA reasoned that the political status of the Irish state had no bearing on the established structure within international football, although its dismissive response to the FAI correspondence did little to hide a clear anxiety regarding the solidity of its position. Behind the association's portrayal of indifference, the IFA had promptly dispatched letters to the headquarters of its fellow International Board members explaining why they were refusing to accept the new designation of the FAI, while requesting a continuation of the support for its position.[114] The English FA remained faithful to the IFA and continued to view it as the sole and legitimate Irish association however. Despite this, the FAI, having vigorously intensified its campaign for international matches against British opposition, was provided with some hope in September 1938. It was informed by FIFA that the English FA held no objection in principle to the organisation of a fixture against a team representing Éire,[115] although when overtures were made to this effect they were politely rejected by the association's president, William Pickford.[116] Pickford's tone was quite conciliatory as he suggested that 'whatever differences there are we still look upon all the Irish as, in a sense, one of the family', although if this was in fact the case

[112] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Wickham to C. Watson, 11 Feb. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/4).
[113] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 25 Feb. 1938 (P.R.O.N.I, IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[114] Ibid.
[115] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, FIFA to J. Wickham, 22 Aug. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[116] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, S. Rous to J. Wickham, 4 Oct. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).

the FAI can certainly be considered a distant and discomforting relative that remained desperate for an invitation to return after a period of prolonged absence.[117]

After the Irish government had further enhanced the status of the southern state by negotiating the return of its Treaty ports from British control,[118] the FAI once again approached the IFA during the autumn of 1938, enquiring as to whether the Belfast association held any interest in organising a conference to discuss recent developments. Predictably, the IFA, eager to protect its increasingly tenuous position, declined, stating that it could see no purpose in arranging a meeting as the previous status quo remained unaltered.[119] The northern association undertook further measures to ward off any potential challenge regarding the rights to its international programme by signing a twenty-one year agreement with the Linfield club that legalised arrangements for all Irish national fixtures to be staged at Windsor Park in Belfast.[120] The rebuff from the IFA signalled the end of the last direct attempt at settlement between the two rival Irish associations during the inter-war period. To compound matters any hope that the English FA may have been able to affect change were dashed when Pickford cancelled an audience that had been scheduled with an FAI delegation at a banquet in London in August 1938,[121] before exhibiting an astonishing lack of understanding of the character and history of the conflict by suggesting that the Irish dispute could be effectively resolved by a return to the pre-split position three months later.[122]

Reports that Irish Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, had taken a personal interest in the situation served only to briefly raise the morale of FAI officials,[123] until July 1939 when the office of John Dulanty, the High Commissioner in London, informed Joe Wickham that the death of William Pickford the previous November had halted discussion with the English FA, and that all other avenues had been exhausted with little prospect of

[117] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, W. Pickford to Dr Hooper, 20 Sept. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[118] *The Times*, 11 July 1838.
[119] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 24 Aug. 1938 (P.R.O.N.I, IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[120] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 2 Aug. 1938 (P.R.O.N.I, IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[121] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, report of delegation to England, 25-27 Oct. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/39).
[122] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Wickham to S. Nunan (Secretary of the High Commissioner), 29 Nov. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/6).
[123] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J.W. Dulanty (High Commissioner) to J. Wickham, 17 Nov. 1938 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/6).

progress in the foreseeable future.[124] By the time war once again engulfed Europe the FAI had achieved very little in its pursuit of international recognition from the International Board. There had been signs that its position was strengthening however, and as it transpired the outcome that the association's members so desired was forthcoming in 1946 on the post-war resumption of the international football programme when a senior fixture against England was played in Dublin as part of the FAI's jubilee celebrations.[125] Although this thawing of the policy of isolation did not lead to regular fixtures against British opposition, it can certainly be considered a positive step, and it undoubtedly had its roots in the inter-war period when the tireless and determined efforts of men such as Jack Ryder and Joe Wickham laid the basis for further progression in terms of international recognition.

Conclusion

The FAI's pursuit of international recognition during the inter-war period had proven to be a frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful campaign. When the decision to split from Belfast had been taken during the spring of 1921 Leinster delegates were aware that recognition from the wider association football fraternity was fundamental to the survival of any new organisation, although they could not have predicted the arduousness of the path that they were embarking upon and the complexity of the challenges that were to be overcome. Members of the newly-formed FAI were aware of the difficulties that were engendered by the status of the IFA, particularly within the International Board. The International Board controlled access to Britain's lucrative international programme, and early rebuttals of approaches made to the national football associations of England, Scotland and Wales set the tone for the remainder of the period under review. Acceptance from FIFA in 1923 did provide legitimisation on the continent, which in turn led to increased optimism regarding the future prospects for the association, although it merely served to act as a brief moment of comfort as it became apparent that the steadfast support of the International Board for its Belfast member was unflinching. Despite this, the significance of attaining FIFA membership cannot be overestimated. The continental organisation certainly saved the FAI from complete isolation and a likely return to a subversive relationship with Belfast. That said, the

[124] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J.W. Dulanty to J. Wickham, 19 July 1939 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/6).
[125] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, Republic of Ireland v England, 30 Sept. 1946 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/48).

frustration that was evident with the lack of influence that FIFA had within the International Board is a constant theme of the FAI's pursuit of international recognition.

After the FAI had inadvisably signed up to the terms of the Liverpool agreement of October 1923, the validity of its claims for international legitimacy were settled in the eyes of the British associations. 'Dominion' status had been granted to what was deemed a renegade and troublesome association, and in echoes of negotiations that ended the Anglo-Irish War two years previously the Irish delegation returned home to a mixed reception, feeling outmanoeuvred and limited in their achievements. As far as the International Board was concerned the matter had now been resolved. No such sentiment existed within the FAI however, and a determination to achieve recognition as an autonomous and legitimate body continued to prevail above all else. After the Liverpool agreement it was apparent that the best opportunity of achieving recognition from the International Board lay in compromise with the IFA, and the relationship between the administrations in Dublin and Belfast was particularly complex throughout the inter-war period. Although there had been no possibility of a return to the pre-split structure from the moment that the FAI was formed, a settlement on the issue of a joint international football programme came extremely close on two separate occasions; in 1924, when the council of the FAIFS rejected an agreement that its delegates had made in Belfast, and again in 1932, when a belated enquiry regarding equal representation on the International Board led to a chaotic and vociferous exchange of views.

The IFA had proven to be open to a settlement on its terms throughout the period, and it is ironic that the terms offered in 1932 would have been enough to placate the Dublin delegates and bring about a resolution to the international issue during the previous decade. By the 1930s the FAIFS was not going to accept anything less than full equality in international affairs however. With the patience of the IFA irreversibly exhausted, it initiated a campaign based upon the political and geographic status of the Irish Free State that sought to invalidate the position of primacy that was enjoyed by the IFA, which was ultimately an argument that carried little weight with sporting organisations in Britain. Even the incorporation of a new Irish constitution during 1937 failed to influence the outlook of the International Board or the English Football Association, the organisation which the FAI had targeted as the most likely avenue of gaining favourable representation, and although it can be argued that significant steps had been taken over the course of the period the FAI was no closer to achieving its

intended goal as war once again erupted in Europe. Whether the two Irish associations would have been able to function effectively within a joint international structure given the levels of bitterness, resentment and animosity that was ingrained in their relationship during the inter-war period is highly debatable, and perhaps unlikely. As it transpired the FAI was forced to content itself with less prestigious and financially lucrative international relations with the associations of continental Europe, and analysis of these processes form the basis of discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: The Irish Free State and international football

Introduction

R.F. Foster argues that foremost on the agenda of the new Irish political regime under W.T. Cosgrave during the early 1920s was gaining 'self-definition against Britain'.[1] This preoccupation was certainly mirrored in the outlook of the newly-formed Football Association of Ireland from the time of its foundation, although the 'self-definition' that those who governed association football in the southern twenty six counties sought was against their counterparts, and former colleagues, within the Belfast-based Irish Football Association. The parallels between the objectives and aspirations of the Free State government and the FAI did not end here, and both bodies portrayed an obsessive determination to achieve recognition and legitimacy in the international realm. In political terms, the Irish government sought to do so through gaining access to international organisations, such as the League of Nations, while the FAI pursued a similar course in its efforts to gain membership of association football's international administrative bodies. In contrast to the government of the new Irish Free State however, the FAI attempted to forge closer relations with its British counterparts, and as has been discussed in the previous chapter this was a quest that was to ultimately prove unsuccessful. The Free State association did find a measure of consolation and solace in its admittance to FIFA in 1923, and in light of the difficulties it encountered in gaining acceptance in Britain it was plainly obvious that international intercourse with its peers would have to evolve within the context of continental Europe.

Despite the fact that FIFA was viewed as inferior to the International Board in its comparative eminence, the admission of the FAIFS to the organisation in 1923 coincided with a period of rapid sporting development on the continent that saw relations increasingly forged between national football associations. International football was clearly in the ascendancy throughout Europe, and during the 1920s the amateur football tournaments at the Olympic Games in Paris and Amsterdam served as unofficial and highly competitive world championships. These world championships were further developed within the context of the World Cup tournament, a competition that was organised for the first time in Uruguay in 1930, and which was created to

[1] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (2nd ed., London, 1989), p. 516.

accommodate the growing number of professional players around the world and to profit from the increasing global popularity of the sport.[2] International football undoubtedly provided the FAIFS with the opportunity to showcase not just Irish football, but the new Irish state, on the world stage. Despite the fact that significant elements within nationalist Ireland were far from accepting of association football's potential for state-building through sport, there is no question that FAIFS officials viewed themselves as part of a national organisation with a nationalist agenda. In this regard the process of convincing those that held opposing views of their legitimacy as national representatives was to prove both problematic and exhausting. Whether the national association football team could claim to be a true representation of the Irish nation during the inter-war period was an issue of complexity and complication. It was certainly the most visible of the state's sporting embodiments, although the fact that such a large section of Irish society struggled to identify with either the team or the sport it played certainly calls its credentials into question. The FAIFS had no reservations regarding its status however. As the period progressed it would use the national team to promote its objectives within the state, and further its ambitions abroad, as the worth of the national team as a vehicle to attain the self-definition that Foster describes was identified from the outset.

The onset of international football in Ireland

The first international match featuring a team representing Ireland occurred in Belfast in 1882, just two years after the formation of the Irish Football Association, and only ten years after the first recorded international fixture between Scotland and England.[3] The Irish team was heavily defeated by its more experienced English opponent on this initial foray into the burgeoning international schedule, and the overall development of the national team during the late nineteenth century was relatively slow. Ireland became an established member of the Home Championship, a tournament organised annually between Ireland and the national associations of England, Scotland and Wales. By 1900 it had failed to record victories over either the English or the Scottish however, and the lack of development was a pressing concern for those within the sport's administrative structure, particularly as national selections in codes such as rugby were competing on a

[2] David Goldblatt, *The ball is round: a global history of football* (2nd ed., London, 2007), p. 247.
[3] Malcolm Brodie, *100 years of Irish football* (Belfast, 1980), p. 3.

competitive plane with their British counterparts.[4] The consistently weak performances of the Irish national team also led to criticism in the media. Remedies to address the depressing and disheartening situation, including the introduction of professional payments to footballers that would raise their playing proficiency and an overhaul of the selection process for international fixtures, were propagated, while there were those that even cast doubt on the suitability of the Celtic character to the skills required to succeed in association football.[5] While the results of the national team were a clear source of embarrassment for members of the IFA, and a cause of consternation to contemporary commentators, such assertions were completely without basis. The reality was that the earlier development of the sport in England and Scotland, the greater resources that were afforded to the game, and superior conditioning within a more professionalised association football structure had provided rival national teams with an advantage over the Irish.

By the early twentieth century development within the sport at international level was gradually becoming evident however, and a challenge to the dominance of the English and Scottish was about to be mounted. A significant milestone was achieved in 1903 when Ireland shared victory in the Home Championship, and the further progression of the national team culminated in its first outright victory in the competition on the eve of the Great War in 1914.[6] As association football, and national teams, outside of the British Isles were comparatively underdeveloped, Ireland could claim, with some justification, to possess the best team in world football before the outbreak of the war. The conflict signalled a sharp halt to any exaltation that abounded however, and when international football re-emerged in Britain at the behest of the Scottish FA in 1919 the Irish national team proved somewhat less capable than its pre-war predecessor. By now the tensions that would end the relationship between the IFA and the Leinster Football Association were coming to the fore. When two rival national associations, both claiming jurisdiction over the entire territory of Ireland, emerged after the split of 1921 Irish international football was set on two distinct courses, with the newly-formed FAI turning towards continental Europe for recognition in the absence of any semblance of acceptance from the International Board.

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[4] Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), p. 36.
[5] Ibid., pp 36-7.
[6] Neal Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland; being a reprint of M.R. Peter's annual of Irish football 1880* (Belfast, 1999) p. 21.

The post-war development of international football

At the global scale the inter-war period was undoubtedly the most important epoch to date for the development of international football. Representative fixtures between nations had become more common during the early twentieth century, as new national football associations were established around the world. Relations between these emerging bodies were facilitated by the increasing connectivity that was resultant of developments in technology, communications and transportation. As discussed in the previous chapter, this process led to the establishment in May 1904 of FIFA, and by the outbreak of the Great War FIFA was truly a global organisation that could boast membership from throughout Europe, as well as from North America, South America and even Africa. FIFA's functionality was highly questionable however, and it had failed to contribute significantly to the overall development of international football by the time that military conflict in Europe halted intercourse between national football associations. The organisation served primarily as a focus for social cavorting and the establishment of gentlemanly relations between the elite classes that governed association football at national level, although the effects of war on Europe's populations would later lead to a transformation of previously accepted societal structures, which was soon reflected within the characterisation of international football.[7]

The Great War had certainly taken its toll on the population of Europe, whose sacrifices and endurances mobilised them to demand greater participation in society during the inter-war period.[8] In sporting terms, these processes can be charted in the popularisation of association football in Europe during the early 1920s, where similar social conditions to those that had facilitated the game's development in industrialised Britain during the late nineteenth century prevailed.[9] Large-scale popular involvement in sport was accentuated by the rise of nationalism during the early twentieth century, and European football was to become highly politicised. David Goldblatt describes international football during the inter-war period as 'a proxy war' between nations, as governments, sporting administrators and the general populace sought to exhibit the distinct characteristics, strength and prowess of their states in the sporting arena in the

[7] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, pp 233-4.
[8] Ibid., pp 175-6.
[9] Simon Kuper, *Ajax, the Dutch, the war* (London, 2003), p. 26.

absence of military conflict.[10] International football, in many instances, became a mechanism for national celebration, promotion and even commemoration, and the politicised sporting environment that greeted the FAIFS on its acceptance to FIFA in 1923 would in many ways have been alien to individuals who were now entering uncharted waters

The FAI and international football: the Olympic adventure

FAI members, such as Robert Murphy, Jack Ryder, Laurence Sheridan, James Brennan and others, who sought to establish the association on the world stage during the early 1920s were quite inexperienced in terms of their understanding of the intricacies of the sport at international level. Before the split, international football had primarily been an Ulster concern. The rights to stage international fixtures, and the influence in selecting the national team, had essentially been monopolised in Belfast, where IFA administrators, with a measure of justification, reasoned that the larger crowds that attended association football entitled the traditional and historical base of the Irish game to dominance over the growing clamour for equality from Dublin. It had taken until the spring of 1900 before a senior international fixture was staged in Dublin,[11] and despite the strengthening position of the game in the south of the country during the early twentieth century only a further four matches were organised in Dublin before the Great War.[12] Therefore, the LFA delegates who initiated the split possessed relatively little actual experience in the organisation of international football, although the vigour with which they approached the daunting task of establishing the new southern association on the international stage is testament to their desire to be afforded the opportunity to represent both Irish football and the fledgling Irish Free State abroad. What was lacking in experience was certainly offset by enthusiasm, and, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, acceptance by fellow national associations became a preoccupation that was correctly recognised as intrinsic to the survival of the organisation.

The outcomes of the Liverpool conference and the acceptance of 'dominion' status in October 1923 had set the FAIFS on a defined path towards FIFA and continental Europe, where the face of international football had been transformed during the early

[10] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, p. 229.
[11] Joe Dodd, 'The first sixty years', in George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds), *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), p. 28.
[12] Donal Cullen, *Freestaters: the Republic of Ireland soccer team 1921-1939* (Essex, 2007), p. 10.

1920s by the acceptance of newly created nations within the ranks of the organisation on the decimation of the continental empires. The FAIFS had certainly entered a blossoming and fervent sporting environment, and the association's administration was finally in a position to launch the Free State national team at the Olympic Games of 1924. As well as bearing witness to FAIFS admittance to FIFA, the summer of 1923 had also seen the Irish Free State recognised internationally in terms of athletics by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), in a development that R.V. Comerford describes as the 'sporting equivalent of admission to the League of Nations', and after the establishment of an Irish Olympic Council later that year, an invitation to participate in the forthcoming games in Paris had been extended to the FAIFS.[13] The Olympic Games provided the setting for the Irish Free State to announce itself to the world, not just in sporting terms, but also as a political entity as the state became visible on the international stage. Promotion of a distinct Irish nation through sport was a concept that people such as Arthur Griffith had propagated even before independence from Britain had been achieved, and he was just one of many who recognised the potential for state-building through sport.[14] Modern historians, such as Mike Cronin, have also examined this concept of state-building through sport in the Irish context, and there is no doubt that sport was as an effective vehicle by which the fledging state could be promoted internationally.[15] As it transpired, the association football team were to be the first athletes to present an independent Irish state as far as the Olympic Games was concerned, and there was a discernible air of excitement among the sport's enthusiasts regarding the prospect of a national team which represented the new state competing in full view of the sporting world. This sentiment is perhaps best surmised in a letter to the editor of the *Irish Times* in May 1924, which states 'to her footballers is entrusted the honour of unfurling her flag', and as will be discussed later in this chapter the FAIFS and its national association football team would be to the fore in holding the tricolour aloft in the sporting arena throughout the inter-war period.[16]

[13] R.V. Comerford, *Ireland: inventing the nation* (London, 2003), p. 232.
[14] David Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup: the story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic football team* (Dublin, 2012), chapter 9, available on kindle.
[15] Mike Cronin, 'Projecting the nation through sport and culture: Ireland, Aonach Tailteann, and the Irish Free State', in *the Journal of contemporary history*, 38, no. 3, Sport and Politics (July 2003), pp 395-411, available at http://www.jstor.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/sici?origin=sfx%3Asfx&sici=0022-0094(2003)38%3A3%3C395%3E1.0.CO%3B2-v [10 March 2011].
[16] *Irish Times*, 14 May 1924.

An Olympic Football Organising Committee was duly formed, and it was estimated by those involved that approximately £1,500 would need to be raised to fund the training, equipment, transportation and accommodation requirements of the party that would travel to France.[17] The FAIFS was clearly not in a position to finance the venture, having only just established itself in its own right, and fundraising initiatives were undertaken under the direction of Laurence Sheridan.[18] The foremost of these initiatives was an exhibition match between the Free State League and the Glasgow Celtic club in Dublin in February 1924, which was a fixture that had been made possible by the terms of the Liverpool agreement of the previous year.[19] The FAIFS hierarchy had hoped that a large portion of the sum needed for Olympic participation would be raised through gate receipts at the game. Despite the attendance of a huge crowd, organisers were to be disappointed when a mere £218 remained after the expenses of the fixture had been siphoned from the gross takings.[20] The FAIFS was also frustrated by the lack of assistance provided by the Irish Olympic Council, which it accused of favouring other sports,[21] and the association was forced to appeal for public subscriptions and charitable contributions as the beginning of the games came ever closer, with its members reduced to undignified pleas for assistance just days before the delegation was due to depart for Paris.[22]

Monetary difficulties were not the sole obstacle that the FAIFS contended with during its preparation for the Olympics, and in an exhibition of personal defiance, J.J. Keane, president of the Irish Olympic Council and the Free State's representative to the IOC, refused to approve the visa applications of the Irish association football players and officials on the basis that the Free State team did not represent 'a united Ireland so far as soccer is concerned'.[23] Keane, who was a strong supporter of the GAA and a staunch advocate of national games, embodied a sentiment that the FAIFS had acted unpatriotically in abandoning its claim on the territory of Northern Ireland in its own self-interest the previous year. Ironically, the IFA had been approached with a view to

[17] *Irish Independent*, 7 Mar. 1924.
[18] Needham, *Ireland's first real World Cup*, chapter 9.
[19] *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Feb. 1924.
[20] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1921 – Apr. 1931, meeting of the finance committee, 17 Jul. 1924 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/11).
[21] *Freeman's Journal*, 1 May 1924.
[22] Ibid., 14 May 1924.
[23] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the Irish Olympic Committee to J. Harrison, 16 Apr. 1924 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).

contributing to an Irish Olympic football team, but had declined on the premise that its fellow International Board members were not sending teams.[24] This was hardly surprising, and the IFA would certainly have been aware of the damage that participation with a southern-based sporting body could have inflicted on its own claims of autonomy. The FAIFS was predictably horrified by Keane's position, and immediately sought the intervention of the Irish Olympic Council which was apparently 'perplexed' by the rogue actions of its representative. The council pressurised Keane into a retreat, although the episode had left a lingering bitterness. The FAIFS now firmly recognised, if there had been any doubt, that it was considered a peripheral entity within the state's sporting structure, and the unsavoury experience of the Olympic preparations would play a large role in dissuading the association football administration from participation in the games for the remainder of the inter-war period.[25]

Despite the negativity surrounding the preparations, the Free State football team became the first Olympians to represent an independent Irish state on 24 May 1923 in the biggest and most prestigious international football tournament to date.[26] The FAIFS was not permitted to outwardly portray the nationalist persona that its members may have intended in Paris however. While the tricolour was flown at its games, Robert Murphy later revealed that Irish delegates 'had no voice in the selection of the anthem', and stood to attention for the composition 'Let Erin Remember'. Murphy also stated that the party had no say in the colours that they wore, and were required to play in blue, instead of the green they had hoped to wear, by tournament organisers who wished to avoid colour clashes with other competing teams.[27] The Irish team performed credibly in Paris, and was defeated by the Netherlands after extra time in the quarter-finals, having overcome Bulgaria in the previous round.[28] Both games involving the Irish team were watched by sparse crowds that were not in keeping with the general public interest taken in the tournament, and perhaps this can be considered a commentary on the lack of popular recognition of the new Irish state in continental

[24] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 15 Apr. 1924 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[25] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the Irish Olympic Committee to J. Harrison, 16 Apr. 1924 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).
[26] Cullen, *Freestaters*, p. 32.
[27] *Irish Independent*, 9 June 1924.
[28] Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup,* chapters 10 & 11.

Europe, as well as the lack of repute that accompanied the Irish team.[29] The Olympic team remained in Paris after its elimination and played a fixture against Estonia, before returning to Dublin to play the United States in the first home international match to be played under the auspices of the FAIFS.[30] Although no national anthem had been chosen as yet for the Irish Free State the FAIFS was conscious of the symbolism attached to the issue of an anthem, and on this occasion the association exhibited its preference for 'A Soldier's Song', which was played as the Irish team entered the field.[31]

Despite being organised as an amateur international, the match against the Americans was a momentous occasion for the association, and the Irish game, although it ultimately served to highlight the prevailing public indifference towards international football in the Free State, as the game was sparsely attended and amounted to a financial failure.[32] By now the enthusiasm and relish with which FAIFS officials had initially approached the launch of the Free State national team on the international stage had subsided. It had been replaced by the realisation that similar excitement was not prevalent among the sport's popular support base, which had failed to provide the subscriptions to send the team to Paris and had been apathetic to the team on its return. When it is considered that exhibition matches in Dublin involving British clubs at the time were attracting large crowds, it is clear that there was a market for the sport, but that the national team was an unattractive product that as yet had failed to capture the public imagination. Facilitated by increased press coverage, the public became increasingly interested in the British game, an avenue that the FAIFS could not access in terms of international football, and the excursion trains that continued to carry southern supporters to Belfast for the fixtures in the IFA's international schedule were undoubtedly an irritation to the association's membership.[33] The bleak outlook was further compounded by the administrative difficulties that the association had encountered in the guise of Keane, and the Irish Olympic Council. In truth the momentum that had come from accession to FIFA and participation at the Olympic Games had been tempered by the realisation that the national team was not as yet

[29] *Freeman's Journal*, 29 May 1924; 3 June 1924.
[30] Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup,* chapters 11 & 12.
[31] Ibid., chapter 12.
[32] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the FAIFS to C.A.W. Hirschman, 14 July 1924 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).
[33] *Irish Independent*, 11 Nov. 1930.

viewed as a representation of the Irish Free State by significant elements of its political, sporting or popular structures.

The establishment of international relations and the first senior fixtures

The frustration of the FAIFS was set to continue in the short-term as the association was unable to organise any international fixture whatsoever during 1925. Continued efforts to entice the members of the International Board to negotiate fixtures failed to bear fruit, while approaches to the French,[34] Belgian,[35] and German associations were also rebuffed.[36] The FAIFS came to realise that the international schedule of many European associations were filled for as long as two years in advance, and the association was forced to wait until the spring of 1926, almost two years after its appearance at the Paris Olympiad, for its first senior international fixture. On this occasion, the Free State delegation undertook an arduous journey to play Italy in Turin, with the mandate of 'establish[ing] abroad the reputation for high-class football they [had] secured at home'.[37] The travelling party was also undoubtedly armed with a confidence that was fuelled by a prevailing dismissive perception of continental inferiority in terms of playing prowess. This was evident in the media when the *Irish Independent* dismissed the Italian team as 'hustling' and 'determined', with 'a lot to learn about the finer points of the game' before the match.[38] Such outlooks proved to be relics of a bygone era however, being rendered superfluous by the recent development and progression of the European game, and they were firmly dispelled by a comfortable Italian victory, which caused a degree of surprise within the Irish media.[39]

It is clear from the media reaction that there was a general lack of awareness of the actual position and role of association football in Europe, and when the disparities in the investment, both monetary and practical, in the sport in the Free State and Italy are compared, the variance in the playing level between both competitors is perhaps less surprising. While the Irish game was provided with minimal state assistance, Benito

[34] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, H. Delauney to J. Ryder, 29 Apr. 1925 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).
[35] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the Belgian Football Association to J. Ryder, 18 July 1925 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).
[36] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the German Football Association to the FAIFS, 9 Nov. 1925 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).
[37] *Sunday Independent*, 21 Mar. 1926.
[38] *Irish Independent*, 20 Mar. 1926.
[39] Ibid., 22 Mar. 1926.

Mussolini's fascist regime became the first European government to harness association football for political gain on a national scale. Mike Cronin describes how sport became a mechanism for state access to a more popular form of nationalism than could be achieved by other cultural means.[40] This is an observation that precisely encapsulates the Italian approach to association football, as the game was effectively incorporated in the propaganda apparatus by a fascist infiltration of the national and regional football associations, a de-Anglicisation of the sport's heritage, a prolonged and unprecedented programme of stadium building, and the assimilation of state insignia and symbolism.[41] The Free State contingent were privy to such processes while in Turin, where they were greeted by the prefect of the city at a civic ceremony, after posing for the customary photographs that undoubtedly fed the Italian propaganda machine.[42]

The organisation of international fixtures during the inter-war period typically consisted of a two-match arrangement that safeguarded associations from loss of revenue due to foreign exchange rates, and for the Free State's home fixture against Italy in April 1927 the FAIFS had optimistically acquired the Lansdowne Road enclosure from the IRFU in the expectation of a large crowd. To the disappointment of the FAIFS a less than satisfactory crowd attended however, as what amounted to an Italian reserve team; the Italian association having already committed its primary squad to playing in France a day later; inflicted a further defeat on their inexperienced hosts.[43] The nationalistic overtone that had by now become endemic within the fabric of Italian football was once again in evidence at the after-match banquet in Dublin's Hibernian Hotel in the address of Italian representative, Paolo Ingenere Graziani, who, in comparing the history of Ireland and Italy, spoke of both nation's long struggle for freedom, while stating that 'there were two great things that united any people, the national spirit and the sporting spirit'. Graziani proceeded to claim that 'sport was going to help the two peoples to defend the freedom they had won', before presenting the Irish delegates with statuettes of Romulus and Remus that were gifts of 'the spirit of Italy and of Mussolini', a gesture that was received with loud applause by all present.

[40] Mike Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, soccer and Irish identity since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), p. 19.
[41] John Foot, *Calcio: the story of Italian football* (London, 2007), pp 389-90.
[42] *Irish Independent*, 25 Mar. 1926.
[43] Cullen, *Freestaters*, p. 70.

There could be no greater summation of the relationship that had developed between Italian politics and association football than Graziani's words, and their power and emotiveness were not lost on the FAIFS members in attendance, some of whom would go on to utilise similarly forceful and nationalistic language in asserting their claims against the IFA, and in greeting foreign delegations, at post-match functions in the future.[44] The Irish media was also impressed by the Italian model, with the *Sunday Independent* exclaiming in a broadsheet headline 'let us shout with the man in the black shirt – *Viva Italia*',[45] while the visiting party were afforded a warm farewell by their hosts as 'all gave the ancient gladiatorial and modern fascist salute, the right hand outstretched' as their ship set sail from Dun Laoghaire.[46] FAIFS officials had certainly learned much from their Italian counterparts during their acquaintance, although the lack of commentary on the militancy of either occasion suggests either a lack of understanding or a lack of concern with the implicit nature of the political and sporting relationship that they had been exposed to. Given the intellect and education of FAIFS members, some of whom were fluent in the Italian language, the latter assertion is far more likely and the significance of the connection was probably overlooked by individuals that considered the political context of European sport as an issue that was distinct to the continent and who were simply respecting foreign etiquette.[47] The dangers of fascist politics had not yet become fully apparent during the 1920s, and it is unsurprising that the FAIFS membership merely observed the ceremonial protocol of a fellow national association, and international football in general, although its adherence to the formal procedures of the German totalitarian regime during the 1930s can be considered slightly more questionable.

The FAIFS and Irish nationalism

It is apparent that members of the FAIFS viewed their association as a sporting representation of the Irish Free State in its relations with fellow national bodies, although whether it was viewed as such from within Irish society during the 1920s is open to interpretation. The association had immediately incorporated the symbolism of the new state during its formative years, had adopted the title Cumann Peile Saorstát Éireann in its correspondence with its international counterparts, made great efforts to

[44] *Irish Independent*, 22 Apr. 1929.
[45] *Sunday Independent*, 24 Apr. 1927.
[46] *Irish Independent*, 25 Apr. 1927.
[47] Interview with Maighréad Ní Mhurchadha of Skerries, County Dublin (15 Nov. 2012).

align itself with the state in its early excursions to the continent, and had revelled in the ceremony and grandeur that formed the basis of such trips. The association's officials had performed the role of state dignitaries in attending memorial functions for the war dead at the Olympics in Paris, and had taken pride in their self-propagated image as ambassadors of the Irish Free State as they held its symbolism aloft for European populations to see.[48] As has previously been discussed, the FAIFS had shown a preoccupation with attaining international recognition that was mirrored in the policy of the Cosgrave government, which, according to John A. Murphy, was 'determined to transcend its limitations as a dominion'.[49] In sporting terms the FAIFS was greatly assisted by the fact that it was the only sporting body whose territory lay exclusively within the boundaries of the Free State, and as such was free to portray an outward nationalism without offending the sensibilities of an internal unionist element, which was a concern of sporting other bodies such as the IRFU. The association theoretically provided a mechanism for the promotion of the Free State, although the ideological complications engendered by the position and perception of Gaelic games and foreign sports in Irish society, an issue which will be examined in greater detail later in the thesis, blurred the situation somewhat. Elements within nationalist society were disinclined to adopt association football as their sporting embodiment, and the stance of J.J. Keane during the Olympic ordeal, however extreme, is perhaps indicative of a prevailing attitude towards association football, which continued to be viewed as a culturally peripheral sport.

This was a view entertained by those that felt that the Dublin-based association football administration had been slow to promote Irish nationality when it had been governed by the IFA, and as such had forfeited any right to be considered a national representation in the post-independence era. Despite the support it had received in its application to FIFA in 1923, the Free State government was slow to embrace the FAIFS. Aware of this, FAIFS secretary, Jack Ryder, attempted to defend his association's right to represent the Free State, and to assert its nationalist credentials, in correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1930, in stating that the tricolour had been raised at all its international fixtures and that the association's members had even brought their own flags and recordings of the national anthem on continental trips. While Ryder

[48] *Freeman's Journal*, 24 May 1924.
[49] John A. Murphy, *Ireland in the twentieth Century* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1989), p. 66.

admitted that there was little recognition of the symbolism of the Free State on the national team's initial jaunts to France and Italy, by the time they played against Belgium in Liege in 1928, the tricolour was evident throughout the stadium.[50] In view of this the subsequent assertion of Dublin's Lord Mayor, Alfie Byrne, that the matches of the Free State association football team had enabled 'Continental countries for the first time to see the colour of the flag' was quite a valid and legitimate claim.[51]

The FAIFS certainly portrayed a more nationalist persona than a number of sporting bodies operating within the Free State, with the aforementioned IRFU, in particular, being reluctant to incorporate the symbolism of the state for fear of alienating its membership in Ulster. The rugby association was widely criticised for its stance within the Free State, and, ironically, it had been on the occasion of the Free State association football team's game against Italy that the tricolour had been raised at Lansdowne Road for the first time at an international sporting occasion.[52] The national tennis association also came in for criticism for holding a similar outlook,[53] while the fact that 'God Save the King' continued to be sung by spectators at the annual international horse show at the Royal Dublin Showgrounds,[54] as well as at sporting occasions held at Trinity College, during the mid 1920s indicates that nationalist sentiment was slow in infiltrating a multitude of Irish sports.[55] Once again it must be noted that the status of the FAIFS as a twenty-six county entity allowed it more scope to exhibit an outward nationalist facade, and its members determinedly strove to do so, despite the lack of universal acceptance they had gained. The contradictory position of association football as a state representation is perhaps best surmised by Cronin, who claims that 'Soccer, while not a national culture, provided Ireland with a physical nation', and, for the most part, there was a discernible reluctance within nationalist agendas to recognise the sport's administration and national team as anything other than unrepresentative

[50] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, 'Copies of Correspondence in the year 1930 relative to the Association's position in regard to International Matches in which the name 'Ireland' is used', 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[51] Deputy A. Byrne, 'Finance Bill – From the Seanad', Dáil Éireann, vol. 34, 3 Aug, 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/08/03/00006.asp [20 Aug. 2010].
[52] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, 'Copies of Correspondence in the Year 1930 relative to the Association's position in regard to International Matches in which the name 'Ireland' is used', 21 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[53] *Irish Independent*, 25 May 1926.
[54] John McCormack, *A story of Dublin: the people and events that shaped a city* (Dublin, 2000), p. 258.
[55] Trinity College sports: playing of 'God Save the King', Sept. 1928- June 1932 (National Archives of Ireland, TSCH/3/S6535).

peripheral embodiments.[56] While there were those within nationalist circles that were openly hostile to association football and the national team, the common attitude can be considered one of mere indifference, although it is clear that the stigma attached to the sport as a perceived foreign, or more specifically British, game was inhibiting any large-scale patronage of the national team that may have occurred.

Additional difficulties during the early 1930s

The question of nationality was not the sole reason for the indifference that was portrayed towards the national association football team, and in 1925 the *Sunday Independent* claimed that popular interest in international football in the Free State had declined significantly since the split.[57] As previously discussed, attendances at international fixtures in Dublin were relatively small at a time when crowds that were attending domestic club and representative games were significantly on the rise. In fact the popular lack of identification with the national team was so apparent that the Great Southern Railway Company had even scrapped plans for the customary excursion train from Cork on the occasion of the Italian appearance at Lansdowne Road due to a lack of public interest.[58] The attractions of relatively unknown teams from the United States, Italy and Belgium were simply unappealing to Free State football supporters during the 1920s, although the national team did provide a focus and magnetism for the Irish Diaspora in European cities. The team that competed at the Olympic Games in 1924 had received generous support and encouragement from the Irish residents of Paris, who socialised with the players and officials,[59] while there had been a scramble for tickets among the Irish population in Belgium for the fixture in Liege in 1928.[60] This support continued during the 1930s, and it is perhaps unsurprising that emigrant communities throughout Europe, that were detached from regular contact with Irish culture, were more inclined than Free State residents to identify with the national team. The Free State team provided a connection with home, and international fixtures an opportunity for national expression, and while the national team was struggling for identification within Ireland, its reputation and stature was certainly growing on the continent.

[56] Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland*, p. 126.
[57] *Sunday Independent*, 25 Oct. 1925.
[58] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the Great Southern Railway to J. Ryder, 14 July 1927 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).
[59] *Irish Independent*, 9 June 1924.
[60] Ibid., 6 Feb. 1928; 13 Feb. 1928.

Three fixtures against Belgium were the only international games organised by the FAIFS in a four year period between April 1927 and April 1931, when the national team was exposed to an altogether more perceptibly politicised occasion than on previous trips to continental Europe. The Free State was due to play Spain in Barcelona in the wake of a negotiated settlement between the Catalan and Central Republics after the proclamation of the Second Republic, and arrived in the city during a 'week of revolutionary excitement' that led to a fervent and unstable prevailing atmosphere.[61] The number of zealous Catalans that attended the match is unclear, although it is certain that it was the largest crowd that the Free State team had ever played before. Some reports estimate that as many as 100,000 people were present, including the head of the new Central Republic, Alcala Zamora, and Catalonian leader, Colonel Macia.[62] Once again, any political connotations associated with the occasion had been overlooked by the FAIFS delegation, which preferred to focus on the performance of the team in attaining a credible draw. Apparently the travelling party had witnessed little sign of revolution in the city during their stay, despite the introduction of the political leaders to the crowd before the game, and despite the widespread media reports of civic disturbance and unrest.[63]

A second game against Spain was organised in Dublin in December 1931, and the crowd of 35,000 that attended Dalymount Park indicates that it was the first post-split international fixture to truly capture the imagination of the Irish public. On this occasion, excursion trains descended on the capital from Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Athlone,[64] and the Spanish performance in a five-goal victory was lauded by the press as of a standard that had never previously been witnessed on Irish soil.[65] The match against Spain proved to be an isolated financial triumph for the FAIFS, and despite the success of the fixture, circumstances conspired to deprive Dublin of international football for a further two years. The global economic downturn dissuaded European football associations from committing to games in the Free State, with the high exchange rate between Ireland and Europe acting as the primary deterrent.[66] According to the 1933 annual report of the senior council of the FAIFS, the association was finding

[61] Ibid., 20 Apr. 1931.
[62] *Sunday Independent*, 26 Apr. 1931; *Irish Independent*, 1 May 1931.
[63] *Irish Independent*, 1 May 1931.
[64] *Irish Press*, 9 Dec. 1931
[65] *Ibid*, 14 Dec. 1931.
[66] Peter Byrne, *Green is the colour: the story of Irish football* (London, 2012), p. 100.

it 'impossible' to organise international fixtures,[67] and an ineffectual approach was made by the association to FIFA in the hope that it could use its influence to compel its members to play against the Free State.[68] In truth, the FAIFS had received relatively little benefit from its participation in international football to date. The infrequency of fixtures and the disappointing crowds that attended them meant that they had been of little financial value to the association, while the stature and standing of the national team within the Free State had not significantly improved. Again, the lack of matches, particularly after the game against Spain in 1931, stunted any popular impetus that had been achieved, although the Free State's entry into the first World Cup competition to be held in Europe provided the opportunity for the FAIFS to raise the profile of the national team at home, and to become fully integrated into the global association football structure.

The 1934 World Cup

The FAIFS, like most European associations, was dissuaded from entering the inaugural FIFA World Cup competition in 1930 by the restrictive economic climate, and by the length of the journey to Uruguay. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the competition had been organised as a way of harnessing profit from association football's growing popularity and commercial potential, while it also provided an opportunity for national associations to compete for the title of world champion without the restrictions on amateur participation that were intrinsic to the Olympic Games.[69] Amid escalating nationalist fervour in Europe, there was a clamour among national football associations to participate in the 1934 tournament in Italy, and it immediately became apparent that a qualifying process would have to be undertaken to reduce the number of entrants. The Irish Free State was drawn in a group to play Belgium and the Netherlands, with two nations progressing to the finals, and in light of previous results against the Belgians, there was every expectation within the football administration and the media that qualification would be forthcoming. The Free State hosted Belgium in a sombre occasion in Dublin in February 1934, after the recent death of the visitor's monarch, King Albert I, in a mountaineering accident, and could only manage to draw

[67] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, annual report 1932-33 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).
[68] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, J. Ryder to FIFA, 18 Dec. 1933, (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/3).
[69] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, pp 247-51.

the match.[70] A large crowd of around 28,000 attended the fixture,[71] with trains now transporting supporters from places such as Kilkenny, Westport and Sligo, and it appeared that the Free State national team, and international football, were at last privy to widespread and extensive support from the public.[72] The national team's growing support base was to be disappointed by the news of a heavy defeat by the Dutch in Amsterdam however, and it is clear that while the Free State had been lingering in a state of international isolation, the playing standards of continental teams had improved. The content of the media coverage that preceded the World Cup qualification campaign indicates that there may have been a certain amount of complacency in the approach of the Irish. What is certain is that failure to qualify was undoubtedly a missed opportunity for the FAIFS to participate in the most prestigious international football tournament to date, and to further its position within the world game.

An accelerating international programme

The FAIFS was able to organise more frequent international fixtures after its World Cup campaign. The Christmas period of 1934 witnessed the visit of Hungary, one of Europe's most highly-rated teams, to Dublin, while the association undertook its first summer tour of the continent in May 1935, playing games in Switzerland and Germany. On occasion, the greater amount of international fixtures in the schedule brought the FAIFS into dispute with senior clubs, who lost revenue when the counter-attraction of an international match was held on the same day as a domestic game.[73] The association also experienced problems in securing the release of players from British clubs, as the FAIFS international schedule did not necessarily coincide with that of the International Board.[74] This situation became so desperate that FAIFS president, Laurence Sheridan, personally travelled to Britain in 1934 to meet with the managements of a number of Football League clubs to gain a commitment for the release of Irish players for international duty. Despite receiving some reassurance from his enquiries, relatively little changed for the remainder of the period, and the FAIFS continued to be frustrated

[70] Cullen, *Freestaters*, pp 84-6.
[71] Ibid., p. 84.
[72] *Irish Press*, 22 Feb. 1934.
[73] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 144; Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932 – 1937, special meeting of the senior council, 27 June 1934 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).
[74] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, Irish Free State v Hungary, Sept. 1934 – Jan. 1935 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/44).

by the lack of cooperation by British clubs.[75] Free State players were contracted to the clubs, who were under no obligation to release them for international duty, and their tendency to withhold access was often motivated purely by their own need for the contribution of the players in question.[76] There also appears to have been a reluctance among British clubs to facilitate the FAIFS at junctures when tension with the IFA was at its most pronounced, and it is likely that in such circumstances directives were given to impede the Free State association's selection policy where possible.

There were critics that thought it prudent to exclusively select footballers that played in the Free State League for the national team. There was a feeling that individuals that travelled to Dublin from Britain for international fixtures were underperforming, and were handicapped by the arduous and tiresome journeys which often saw them arrive just hours before the matches. As with other complaints the level of such criticisms became more audible when the team was not performing well, and James Harrison, who served on the international selection committee, had been forced to defend the FAIFS policy of using British-based players, particularly after the heavy defeat against Spain in 1931.[77] This argument was somewhat dispelled by the defeat of a team comprised entirely of local-based players by the Netherlands in December 1935, in the last home fixture before new FAIFS secretary, Joe Wickham, took the decision to bill the national team as 'Ireland' for the first time against Switzerland in March 1936. The significance of Wickham's policy has been discussed in the previous chapter, and the recent strides that had been taken at international level had clearly provided the association with the confidence and justification to assert itself more confidently within the sport's global structure. Attendances at the international fixtures held in Dublin during the mid 1930s were consistently high, and the patronage of the public indicates a greater popular identification with the national association football team than had been the case during the 1920s.

Almost a decade after their initial international trip to Italy, the Irish contingent that toured Switzerland and Germany during the summer of 1935 had once again been exposed to a totalitarian sporting model and highly politicised association football ideal.

[75] Minute book of the Football Association of Ireland's senior international team, March – May 1934, the Irish Free State v Holland, 8 Apr. 1934 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/43).
[76] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the Irish Free State v Holland, Mar. – May 1934, T. Farquharson to J. Brennan, 26 Apr. 1934 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/6).
[77] *Irish Press*, 14 Dec. 1931.

Similarly to Mussolini's regime, Adolf Hitler's Nazi party had effectively infiltrated all strands of German culture and society since its ascension to power in 1933, and had recognised the potential of sport in not only maintaining a physically healthy and athletic population, but also in promoting the state internationally.[78] German association football had been nationalised under the *Deutscher Reichsbund fur Leibesubungen* shortly after the party came to power in 1933,[79] and had been systematically purged of Jewish involvement with the cooperation of the existing administration.[80] The Nazi regime used international football, and sport in general, as a mechanism for enhancing the reputation of the German state, and establishing a perception of the German people as hospitable, efficient and muscular. This offensive culminated in the politicisation of the Berlin Olympics in 1936, which like the World Cup of 1934, aimed to portray fascism and the state in an attractive and alluring light to the outside world.[81]

The Irish officials and players were provided with a tour of the Rhineland and entertained by the renowned German football administrator and international referee, Dr Peter Joseph Bauwens, before the game in Dortmund in May 1935.[82] The team gave the fascist salute on the pitch before the commencement of the match in a gesture which again would not have been viewed by the Irish contingent as an endorsement of the Nazi regime, and would not have been treated as anything other than showing respect to their hosts in keeping with international etiquette.[83] The visitors were subsequently afforded a standing ovation by the German spectators after they were defeated, and were then treated to a lavish post-match banquet, which was attended by a number of high-ranking army personnel and Secret Service officers.[84] The Irish party played in Germany once again during the summer of 1936, and had clearly observed the politicised nature of German football, although they were undoubtedly of the view that they were there merely to participate in an international football fixture, and were certainly not about to attach any political significance to the game in terms of their own

[78] Ulrich Hesse-Lichtenberger, *Tor: the story of German football* (London, 2003), p. 73.
[79] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, p. 308.
[80] Ibid., p. 309.
[81] Peter J. Beck, 'England v Germany 1938: Football as Propaganda', in *History today* 1982, vol. 32, no. 6, available from http://www.historytoday.com/peter-beck/england-v-germany-1938-football-propaganda [26 Oct. 2012].
[82] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932 – 1937, 'Secretary's Report of matches on the Continent 1936' (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).
[83] Cullen, *Freestaters*, p. 95.
[84] *Irish Independent*, 10 May 1935.

involvement. There was clearly an acceptance of the differing character of association football in different parts of Europe, and far from being perturbed or discomforted by what transpired in Germany, the Free State officials appear to have genuinely enjoyed the experience and the hospitality of their hosts, and looked forward with much anticipation to the visit of the German team to Dublin the following year.

The role of the FAIFS in the Nazi propaganda offensive when the German national team arrived in Dublin for a fixture in December 1936 can be considered somewhat more contentious than its participation in Dortmund the previous year. The anti-Semitic policy of the German regime was by now causing considerable debate internationally, while headlines such as 'France faces another dramatic coup by Hitler' appeared in the Irish media in the week before the game.[85] The FAIFS would also have been aware that the recent staging of a fixture in London between the German team and England had led to a significant protestation by Jewish and trade union groups, the political significance of which the English Football Association had been eager to dismiss.[86] The English association defended its decision to play against Germany by arguing that politics and sports were separate and unconnected realms, and likewise Irish administrators saw no reason to allow the political or social policies of a European state to affect the sporting relationship between two national associations.[87] Despite this, the fact that the Irish government had taken such a firm stance against the potential internal rise of fascism in disposing of the blue-shirt movement during the early 1930s must have caused some slight concerns regarding the presence of German officials in military uniform and insignia, the wearing of which had been outlawed by the state.[88] Modern historians, such as Donal Cullen, have attempted to diminish the complicity of Irish officials in conforming to fascist ceremony.[89] Despite this, footage of the game, which saw the first large-scale invasion of the supporters of a foreign national team to Dublin,[90] clearly shows the teams entering the field as a number of officials and spectators observe the Nazi salute. Although the footage makes for uncomfortable modern viewing, it is wholly unsurprising that such a sporting contest was carried out within the boundaries of accepted international sporting decorum, and the German party were certainly

[85] *Evening Herald*, 14 Oct. 1936.
[86] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, p. 321.
[87] Beck, 'England v Germany 1938.
[88] McCormack, *A story of Dublin*, p. 270.
[89] Cullen, *Freestaters*, p. 95.
[90] *Sunday Independent*, 18 Oct. 1936.

welcomed with the same enthusiasm, and treated with the same respect as any other visiting national delegation.[91]

The game against Germany was marked by arguably the Free State's best result to date in defeating the experienced visitors by five goals to two, and the FAIFS approached its summer tour of 1937 with a renewed sense of vigour. The trip to Switzerland and France proved a financial failure however, and a number of officials within the organisation began to call for a limit on the number of international games being played.[92] Despite the fact that the association's international programme was not as profitable as its members would have liked, there had since been a reversal of the earlier struggle to find international opposition. The FAIFS was inundated with requests from the national associations of countries such as Yugoslavia, Romania, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, although such national teams were perhaps not of the requisite stature to appeal to the Irish public, who continued to frequent exhibition games involving British clubs in large numbers throughout the inter-war period.[93]

The 1938 World Cup

What was appealing to the public was the World Cup competition, which the FAIFS entered for a second time in 1937. The finals of the competition were to be staged in France in the summer of 1938, and similarly to the Italian and German regimes before it, a global sporting event would highlight the intrinsic role of nationalism within European sport. The World Cup provided the French Popular Front government with the opportunity to showcase the nation through an architecturally flamboyant stadium construction project, while it also served as a premise for the French public to exhibit an open and aggressive defiance of the fascist ideology that had by now heightened tensions on the continent.[94] The Free State was drawn to play against Norway in a two-legged tie in the qualifying rounds, after objecting to any possible encounter with Spain, owning to the 'existing circumstances' of the Spanish Civil War.[95] This was the first

[91] British Pathe, 'Soccer International Ireland defeat Germany at Dalymount Park, Dublin', available from http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=20962 [7 Feb 2011].
[92] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, May 1931 – Mar. 1937, meeting of the finance committee, 3 Dec. 1936 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12).
[93] Minute book of the international affairs committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Mar. 1936 – Nov. 1956, meeting of the international affairs committee, 23 Nov. 1936 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/39).
[94] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, pp 318-20.
[95] Minute book of the international affairs committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Mar. 1936 – Nov. 1956, meeting of the international affairs committee, 4 May 1937 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/39).

time that the FAIFS had made any objection on political grounds in terms of international football. Although the hostility of the conflict in Spain, the instability in the country, and the participation of an Irish military element, was undoubtedly justification for the association's position, there was also perhaps a measure of sporting self-interest in the request given the high calibre of the Spanish team when it played in Dublin in 1931.

Once again the Irish media were highly optimistic regarding the prospects of qualification considering the fact that Norwegian football had remained the preserve of amateurism. The length of the journey to Oslo for the first match, and the performance of the Norwegian team at the Berlin Olympics in 1936, where it had eliminated Germany in what was reputedly the only association football game ever attended by Hitler, should have acted as sufficient warnings against complacency however.[96] Indeed, the travel-weary Irish were defeated in Oslo and could only manage to draw the home fixture in Dublin, leaving the press to once again bemoan failure to qualify for the showpiece competition of world football.[97] It appears that yet again the Free State management, players and media had been guilty of underestimating their opponents. The level of lament at elimination in the media indicates that the World Cup was by now a revered competition, despite the continued indifference shown by the British associations, and the Free State's failure to appear in the finals of the tournament on any occasion during the inter-war period was hugely disappointing. Logistical realities had made participation in the inaugural tournament in 1930 unfeasible, although the 1934 and 1938 campaigns had highlighted the limitations of the national team in failing to overcome opposition that were perhaps theoretically inferior.

A flurry of fixtures in the late 1930s

The failure to qualify for the World Cup in France was somewhat offset by a profitable tour to the troubled Czech and Polish territories during the summer of 1938, before successful fixtures were organised against Switzerland and Poland in Dublin in late 1938, and against Hungary in the first international match to be played in Cork in March 1939. The FAIFS next proceeded with a controversial continental tour to Hungary and Germany with Europe on the brink of war as a result of German military

[96] Kuper, *Ajax, the Dutch, the war*, p. 35.
[97] *Irish Press*, 9 Nov. 1937.

aggression. The decision to play in Germany was a highly questionable one from a moral standpoint, as the racial persecution of the Nazi regime was now widely reported throughout Europe. Although Diarmaid Ferriter describes the manner in which Nazi atrocities were either censored or disbelieved in Ireland,[98] the FAIFS could not claim ignorance of the political connotations of playing in Germany, given the vehement anti-fascist aggression that had been aimed at the Italian and Austro-Germany teams at the World Cup in France, or more indelibly by the fallout from the visit of the English team to Berlin the previous May.[99] On the advice of the British government and the English FA, the English players had stood to attention and given the Nazi salute in front of a nationalistically fanatical crowd of 100,000 in a public exhibition that acted as a significant propaganda tool for German interests. The pictures from the game caused outrage in England, and beyond, and although the instruction had been given to avoid a diplomatic incident, there can be no doubt that members of the FAIFS were very much aware of the controversy it had caused.[100]

Despite any misgivings that may have existed among individual members of the FAIFS, the Irish contingent travelled from Budapest to Bremen via the occupied Czechoslovakian territory and Vienna, where the party were greeted by 'Old Austrian' association football officials. The Irish delegates and players were met by 'the usual batch of photographers' on their arrival in Bremen, and received a civic and state welcome from the military governor of the city, while the German sports minister flew in from Berlin to address the Irish team in the changing room before the game. Joe Wickham's account of the occasion fails to mention what was said during this encounter, although it does provide a vivid description of the scenes inside the stadium. Wickham recalls how the Irish tricolour was evident in the arena, 'though, of course, well outnumbered by the swastika', before describing how the Irish players and officials gave the Nazi salute 'as a compliment' during the German national anthem. Wickham also describes the manner in which the German minister 'paid special tribute' to the Irish team for playing the fixture as arranged despite what he described as 'untrue press reports regarding the position in Germany and their intentions'.[101] Another report of the

[98] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (2nd ed., London, 2005), p. 380.
[99] Foot, *Calcio*, pp 389-90.
[100] Kuper, *Ajax, the Dutch, the war*, pp 38-9.
[101] Minute book of the international affairs committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Mar. 1936 – Nov. 1956, 'Continental Tour May 1939. Report of International Matches v Hungary at Budapest, 18th May and v Germany at Bremen 23rd May' (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/39).

match describes a more 'imposing' scene inside the stadium, whose 'wide oval expanse was bordered by dozens of flagstaffs', while military music emanated from the stadium speakers throughout.[102]

Wickham's account lacks any suggestion of an intimidating atmosphere, and refers more to the courteousness of the welcome afforded to the Irish party. There is also no reference to the political significance of the fixture, an observation that could not have escaped anyone involved in the occasion, and there is no denying that the FAIFS allowed themselves to be used as cogs in the German propaganda machine at a time when the regime was eager to raise public fervour in preparation of impending war. There is no possibility that the Irish delegation could not have been aware of the connotations involved. The game was played a day after a formal military alliance had been agreed between Hitler and Mussolini, and the German state, and indeed its association football federation, by now had few friends in the international sphere.[103] In defence of the FAIFS, it can be argued that the association was merely the sporting embodiment of the position of neutrality taken up by the Irish state, and it had no grounds to boycott Germany in regards to international football when the state was not doing so in political terms. Like Ferriter, Charles Townsend describes how there was little public willingness within some sections of Irish society to acknowledge the realities of Nazi atrocities, and how it was convenient to overlook the policy of the German regime, which was increasingly adopting an antagonistic approach to Ireland's historical foes in Britain.[104] Such attitudes may have been present in the outlook of the FAIFS hierarchy, although in all likelihood the potential monetary value of the tour, twinned with the state policy of neutrality was adequate justification for its actions.

Large crowds continued to attend international fixtures in Ireland during the late 1930s. Over 30,000 spectators attended the fixture against Poland, the last international game in Dublin before the war, and the media certainly had a part to play in the growing popularity of the national team. Articles began to circulate in the press referring to the national team as ambassadors for the state, and the public were clearly more disposed to

[102] Minute book of the international affairs committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Mar. 1936 – Nov. 1956, 'Germany v Ireland: Disappointing Display of the German Football Eleven. Ireland plays a really sound Game. A Drawn Match. 1:1' (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/39).
[103] John Merriman, *A history of modern Europe* (London, 2007), p. 1154.
[104] Charles Townsend, *Ireland: the 20th Century* (2nd ed., New York, 2010), p. 152.

the attraction of international football as a result.[105] The media coverage afforded to international football during the 1930s highlights the fact that the fortunes of the national team had become a concern of the general public, although the reception international football received from state politicians for much of the decade continued to be disappointing to those involved in its promotion. By the mid 1930s there were indications that attitudes were changing however, and as the ideal of a culturally Gaelicised state, which will be discussed in the context of the relationship between perceived indigenous and foreign games later in the thesis, became less prominent, a climate of greater cultural acceptance was slowly ushered in.[106] In political terms, de Valera and his party had severed links with the more radical and militant strand of Irish republicanism, and the clamour regarding the partition issue had become somewhat less audible.[107] The Irish government had in some ways become more pragmatic, and this changing outlook led to an increasing acceptance and acknowledgment of the place of foreign cultural practices within Irish society.

Visiting national teams began to be afforded a formal state welcome from the Taoiseach and Dublin's Lord Mayor on arrival in the Free State from the mid 1930s. There was also evidence of a thawing of previous unresponsiveness from government officials to the ideal of an association football team representing the nation internationally, with de Valera himself commenting on the importance of 'international intercourse' through sport when welcoming the Dutch party to Dublin in 1935.[108] The FAIFS persistently invited political dignitaries to its international fixtures and functions throughout the 1930s, and finally made a breakthrough when Minister for Finance, Seán MacEntee, became the first member of the Executive Council to attend an FAIFS event, after accepting an invitation to the post-match banquet during the visit of the Swiss national team in 1936.[109] Other members soon followed suit, and staunch association football enthusiast, Oscar Traynor, the then Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, commended the FAIFS for its work, which he described as of 'national importance', after the game against Germany in December 1936, before claiming that the national team had 'clarified the foreign view of the Irish people'. At the same function, the American Minister, Alvin Mansfield Owsley spoke of his belief that 'footballers who played in

[105] *Irish Press*, 8 Nov. 1937.
[106] Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, p. 546.
[107] Murphy, *Ireland in the twentieth century*, p. 84.
[108] *Irish Independent*, 9 Dec. 1935.
[109] *Sunday Independent*, 18 Oct. 1936.

international matches were ambassadors for their country', and that they 'spread understanding among peoples', and although such views were mere personal opinions, they can be considered by the circumstances of their delivery as a form of state acceptance of the FAIFS.[110]

Although attendance at GAA fixtures had been common among state politicians throughout the inter-war period, no government minister had gone as far as attending an international association football fixture until MacEntee, now Minster for Defence, and Traynor were present at the World Cup qualification play-off against Norway in November 1937.[111] A year later, de Valera, in his role as Taoiseach, and Douglas Hyde, in his role as the first president of the independent state, attended the international match against Poland in Dublin in an official capacity. Although the presence of the state's two most prominent political figures represented the state recognition that those within the FAI had long desired, it also served to highlight continued ideological opposition and resistance to any such acceptance from within the ranks of the GAA, as Hyde was removed from the association's list of patrons. Presidential records reveal that an 'outcry' from GAA enthusiasts was expected in the event of Hyde attending an association football match, although it was felt that it would not be appropriate for the president 'to indicate by his absence his disapproval of a particular type of sport, which is popular in the country', as it 'would be the cause of very wide-spread discontent' among certain sections of the population.[112] The assertion in the outline for general procedure for presidential attendance at sports fixtures between 1938 and 1944 states that 'there is no question that preference should be given to national games, such as hurling and football but such a preference does not mean the complete exclusion of games and sports of an international character', which indicates that pragmatism was prevailing in terms of sport in state policy.[113] The complexities of the Hyde affair will be discussed in a later chapter, and there is no doubt that the stance of the GAA was representative of a certain strand of Irish society that was loathe to see association football, and the Irish national team, legitimised as a sporting representation of the state under any circumstances. Despite this, such attitudes were apparently undergoing a process of dilution, and the patronage of de Valera and Hyde at an international

[110] *Irish Press*, 7 Dec. 1936.
[111] Ibid., 8 Nov. 1937.
[112] Office of Secretary to the President, Sports fixtures: general procedure, 1838-1946 (National Archives of Ireland, PRES/1/P707).
[113] Ibid.

association football game is significant in that it shows that the FAI and the national association football team were by the end of the inter-war period a cautiously accepted element within state representations of Irish sporting culture.

Conclusion

There had existed a lengthy tradition of international football in Ireland before the formation of the FAI in 1921, although this tradition was undoubtedly centred in Belfast under the administrative control of the IFA. The FAI administration that gained membership to FIFA in 1923 was relatively inexperienced in terms of the organisation and procedures of international football, and they began their journey and education at the very moment that the sport was becoming popularised throughout Europe, and beyond. The administration's first venture into the international game at the Paris Olympics certainly served to temper the enthusiasm that existed among members of the FAIFS, as the stark realities of the monetary cost of competing, and the ideological opposition that faced the association became glaringly apparent. Despite the numerous difficulties that were encountered, FAIFS officials took solace in their belief that they were truly representing the fledgling state in the international sphere. The association football body was certainly the most visible national sporting representative, a reality that did not sit well with certain nationalist elements within Irish society, who questioned the legitimacy of a sport with perceived connections to British imperialism to characterise the Free State internationally. It was not just a nationalist or politically-minded element that refused to view the Free State football team as the sporting embodiment of the state, although the failure of the general public to embrace international football was more resultant of the unattractiveness of the FAIFS programme and the popular belief that continental football was far inferior to that which was played in Britain.

The inter-war period saw an unprecedented politicisation of sport in Europe, with totalitarian regimes, in particular, harnessing the popularity of association football for political purposes to great effect. The FAIFS, and the Free State national team, became a passive participant in the ceremony that accompanied the politicised continental game, and in certain instances in the propaganda mechanisms of the fascist Italian and German states. FAIFS officials appear to have been eager to downplay any political significance attached to their relations with their European counterparts throughout the period. Their

association with fascist-influenced sporting bodies should not be viewed as an endorsement of the political policies of the states that controlled such organisations, and should merely be considered in the context of an observance of international protocol and etiquette in cordially conforming to the rituals of individual nations. The manner in which the association allowed the national team to be utilised as the supporting cast in a show of military aggression and popular incitement in Bremen in 1939 can perhaps be considered the exception to this assertion however, and the decision of the FAI to engage in a game against Germany when it had already been shunned by the international world in both political and sporting terms was highly contentious and controversial. Of course, the association could justifiably cling to the defence that the Irish state had adopted a policy of neutrality, but it appears that on this occasion financial gain had been placed before integrity and morality, especially when it is considered that the association had been swift to object to playing against Spain just a couple of years earlier on political principle.

By the end of the inter-war period the national team could legitimately claim to be a true sporting representation of the Irish state. It had become so in popular terms by the mid-1930s, when the Free State public patronised international football in huge numbers, and when the national media promoted the team at an unprecedented scale. Great interest was taken in international fixtures, and much excitement was generated by the World Cup tournaments, despite the frustrating failure to qualify for the finals of the competition on two separate occasions. The growing inclination of the public to take an interest in international football also provided the impetus for slight changes in attitude from within the state's political structure. Formal welcomes to visiting national teams led to ministerial acceptance of invitations to FAI functions from the mid 1930s, which culminated with the presence of the state's two foremost political figures at an international association football fixture by the end of the decade. Such acceptance was not universal however, and those elements within Irish society that held anti-foreign sport views would continue to view the Irish national team as a peripheral entity that was culturally unrepresentative of the Irish state. These voices were becoming less representative of mainstream outlooks however, and there was no doubt that the status of the national team had been transformed during the course of the inter-war period. By the end of the 1930s the national team was finally viewed by Irish society in the same way as the FAI had considered it from the outset, as a true sporting representation of the

Irish state, and despite considerable opposition and indifference remaining towards the sport, the progression of the national team was among the most significant successes achieved by the FAI during the period under review.

Chapter 4: The dissemination and development of association football during the 1920s

Introduction

The manner in which the Football Association of Ireland pursued the legitimacy that was provided through international recognition and its attempts to establish itself as a valid sporting representation of the Irish Free State both at home and abroad have been discussed in the preceding chapters, but what of the development of the sport under the association's auspices in terms of the domestic game? As it became apparent that a resolution to the dispute with the IFA that would see the Dublin administration return to its previous position of subordination was wholly undesirable to its members during the summer of 1921, the individuals that had decided that the split had been in the best interests of the sport in the south of the country were tasked with proceeding with complete autonomy from Belfast. Although this was a mandate that was approached with much enthusiasm, the Dublin officials were undoubtedly aware of the scale of the undertaking they had committed to. Despite the post-war recovery of the sport in the capital association football remained in a state of instability that was reflective of the tumultuousness that engendered wider society during the Anglo-Irish conflict. As such pre-existing sporting structures had been demolished by both political unrest and shifting cultural outlooks in many parts of the country. Although countless individuals with nationalist sympathies were comfortable enough with the idea of playing association football, and even affiliating to the IFA, the sport became stigmatised as an agent of imperialism within certain strands of nationalist ideology as the push for independence gathered pace. Diminishing popular contact with the military also served to damage association football in provincial regions of the country, and by the time that that the sport was experiencing its post-war revival in Dublin it is clear that it had stagnated elsewhere.

Considering the criticism that its members had consistently levelled towards the IFA's failure to effectively promote the sport outside of its north-eastern centre of influence, the early policy of the FAI was unsurprisingly imbued with a commitment to foster the game throughout the entire territory under its governance. Concerns relating to the diffusion of association football were clearly to the forefront of the association's

strategy from the outset. Cultivating the sport at a national scale involved processes of both dissemination and development, and it was apparent that much time and effort would need to be devoted to embedding an association football culture within regional populations where the game had declined, disappeared or been absent. The fact that no consideration was given to the capability of any clubs that resided outside of Dublin to compete within the new senior structure on the formation of the League of Ireland competition during the autumn of 1921 testifies to the frailty of the provincial game. Despite this, the social conditions that developed in the Free State after its creation did prove conducive to the expansion of association football and to the progression of the association code. This chapter explores the unprecedented development of the sport throughout the southern Irish state during the first decade of independent FAI governance, and the socio-economic factors that facilitated this process. It also charts the position and strength of the administrative and organisational structure that emerged under the new regime. The heightened popular connection with the sport in varying regions is also analysed, as are the successes and weaknesses of the game's development during a period that bore witness to the diffusion of association football at a rate at which even those that instigated the split could not have dared to hope for.

The initial success of the domestic game under FAI governance

With the split all but cemented during the summer of 1921 the Dublin administration began contemplating the organisation of its first season with complete autonomy from Belfast. Despite the great relish with which this prospect was surely approached, there was an air of uncertainty surrounding the immediate prospects for the sport under the FAI. The pressing question of international recognition was viewed by proponents of the breakaway as an issue that would resolve itself in time, and as September approached the main focus of the southern administration turned towards the structure of the domestic game. As the Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs had participated in the senior Irish League before the split, an extensive restructuring process was required. This culminated in the organisation of the League of Ireland competition, which was created by a collective of clubs during the early autumn of 1921 with the mandate of attracting the most proficient teams from throughout Ireland. The ongoing Anglo-Irish War, together with the underdevelopment of the provincial game, made the inclusion of clubs from outside of the capital unfeasible however, and this necessitated that all eight founding members of the League of Ireland competition were based in Dublin. The

Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs were joined in the initial line-up by the city's foremost intermediate club, St James's Gate. These clubs were also joined by Jacobs, Olympia, Dublin United, the YMCA club, and the recently revived Frankfort in a structure that officials hoped would in time become an institution to rival the prestige and popularity of the Irish League during the pre-war era.

As the 1920-21 season had been considered a success with gate receipts at senior matches showing a marked increase, the prevailing sentiment was one of excitement as the new campaign commenced. The exuberance was tempered slightly by an inauspicious start however, as hastily arranged games were postponed when teams failed to turn up, while the standard of play within the competition was apparently not of a particularly high quality.[1] It was also immediately apparent that the gulf in playing ability between teams such as Bohemians, Shelbourne, St. James's Gate and the other league members was problematic. The public were simply not drawn to games involving the lesser clubs and were reserving their interest only for the competitive fixtures that occurred when the best teams played against each other.[2] As such attendances at League of Ireland matches during the 1921-22 season, which amounted to somewhere in the region of 4,000 spectators for the more attractive games, can be considered satisfactory rather than exceptional.[3] Although the established order and predictability of the senior game was somewhat challenged by the emergence of the St James's Gate club, which triumphed in the inaugural league competition, as well as in the first FAI Cup tournament, it was apparent that more competitive clubs would need to be incorporated into the senior structure to generate a popular connection.[4]

The creation of the League of Ireland also necessitated a restructuring of the existing league system below it. To this effect the intermediate Leinster League was reorganised to include the most capable Dublin clubs below senior level as well as the reserve selections of a number of senior clubs. A functional league structure at junior level had also predated the split in Dublin and it was seamlessly integrated into the FAI programme, although the plethora of junior leagues was required to facilitate large numbers of new clubs that formed amid the publicity that had been generated by the

[1] *Freeman's Journal*, 19 Sept. 1921.
[2] *Irish Independent*, 28 Nov. 1921.
[3] *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Oct. 1921; *Sunday Independent*, 10 Oct. 1921.
[4] See introductory note 6.

split.[5] The severance from the IFA had clearly had the effect of accelerating the rejuvenation of the sport in the capital. The LFA experienced what Joe Dodd describes as 'record-breaking' expansion in the months immediately after the split, and clubs emerged throughout Dublin in areas such as Inchicore, Ringsend, Clontarf, Drumcondra, Ranelagh and Rathmines, as well as within inner city areas. Clubs were also forming throughout Dublin's county regions, and names that would later become synonymous with association football in Dublin, such as Dolphin, Brideville, St Barnabas, Queens Park and Edenville came into existence during this period of heightened excitement.[6]

A record number of clubs entered the LFA's junior cup competition in the season after the split, although it was not just the Dublin area that was benefiting from the breakaway from Belfast and the culmination of the administrative attachment to the IFA.[7] In provincial regions, where general participation in sports had significantly waned during recent years, there was evidence that association football was in the process of recovery after rising nationalist sentiment, diminished contact with military teams, and restrictions on travel and mobility had decimated the sport over the course of the previous decade.[8] Although association clubs existed in isolation in rural areas throughout the country, the sport was disordered and was poorly organised. In September 1921 the FAI advertised to encourage any clubs 'whose only chance of a competitive game was against an odd military team' to contact Jack Ryder to affiliate with the association.[9] The response was quite positive as clubs from Westmeath and Tipperary were immediately evident within the FAI structure, while enough interest was stirred in the inaugural FAI Cup competition to warrant the creation of regional qualifying processes. These competitions were organised in Sligo and the Midlands, where east Connacht representatives from Castlerea and Ballinasloe competed against clubs from Athlone, Mullingar, Clara and Moate,[10] while a year later similar competitions also took place in Tipperary and Cork.[11] The association took great

[5] See introductory note 1; *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Oct. 1921.
[6] Joe Dodd, 'The first sixty years', in George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds), *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), pp 43-4
[7] Ibid., p. 44.
[8] *Nenagh Guardian*, 8 Feb. 1919.
[9] *Sport*, 17 Sept. 1921.
[10] *Freeman's Journal*, 12 Sept. 1921.
[11] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the emergency committee, 22 Nov. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/14).

satisfaction in the qualifying processes as they were something that had never been required within the Irish Cup competition under the governance of the IFA, and this was rather facetiously propagated as proof of the sport's greater strength in depth in the south of the country.[12]

Such claims were certainly premature given the infant character of the FAI structure, although the association's members did exhibit a clear determination to foster the sport in provincial regions from the outset. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, this is perhaps unsurprising given the criticism that had been directed towards the IFA's indifference to dissemination processes before the split. The FAI certainly considered its first season of autonomy to have been an unqualified success.[13] In numerical terms the lacklustre attendance figures recorded at senior fixtures, particularly during 1921, could be explained away by the restrictions that were placed upon Dublin's population by the lack of mobility within the city during the Anglo-Irish War, while the imposition of curfews had also been a contributing factor. In spite of the obvious difficulties that were encountered an optimistic outlook clearly prevailed, as both the FAI and the League of Ireland made financial profits during the 1921-22 season.[14] The number of affiliated clubs was also encouraging, and by August of 1922 260 clubs from the ranks of the FAI's four divisional bodies, the LFA, the Belfast and District Association, the new Athlone and District Association and the rejuvenated Munster FA had joined up.[15]

Given the predictability of the inaugural League of Ireland competition, and the lack of public connection with many of its members, the decision to expand the competition to a twelve club format before the 1922-23 season was a highly questionable course of action. The introduction of clubs such as Rathmines Athletic and Midland Athletic did little to enhance the popular appeal of the league, and attendances at games in the autumn of 1922 were described only as 'fairly satisfactory'.[16] The expansion of the league did lead to the election of the first provincial club to participate at senior level however, and there is no doubt that the presence of the Athlone Town club within the League of Ireland was an important epoch for the development of association football under the auspices of the FAI. The 1922-23 season also saw provincial clubs enter

[12] *Sport*, 12 Nov. 1921.
[13] *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Aug. 1922.
[14] *Sunday Independent*, 10 Sept. 1922; *Irish Independent*, 6 Dec. 1922.
[15] *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Aug. 1922.
[16] *Irish Independent*, 17 Sept. 1922.

Dublin-based competition at a lower level, and football enthusiasts were attracted by the novelty of games involving the Dundalk GNR club, as well as the Drogheda United and Bray Unknowns clubs when they came to play in the city.[17] Geographic proximity to the capital facilitated the participation of such provincial clubs within the Dublin structure. The accessibility afforded by good rail links was particularly beneficial to the Dundalk team, which was provided with travel concessions from the Great Northern Railway Company whose workforce had established the club during the early years of the twentieth century.[18] Although the most proficient local clubs from the Westmeath, Louth and Wicklow areas were now competing in Dublin this does not appear to have significantly affected the progression of the sport within these regions, and the local media routinely described vibrant and expanding association football cultures in towns such as Mullingar, where a new league competition was incepted in October 1922.[19]

Sunday football

The expansion of the provincial game brought the divisive issue of Sunday football into sharper focus, and there is no doubt that difficulties pertaining to travel and working hours made the organisation of matches involving provincial teams on Sunday afternoons far more practical. Sunday play had been impossible under the governance of the IFA due largely to the strong Presbyterian influence that resided within the organisation, although in the context of southern Ireland most agreed that its introduction would be beneficial to the development of the sport.[20] In the more rurally-based economies that existed outside of the industrialised north-east, the rigid Saturday afternoon schedule of association football restricted the opportunities for the workforce, who did not enjoy similar levels of free time as that afforded to their northern counterparts, to become engaged with the sport. Sunday was undoubtedly the day of leisure and play for the Catholic population,[21] which enjoyed a hegemony of over ninety percent representation within the population of the emergent southern state.[22] This was recognised by southern administrators, and in the opinion of the daughter of John Murphy, the brother of Robert Murphy and a prominent figure in Leinster association

[17] *Freeman's Journal*, 7 Oct. 1922.
[18] Jim Murphy, *The history of Dundalk FC: the first 100 years* (Dundalk, 2003), pp 33-6.
[19] *Westmeath Examiner*, 21 Oct. 1922.
[20] Neal Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland: being a reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880* (Belfast, 1999), p. 11.
[21] R.V. Comerford, *Ireland: inventing the nation* (London, 2003), p. 218.
[22] Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2005), p. 28

football circles during the tumultuous period around the split, the prospect of being able to organise the sport on Sundays was very much a factor behind the motivation to sever links with Belfast.[23] Contemporary evidence appears to validate this assertion and it seems as though certain clubs that were affiliated to the official structure in Leinster had begun playing on Sundays even before the split had been legitimised.[24]

The new national administration was quick to embrace the practice of Sunday play. The unaffiliated structure of Sunday football that had existed in Dublin before the split was immediately incorporated into the FAI configuration after the association's formation,[25] while the LFA organised its own Sunday competition during the 1921-22 season.[26] There is no doubt that Sunday play was fundamental to the development and expansion of association football in the territory that would become the Irish Free State. Despite this, it is very apparent that not everyone involved in the southern administration was altogether enamoured by changing attitudes towards it. A more traditionalist outlook portrayed in the *Irish Independent* in October 1921 considered Sunday play to be 'a questionable feature of the new regime'.[27] Such criticisms were relatively muted however, and to the majority of observers the practicalities engendered by Sunday football and the manner in which it facilitated greater social inclusion and popular participation in the sport over larger distances was obvious. Its immediate incorporation also exhibits a resolve within the southern administration to govern the sport with self-determination within the social and cultural conventions of the southern state, and as the inter-war period progressed Sunday became the day of play for the majority of association football enthusiasts in the Free State.

The development of the Munster game

As was the case in many parts of the state, Sunday play was intrinsic to the development of association football in the Munster region, and by 1922 the sport had strengthened significantly in the province. Association football as an organised entity had significantly stagnated after the Munster FA was rather prematurely disbanded on the outbreak of the Great War on the premise that the game could not survive without the

[23] Interview with Maighréad Ní Mhurchadha of Skerries, County Dublin (15 Nov. 2012).
[24] *Sport*, 28 May 1921.
[25] *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Sept. 1921.
[26] *Irish Independent*, 2 Dec. 1921.
[27] Ibid., 3 Oct. 1921.

participation of military teams.[28] Likewise, the localised civil unrest in urban centres such as Cork and Limerick surely went a long way to stunting any possible revival during the Anglo-Irish War.[29] The MFA re-emerged during the course of early 1922 with clubs from Cork and Tipperary joining its ranks,[30] and in May that year the Dublin-based administration enthusiastically responded to a request for assistance by sending a Leinster representative team to Cork to play against a Munster selection in an inter-provincial fixture that was the first of its kind between the two provinces. The occasion was considered a resounding success. It was claimed locally that it had contributed significantly to heightened interest in the association code in the province, although, conversely, it also served to expose some of the cracks that were inherent within the structure of the MFA from the outset.[31]

The geographical expanse of the Munster region necessitated the partition of association football in the province for administrative purposes. As such the south Munster branch of the association concerned itself with the organisation of the sport in the Cork area, while the north Munster branch catered for those based in Tipperary and Limerick, after the game re-emerged in the city during 1923.[32] It appears that the south Munster branch exerted more influence over the selection policy for the aforementioned inter-provincial game, leading to strong criticism from the north Munster members who felt that their region had been underrepresented.[33] The episode had parallels in earlier administrative disputes within the Irish game, and it appears that within any form of organisational structure perceptions of bias and favouritism were difficult to dispel. With the revival of the MFA, Cork had undoubtedly become the main association football centre in Munster. This is evidenced by the huge popular interest that was taken in the Munster Senior League after its re-emergence for the 1922-23 season, and in the new junior competition that was simultaneously founded in the city.[34] Reports of the activities of the 'vigilance committees' that were organised by the local GAA for the purpose of publicly exposing Gaels that dared to attend perceived 'foreign' sports indicate that by late 1922 association football was viewed as a threat to the primacy of Gaelic games in

[28] Peter Byrne, *Green is the colour: the story of Irish football* (London, 2012), p. 34; Nigel O'Mahony (ed.), *Century of Cork soccer memories*, magazine produced by *Cork Evening Echo* (Cork, 1995), p. 7.
[29] *Irish Independent*, 12 July 1921; *Freeman's Journal*, 26 Mar. 1921.
[30] O'Mahony, *Century of Cork soccer memories*, p. 7.
[31] *Freeman's Journal*, 15 May 1922.
[32] *Sport*, 20 Oct. 1923.
[33] *Irish Independent*, 27 July 1923.
[34] O'Mahony, *Century of Cork soccer memories*, p. 8.

Cork, and such fears were based on substance as the popularity of the association code reached unprecedented levels.[35]

Stability and uneven development

In the aftermath of the split the decision of the Falls and District League to join the FAI may have given the impression that discontented clubs in provincial areas of Ulster would desert the IFA to affiliate with the new administration in Dublin, although by 1923 it was clear that no such exodus was about to materialise. Media speculation actually suggested that an outflow of clubs in the opposite direction may have been more likely, and it is clear that there was some initial dissatisfaction with the manner in which the sport was being run by the FAI.[36] A number of senior clubs were critical of the 'laxity' shown by the FAI in its administrative processes, and their displeasure was magnified by the general feeling that the standard of play in Dublin had regressed considerably since the split.[37] Whether this was in fact the case is difficult to quantify, although the emergence of the Shamrock Rovers club from the intermediate ranks to claim the League of Ireland title at the first attempt, and the victory of the little known Alton United club from the Belfast and District Association against Shelbourne in the 1923 FAI Cup final suggests that the level of the top clubs may indeed have dropped.

The 1923 cup final was also a significant occasion as it provided an insight into the lingering political and sectarian character of association football in Ulster when the Alton players were received by an armed IRA cortege on their arrival at the Amiens Street train station in Dublin.[38] Although sectarian concerns had been effectively eradicated from the sport in the south of the country after the split they remained in evidence in the north, and this incident indicates that despite the continued anti-imperialist representations of association football within Irish society the game could be used as a vehicle by which overt nationalism could be expressed in certain circumstances. The 1923 FAI Cup final also marked the culmination of the Fall's and District League's participation under FAI auspices. It had become apparent to some Belfast officials that it was impractical for their clubs to be affiliated to a parent organisation so far removed from their localities, and a significant number of the Fall's

[35] *Irish Independent*, 6 Nov. 1922.
[36] *Freeman's Journal*, 22 June 1923.
[37] *Irish Independent*, 29 Nov. 1922.
[38] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 87.

clubs had returned to the IFA fold even before the Liverpool agreement of October 1923 necessitated their departure from the southern game.[39] Other Belfast representatives were not enamoured by the prospect of returning to the IFA fold however, and evidence suggests that members of the Falls and District League were once again applying for membership of the FAI in late 1924, although by now this was an unrealistic prospect.[40]

The terms of the Liverpool agreement between the newly-renamed FAIFS and the IFA eliminated the possibility of members of either association leaving to affiliate with the other, and as such an era of relative stability within domestic association football was ushered in. This stability was also mirrored within wider society after the climax of civil war hostilities, and with no armed conflict ongoing in Ireland for the first time in almost a decade the environs of the Free State were at last conducive to the onset of unprecedented sporting development. In his comprehensive work on the global history of association football, David Goldblatt describes the way in which European populations, free from the constraints of warfare and in the midst of acquiring greater societal influence, pursued entertainment and recreation at unparalleled rates during the early 1920s.[41] Although this process was slightly delayed in Ireland it was certainly in progress by 1923. Alarmed church leaders lamented what they deemed 'a craze for pleasure' within the popular consciousness that was not altogether in keeping with the rhetoric of Gaelic benefaction and religious piety espoused in nationalist ideology.[42] It was within this context that sports of all kinds experienced increased levels of participation from the early 1920s. By the autumn of 1923 attendance figures at games in the rebranded Free State League, which had sensibly been reduced in size to a ten club membership given the monotony of the previous season, and the Free State Cup were visibly increasing, while a growing number of clubs were emerging in provincial regions of the state. The gate receipts that were being attained in Cork, particularly for matches involving the Fordson club,[43] were highly impressive, while the victory of

[39] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 21 June 1923 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1); Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 5 July 1923 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1)
[40] Minute book of the protests and appeals and emergency committees of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1921 – Oct. 1928, meeting of the emergency committee, 2 Dec. 1924 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/14)
[41] David Goldblatt, *The ball is round: a global history of football* (2nd ed., London, 2007), p. 177.
[42] Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland*, p. 29.
[43] *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Mar. 1924.

Athlone Town over Fordson in the Free State Cup final in March 1924 surely instilled ambitious provincial teams with a confidence that anything was possible.[44]

Despite the undoubted progression of the sport in the provinces not all commentators were satisfied by the manner in which FAIFS policy was disseminating the sport, and in Connacht the lack of development was frustrating factions from Sligo, where a lengthy association football traditional had been maintained throughout the intervening period. Although a strong local league existed in the Sligo area during the early 1920s, clubs were suffering due to the isolation of the Sligo and District Association which bemoaned the fact that the nearest affiliated club was based over eighty miles away in Mullingar.[45] In the case of Sligo the actual benefit of affiliation with the administration in Dublin was highly questionable. FAIFS membership restricted clubs in the region from engaging in competition with teams in the neighbouring IFA territories of Fermanagh and Tyrone, and it was clear that the FAIFS needed to do more to promote the sport in certain regions.[46] Distance and terrain, particularly in northern and western areas of the state, made such a mandate problematic for the national administration however. Despite this, there is no suggestion that the determination of its members to foster the game wherever possible had waned, and by the beginning of the 1924-25 season the progress that had been made in the provinces was certainly viewed as encouraging.

Record numbers of clubs from Cork, Waterford, Limerick, Tipperary and Sligo were entering the national junior cup competition by 1924,[47] while unprecedented numbers also competed in the LFA's junior tournament in a season that was described as the most successful in the history of that association.[48] The heightened popular participation and interest in association football was facilitated by the reconstruction of the state's railway systems, which had been severely damaged during the Civil War, as well as by the increased connectivity and mobility that ensued amid more settled

[44] David Toms, 'Not withstanding the discomfort involved': Fordson's cup win in 1926 and how 'the old contemptible' were represented in Ireland's public sphere during the 1920s', in *Sport in history*, 33, no. 4, 2012, available on eprint.
[45] *Irish Independent*, 4 Dec. 1923.
[46] Minute book of the protest and appeals and emergency committees of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 2 Dec. 1924 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/14).
[47] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 19 Dec. 1924 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/25).
[48] *Irish Independent*, 27 June 1925.

political conditions.[49] Ongoing infrastructural improvements to road networks were also important, and bicycles, motor cars, buses and trains were all utilised by followers of the association code to travel to football games and to converge upon urban centres that were swelling under the pressure of increasing urbanisation trends during the middle of the decade. In some regards the Free State's expanding cities harboured socio-economic conditions that could be compared to those that had prevailed during association football's earlier development in Britain in terms of urban overcrowding and industrial development, and as described by various sports historians, the sport appears to have provided urban males with a brief escape from greater concerns pertaining to sustenance and welfare.[50] By now the Free State League had been instilled with a more provincial character as a result of the election of the Bray Unknowns and Fordson clubs, and once again attendance figures were on the rise during the autumn of 1924. Nine thousand spectators witnessed the meeting of Fordsons and St James's Gate at the Ballinlough grounds in Cork in September,[51] while in Dublin the following month the largest crowd on record attended a game at Shamrock Rovers' Milltown enclosure, which was swiftly followed by a further record attendance for a Dublin ground when 12,000 turned out for a game between Shelbourne and Shamrock Rovers at Ringsend the following week.[52]

Although attendance figures provided by newspaper reports offer an interesting and useful insight into the popular appeal of association football, they must be used with a certain degree of caution as the statistics provided were sometimes conflicting throughout various publications and in many cases are likely to have been slightly inaccurate. Despite this they do serve as a valuable means of estimating the number of people that were frequenting fixtures, although it can be assumed with a degree of certainty that the dilapidated and primitive condition of the grounds and the lack of stewarding allowed many spectators to avoid admission fees and statistical detection on entry. What is certain is that the infrastructural capabilities of grounds that hosted senior matches were increasingly tested as terraces and embankments filled to capacity, and contemporary match reports indicate that a frenzied and chaotic atmosphere was an

[49] Michael Hopkinson, 'Civil war and aftermath, 1922-4' in J.R. Hill (ed.), *A new history of Ireland VII: Ireland 1921-84* (Oxford, 2003), p. 28.
[50] Neal Garnham, 'One game in two nations? Football in Ireland 1918 - 1939', p. 9.
[51] *Sunday Independent*, 28 Sept. 1924.
[52] *Irish Independent*, 20 Oct. 1924; *Sunday Independent*, 26 Oct. 1924.

inherent feature of the experience of attending association football.[53] As stated earlier in this thesis, the terms of the Liverpool agreement also increasingly afforded the growing crowds with the opportunity to witness Free State teams compete against British and northern opposition in exhibition and representative fixtures from the mid 1920s. Despite the growing stature of the sport discontent and fractiousness were rarely far from the surface however, and conflict within Irish association football once again came to the fore during a referee's strike during the spring of 1925.

The standard of refereeing within Leinster football had been a pressing concern that had predated the split, and during the inter-war period it appears as though match officials lacked any semblance of authority or control over players who in turn exhibited little respect towards them.[54] Under pressure from senior clubs the FAIFS began to explore the possibility of appointing foreign referees to take charge of the more important fixtures in the Free State schedule. The association duly secured the services of English match official, J.T. Howcroft, for the 1925 Free State Cup final between Shamrock Rovers and Shelbourne, causing outrage among the indigenous refereeing fraternity. Free State referees immediately instigated strike action in protest at Howcroft's appointment.[55] They ultimately achieved little in the way of success, however, as the FAIFS, which crucially enjoyed the support of the LFA on the issue, pointed out that it was well within its rights to commission any individual it deemed fit to take charge of games under its auspices.[56] The association argued that the greater experience that cross-channel referees possessed was justification for its action, and as it transpired its policy was successful as more respect was immediately afforded to imported referees, while accusations of bias and favouritism were expunged. Local referees were grudgingly forced to accept their position of inferiority as foreign officials were increasingly assigned to important league and cup matches, and the FAIFS policy, while controversial to some observers, certainly exhibits the administration's willingness to take responsibility and to address concerns within the sport.

[53] *Irish Independent*, 6 Nov. 1922.
[54] Ibid., 12 Nov. 1920; 18 Nov. 1920.
[55] *Sunday Independent*, 8 Mar. 1925.
[56] *Irish Independent*, 10 Mar. 1925.

Unprecedented development: processes of dissemination

An alteration to state legislation during the summer of 1925 added further momentum to the development of association football. The entertainment tax that had been imposed on sporting bodies, and other forms of entertainment, by the British authorities in an effort to raise money for the ongoing war in 1916 was removed on all outdoor games, except those involving animals.[57] As a result a greater portion of the money that was acquired through admission charges for entry to football grounds stayed within the game. As the decade progressed this increasingly led to the development of the sport as a genuine consumer product that many external interests saw as potentially profitable. By the end of 1925 the crowds that were attending senior football appear to have once again significantly risen. This is apparent in the reports of 15,000 people attending a match between Shamrock Rovers and Fordsons in Dublin in October,[58] while 16,000 were said to have been at what was billed as a championship deciding fixture between Shamrock Rovers and Shelbourne later in the year.[59] The addition of the Bridevelle club, which was based in the Inchicore area of Dublin, to the Free State League for the 1925-26 season had also added more competitiveness to the league programme. In comparison with previous years very few games were considered to be foregone conclusions, and this was reflected in the strong public interest at matches involving a variety of clubs. Despite this, three Dublin clubs Shamrock Rovers, Shelbourne and Bohemians had by now emerged as the strongest teams in the state, and as it transpired the league championship would be monopolised within this hierarchy until the 1932-33 season when the Dundalk club became the first provincial club to triumph.[60]

In provincial regions the sport was clearly disseminating at an unerring pace by the middle of the decade. In Leinster, the LFA Council spoke of the 'unprecedented expansion of the game' within its jurisdiction in its annual report from July 1925. There was a record 240 clubs affiliated to the association, an increase of thirty-four on the previous year, and although the majority of these clubs were based in Dublin there is

[57] Ibid., 25 May 1925.
[58] Ibid., 6 Oct. 1925.
[59] Ibid., 14 Dec. 1925.
[60] During the inter-war period Shamrock Rovers won the Free State League a record six times (1922-23, 1924-25, 1926-27, 1931-32, 1937-38, 1938-39), Bohemians were league champions on five occasions (1923-24, 1927-28, 1929-30, 1933-34, 1935-36), Shelbourne won the competition three times (1925-26, 1928-29, 1931-32). See appendix 2 for further details.

clear evidence that the sport was expanding throughout the province.[61] The traditional association football areas in north Leinster continued to possess strong localised scenes, and from late 1925 the sport was also taking root in Meath with the emergence of the Navan United and Navan Celtic clubs. Association football in the area was provided with strong encouragement when Shamrock Rovers came to play Navan United in November 1925, although it is clear that there was staunch local opposition to any impending development of the association code as advertisements that promoted the match were defaced to make it appear that the admission charge was significantly higher than was actually the case.[62] The sport was also growing in stature within midland counties and clubs from places such as Athy, Newbridge, Kildare, Tullamore, Edenderry and Portarlington were in a position to compete in the national junior competition from the middle of the decade.[63]

The game had also taken great strides in Waterford where a league competition, which included prominent local team, Young Favourites, as well as seven additional clubs from the city, and entrants from Portlaw and Curraghmore, had come to fruition in late 1924.[64] The sport was also beginning to come to the fore in the Galway region and in April 1925 a well-attended meeting was organised in the city to address what was described as the 'long-felt want' of starting an association football team.[65] By the end of the month a match took place at the local grammar school grounds between clubs styled as Galway City and Rangers. The game was deemed locally as 'an unqualified success' on account of the fact that participants exhibited an understanding of the association rules from the outset.[66] During the following autumn FAIFS representative J. S. Smurthwaite, the welfare manager at the Jacobs biscuit factory in Dublin and a supporter of initiatives for wider child education, travelled to Galway to assist local enthusiasts in promoting the sport. Smurthwaite, who was also an honorary treasurer of the League of Ireland and chairman of the LFA during the early 1920s, duly advised for the immediate commencement of a league competition in the city, as well as the

[61] *Irish Independent*, 23 July 1925.
[62] *Meath Chronicle*, 28 Nov. 1925.
[63] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 17 Dec. 1926 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/25); Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 16 Dec. 1927 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/25).
[64] *Munster Express*, 27 Dec. 1924.
[65] *Connacht Tribune*, 4 Apr. 1925.
[66] Ibid., 25 Apr. 1925.

formation of a divisional association in the area.[67] Financial stimulation was also discussed and the level of enthusiasm that was evident in Galway certainly provided hope that association football could become embedded to a greater degree within the sporting landscape of Connacht.[68]

Such enthusiasm was certainly matched elsewhere, not least in Cork, where Fordsons surprise victory over Shamrock Rovers in the 1926 Free State Cup final resulted in scenes of hysteria and delirium both on the occasion of the match in Dublin, and when the team returned to Cork. The streets of the city apparently 'took on a holiday appearance' as thousands awaited the emergence of the players at the Glanmire train station before Paddy Barry, the scorer of the winning goal, was carried shoulder high through the streets to strains of 'For They Are Jolly Good Fellows' and 'A Nation Once Again'. The appearance of the latter song hints at the sense of local pride that was taken in the considerable achievement of a Cork club triumphing in the national cup competition, while perhaps it can also be considered in the context of a prevailing sentiment of regional defiance in victory against a leading team from the capital.[69]

The Munster FA was clearly coming into its own by the mid 1920s. As such the FAIFS rather reluctantly commissioned the MFA to organise a fixture between a local representative team and a visiting French club, *Cercle de Athletique* of Paris, in May 1926, and the nature of the correspondence between the two associations in the period before the fixture reveals a certain level of fractiousness. Although the FAIFS was understandably nervous regarding the preparations for the first such fixture to be staged outside of Dublin, the condescension with which it dictated the smallest details of the occasion to the MFA was surely unnecessary. The national administration intimated with precision exactly what the MFA was required to do in preparation of the match, from what flags should be used at the ground to where the visitors should change before the game.[70] Although the occasion passed off without incident, MFA members, who were already perturbed by the lack of assistance that they been provided with in respect

[67] Century of Endeavour, The 'TABI' Conference, 1926, available at http://iol.ie/~rjtechne/century130703/1920s/tabi26.htm [24 Jan. 2014]; David Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup: the story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic football team* (Dublin, 2012), chapter 9, available on kindle.
[68] *Connacht Tribune*, 12 Sept. 1925.
[69] *Irish Independent*, 19 Mar. 1926.
[70] International minute book of the Football Association of Ireland, the FAIFS to the Munster Football Association, 5 May 1926 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P/137/2).

of travel expenses for the 1926 Free State Cup final, were presumably less than impressed.[71] As previously stated, tension and the subsequent possibility of conflict between peripheral bodies and a central administration appear to have been unavoidable within the framework of association football, and a certain level of antagonism did persist between factions in Dublin and Cork for the remainder of the inter-war period.[72]

To its credit the MFA was functioning quite efficiently during the mid 1920s and association football was certainly strengthening throughout the province.[73] In Tipperary the sport was evident from Roscrea in the north of the county to Clonmel in the south, and clubs such as Tipperary Wanderers and Cahir Unknowns made an impact within the junior ranks at national level.[74] Association football was also expanding within Limerick where Sunday football was proving particularly beneficial to the sport's development in a city that was populated with a more distinct service-based workforce.[75] A new league competition was also established, with the financial assistance of the FAIFS, in Ennis in 1926, and it is clear that the sport was becoming increasingly centralised within the province as informal networks were brought within the official association football structure.[76] Progression was also evident in Leinster. At the annual general meeting of the LFA in August 1926 the 'phenomenal progress' of the game in the province was lauded in the report of the association's secretary, William F. Sheeran, as a twenty-five percent increase in the number of clubs affiliated to the organisation brought membership to over 300 clubs.[77] The FAIFS was also satisfied by the recent expansion of the sport in Connacht, although the rate of dissemination was not enough to placate dissenting voices from Sligo that remained of the opinion that greater efforts needed to be undertaken in developing the sport in north-western regions of the state.[78]

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[71] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the finance committee, 26 Oct. 1926 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/11);
[72] *Anglo-Celt*, 5 May 1928; *Sunday Independent*, 1 July 1928.
[73] O'Mahony, *Century of Cork soccer memories*, p. 17.
[74] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the finance committee, 2 June 1925 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/11); Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the finance committee, 14 June 1928 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P/137/11).
[75] Jim Kemmy, 'A changing city – a personal view', in James Lee (ed.), *Remembering Limerick: historical essays celebrating the 800th anniversary of Limerick's first charter granted in 1197* (Limerick, 1997), p. 373.
[76] *Irish Independent*, 17 Sept. 1926.
[77] Ibid., 18 Aug. 1926.
[78] *Sunday Independent*, 27 June 1926.

Such reports suggest that acclamation of the expansion of the game in the rhetoric of the FAIFS and its divisional associates must be used cautiously in historical analysis, and despite the clear progression of association football further promotion and stimulation processes were undoubtedly necessary. Similar to the position in Sligo a lack of adequate opposition was also a problem for affiliated clubs in counties such as Cavan and Monaghan, where the supply of potential opponents that resided over the border in Northern Ireland had become inaccessible under the rules and regulations of the FAIFS. Although clubs such as Clones Celtic, which petitioned to be allowed to engage in cross-border competition under the auspices of the County Fermanagh Association in 1925, were discontented by their situation, the FAIFS could not countenance allowing its members to compete within IFA territory.[79] As such the restrictive character of the sport in border counties was simply viewed as an unfortunate outcome of the split, and when this lack of competition that was available to isolated clubs and associations in certain regions is considered the value of affiliation to the FAIFS and the national association football structure must surely have been questioned.

In this regard it can perhaps be argued that localised association football scenes may have developed to a greater extent if they had not been constrained by FAIFS membership. There is evidence for this assertion in the case of Donegal, which possessed a lengthy historical connection with the association code. Conor Curran attributes the rise of a strong association football culture in Donegal to a number of factors, including proximity to a thriving sporting scene in Derry and British maritime influences, such as the influx of sailors and traders to the area. He also highlights the importance of trends of seasonal migration, and there is no doubt that annual jaunts to Scotland undertaken by locals in counties such as Donegal, Sligo and Mayo were highly important to the development of association football at local level.[80] Like Irish scholars that had been exposed to the sport in the public schools of Britain during the nineteenth century, manual labourers and seasonal workers had been privy to similar introductions to the game, albeit in differing social circumstances. There is no doubt that both processes had an effective impact on spreading association football in Ireland however. The development of the sport in the Donegal region also reinforces the argument that in certain circumstances unfavourable portrayals of association football as an anti-

[79] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 1 Oct. 1925 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[80] Conor Curran, *Sport in Donegal: a history* (Dublin, 2010), pp 44-74.

nationalist pursuit carried little weight for ordinary sport enthusiasts in many localities, which is a point that will be explored further in a later chapter. As Gaelic enthusiasts in Donegal bemoaned the continued tendency of local youths to return from Scotland 'with their heads filled up with the idea of soccer', clubs from the north of the county maintained relations and benefitted from competition with their counterparts in Derry, and in such cases any moves to affiliate with the FAIFS were both impractical and pointless.[81]

The FAIFS did accept that further promotional work was necessary to address the problems relating to inaccessibility and geographical isolation in certain areas, although the association was justifiably proud of the results that its initiatives had achieved to date. In 1925 its president, Laurence Sheridan, had stated that the sport had 'progressed to a degree that even its most enthusiastic advocates did not dare to hope for three years ago' in correspondence with general secretary Hirschman of FIFA.[82] Likewise, the following year the 'continued expansion' of the game throughout the state was responsible for the satisfactory tone that engendered the annual general meeting of the FAIFS.[83] Such affirmation could be applied to both the junior and senior levels of the game as the Free State League now comprised of a truly national character with four of the ten participants residing in provincial regions after the election of the Dundalk GNR club during the summer of 1926.[84] The *Cork Examiner* actually went as far as to claim that association football was the 'most popular game in the Free State in 1926,[85] and in Cork it was felt that the popularity of the sport warranted the inclusion of a second club from the city in the Free State League by early 1927 in rhetoric that again espoused greater Munster representation at national level.[86]

Despite the expansion and progression of the sport internal concerns regarding the underdevelopment of association football's built landscape were prevalent. The primitive character of grounds that were used by senior clubs in the Free State will be discussed in a later chapter in relation to crowd behaviour and the emergence of a supporter culture within the sport, while at local level comfort for participants was

[81] *Sunday Independent*, 13 Jan. 1929.
[82] International minute book of Football Association of Ireland, L.C. Sheridan to C.A.W. Hirschman, 14 Oct. 1925 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/2).
[83] *Irish Independent*, 30 July 1926.
[84] Murphy, *The history of Dundalk* FC, pp 46-8.
[85] *Cork Examiner*, 18 Mar. 1926.
[86] *Irish Independent*, 10 Feb. 1927.

wholly lacking during the 1920s. Players were generally expected to change for games in the open, while on occasion refuge may have been provided by the limited shelter that was afforded by discarded or abandoned railway carriages or similar makeshift structures.[87] Junior clubs were also handicapped in their development by the fact that many playing areas were not enclosed and as such they were unable to financially gain from admission charges. The fact that many clubs played their matches in municipal parklands was also problematic in that it was often impossible to stop the public from freely entering such spaces. Even clubs that played in private fields experienced problems as the lack of enclosure allowed individuals to evade entrance fees by crossing hedges and gardens, as was the case at the Town View Park in Navan, while obstructions such as fencing and walls often proved no barrier to entry for those who were unwilling or unable to pay to watch football.[88] The general dearth of suitable playing areas was also restrictive to the development of association football throughout the state and in places such as Cork, Limerick and Galway numerous junior teams played their matches on the same pitch during the course of a weekend.[89] This obviously led to muddy and worn playing surfaces, and there is no doubt that the standard of play was greatly affected as a result.

The administrative centralisation of association football during the late 1920s

Despite such concerns the sport progressed well in provincial regions during the latter years of the decade, and trends of development were undoubtedly influenced by increased media coverage in the provincial press. The manner in which ideological opposition to association football was solidified and even strengthened in certain cultural outlooks during the inter-war period will be discussed later in the thesis, although, as has been pointed out, for many people the nationalistic stigma that was attached to participation in what was deemed to be a foreign game was of little consequence amid the fading memory of the occupation. This was clearly reflected in the media, and increased reporting on association football in regional newspapers was fundamental to the dissemination and expansion of the sport. Gaelic enthusiasts were clearly perturbed by the amount of press coverage that was afforded to association football during the latter years of the 1920s, and it is clear that assertions from some

[87] *Munster Express*, 16 Feb. 1934.
[88] *Meath Chronicle*, 15 Jan. 1927.
[89] *Connacht Tribune*, 2 Apr. 1927.

quarters which claimed that 'soccer football which was quite a rage for a brief period in many provincial centres' had now 'exhausted itself' were premature and wide of the mark.[90] In the Westmeath area the game remained engrained in Athlone by strong local competition in the town, despite the withdrawal of the local senior club from the Free State League in 1928 for financial reasons,[91] while in neighbouring Mullingar the 'Town' club excelled in reaching consecutive finals of Leinster's junior cup in 1926 and 1927.[92] Association football had generally thrived in the state's most populous urban settlements although smaller centres also provided fertile environs for the sport's development in certain cases. One such example of this was that of Longford, where a disproportionate number of clubs for a town of its size existed, with the local Town, Corinthians and Celtic clubs in particular making contributions at provincial and national level.[93]

In Louth, the Dundalk and District League was described as successful both from a playing and financial standpoint during the summer of 1927,[94] while a vibrant Drogheda and District League, which included Navan United, was in operation before the Meath club followed the example of other clubs in the north Leinster area in joining the Dublin-based Sunday Alliance League in 1927.[95] The development of the association code in Navan had been comparable to any area of the state considering the fact that the sport had been almost unknown to Meath before the mid 1920s.[96] The town's young people were said to have been taking up association football in their droves, and at the beginning of 1927 there was even discussion regarding the prospect of Navan facilitating a team that could compete at senior level in the Free State League.[97] Such plans were certainly overambitious although by the end of the decade the sport appears to have been expanding in the county as new clubs were formed in Dunsany,

[90] *Irish Independent*, 12 Nov. 1927.
[91] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 17 Dec. 1926 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/25); Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 16 Dec. 1927 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/25); Frank Lynch, *A history of Athlone Town FC: the first 101 years* (Athlone, 1991) p. 112.
[92] *Westmeath Examiner*, 3 Apr. 1926; 30 July 1927.
[93] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 17 Dec. 1926 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/25); Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the junior committee, 16 Dec. 1927 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/25).
[94] *Irish Independent*, 2 July 1927.
[95] *Meath Chronicle*, 7 Jan. 1928.
[96] Ibid., 7 Dec. 1929.
[97] Ibid., 1 Jan. 1927.

Robinstown and Kells.[98] In the south of the province, the development of association football was also gathering momentum and the relatively populous towns of Carlow, Wexford and Kilkenny provided demographic conditions that were conducive to the development of the sport. Significant growth was not necessarily apparent throughout the entire region however. It appears that in Carlow association clubs existed in isolation as late as 1927 as the Carlow Rangers club advertised throughout Leinster for junior opposition that would be willing to come to the town to compete for a 'valuable' silver cup.[99]

The Carlow Rovers club attempted to pursue an alternative policy in seeking admission to participate under the auspices of the Wexford and District Association, and this was a feature of the development of the provincial game as clubs that found themselves in isolation or had outgrown their local surroundings sought competition in neighbouring regions. Despite what modern historians consider to have been particularly strong Gaelic ideals and values in the Wexford area during the period under review association football became popular in towns such as Enniscorthy, New Ross and Wexford.[100] The benefits that FAIFS and LFA missionary activity held for the expansion of the sport was once again evident in March 1928 as an exhibition match that was organised between the Bohemian club of Dublin and an LFA representative team provided the local game with a massive boost and generated increased popular interest. Around 2,500 people attended the fixture which the media dubbed as a 'propaganda match'. Many of those that were in attendance were said to have turned out in support of Billy Lacey, the famous Wexford-born player who had recently returned to Ireland to play with Shelbourne after spells at both the Liverpool and Everton clubs on Merseyside.[101] In Kilkenny the first indigenous association football league had been founded during the spring of 1926 in the house of its first vice-president, Nicholas Walsh.[102] Association football developed well in the area, and within two years the newly-formed Kilkenny

[98] Ibid., 16 Mar. 1929; 4 May 1929.
[99] *Westmeath Examiner*, 23 July 1927.
[100] Nicholas Furlong, *A history of county Wexford* (Dublin, 2003), p. 140.
[101] *Southern Star*, 5 May 1928.
[102] Photograph provided by Professor R.V. Comerford, available at https://myce.nuim.ie/uwc/webmail/attach/DSC02177.JPG?sid=&mbox=Drafts&charset=escaped_unicode&uid=17&number=2&filename=DSC02177.JPG [19 Sept. 2013].

Celtic club held the organisational capacity to seek and gain access to the Waterford league structure.[103]

In Munster, the MFA was inundated with applications for membership during the latter years of the decade, and the national press, in recognising the increasing popularisation of the sport in the association's southern stronghold, insinuated that 'the enthusiasm for the pastime in Cork is not exceeded by that in Dublin'.[104] The number of people attending association football in Waterford necessitated the construction of a new enclosure in the Poleberry area of the city in 1927. The opening of the ground coincided with the entry of the region's most prominent club, Waterford Celtic to the Munster Senior League, a development which duly led G. Gilligan, the chairman of the MFA, to predict that the standing and popularity of association football in the area would soon be comparable to that in Dublin and Cork.[105] The sport's development in Waterford was assisted by the comparatively good road networks that existed throughout the county.[106] In this regard it was certainly more practical for rural teams and enthusiasts to become involved in association football as access to the city was relatively unproblematic. Yet again initiatives to increase the popularity of association football in the north Munster area were introduced to good effect through the organisation of exhibition matches and the hosting of inter-provincial fixtures in places such as Limerick, Roscrea and Clonmel during the late 1920s, and the sport was clearly strengthening across the province as the decade progressed.[107]

A policy that propagated increased centralisation was on the agenda for the Connacht region and by the late 1920s the strength of the sport in Sligo, Galway and Mayo, where it was thought that an association club resided in practically every town, made the formation of a provincial association a natural progression.[108] The desire for a central administration in Connacht had been longstanding,[109] and was certainly strongest in Sligo, where local representatives made little effort to hide their dissatisfaction with the

[103] *Munster Express*, 10 Aug. 1928; 28 Sept. 1928.
[104] *Irish Independent*, 10 Feb. 1927.
[105] *Munster Express*, 12 Aug. 1927.
[106] Patrick C. Power, *History of Waterford city and county* (Dublin, 1990), p. 254.
[107] Minute book of the consultative committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the consultative committee, 25 Oct. 1927 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/38); *Nenagh Guardian*, 15 May 1928; Dodd, 'The first sixty years', p.47.
[108] *Connacht Tribune*, 12 May 1928.
[109] *Sport*, 15 Sept. 1923.

FAIFS.[110] Discussions that surrounded a proposed league structure that would incorporate clubs from throughout western and midland regions duly led to the establishment of the Connacht Football Association (CFA) in September 1928.[111] A new league structure was indeed initiated under the governance of the CFA, although the long-standing difficulties that had hindered the development of the sport in the region in the past were difficult to surmount. The travel limitations that were resultant of the geographical expanse and terrain of the province necessitated the organisation of the Connacht Cup competition on a regional basis. West Mayo and Galway provided the setting for one district, as did the Athlone region, while a further regional branch was also formed in the east of the province that included clubs from Leitrim, Roscommon and Longford. The north-western section was undoubtedly the most competitive region however, as the Sligo district was twinned with a number of clubs from south Donegal that had finally become receptive to FAIFS overtures.[112] The FAIFS was also encouraging applications from clubs that were interested in participating in a prospective league competition in Monaghan and Cavan in late 1928,[113] although poor attendances at games in the area in early 1929 provided little optimism for the success of the proposal.[114] It appears that clubs from the south Ulster counties within the Free State remained disinclined to affiliate to the FAIFS as a result of the difficulties it entailed, and as late as 1934 only one club from the area, Monaghan United, was listed in the association's annual report.[115]

The desire of the association football administration to implement a policy that would see clubs across the state competing more efficiently over larger distances did lead to problems within the organisation of the sport. Despite offering monetary inducements to individual clubs there was little that officials could do to compel teams to bear the additional expense of travel to fulfil their commitments.[116] As such, cancellations and postponements became a major concern for organisers of league competitions. This was particularly evident in Leinster as clubs from Louth and Meath were often left idle

[110] *Sunday Independent*, 5 Aug. 1928.
[111] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the finance committee, 1 Dec. 1928 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/11).
[112] *Irish Independent*, 12 Sept. 1928.
[113] *Anglo-Celt*, 22 Dec. 1928.
[114] Ibid., 5 Jan. 1929.
[115] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, annual report, 18 June 1934 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).
[116] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the finance committee, 19 Aug. 1933 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12)

and out of pocket when Dublin teams failed to make the journey to the provinces for matches, while cancelled fixtures also appear to have been relatively common in Connacht.[117] Despite the existence of an organisational and administrative structure that theoretically facilitated the development of association football throughout the entire state in a hierarchical model, and although significant levels of dissemination had clearly taken place, the game did remain relatively primitive in character in some regions. In many areas association football was only in its initial stages of development during the late 1920s. Reports from Leitrim of the sport in its infancy, where the rules of the game were read out to the players on the pitch before kick-off, and in Skibereen in west Cork, where locals of all ages engaged in games that left some of the more elderly participants 'winded for the rest of the evening, and [were] crippled for the rest of the week', provide a vivid illustration of the development of association football at a more informal level.[118] The FAIFS also allowed tournaments to be organised during the summer months, which the IFA had not done. This obviously benefited the development of the sport in many areas as workers could participate during the extended daylight hours,[119] and the scene that was described in Kells in May 1929 as the local park was filled every evening with 'throngs' of people competing in a variety of sports was undoubtedly typical of many areas.[120]

Concerns amid the dissemination and development

By the end of the decade there were subtle signs that the momentum that had engendered the development of association football within the Free State for much of 1920s was slowing. The attendance at the 1928 Free State Cup final that culminated in the commendable achievement of the Bohemian club in winning the Free State League, cup and shield competitions showed no increase on figures recorded during previous years. The gate receipts were even lower for the final the following year, as the Shamrock Rovers club began a sequence of five cup victories in a row, despite the fact that the capacity at the Dalymount Park enclosure had since been significantly extended.[121] There had also been internal conflict within the administration of the FAIFS, which came to the surface during the association's annual meeting during the

[117] *Meath Chronicle*, 11 Feb. 1928.
[118] *Southern Star*, 26 May 1928.
[119] *Munster Express*, 10 May 1929.
[120] *Meath Chronicle*, 18 May 1929.
[121] Alex Graham, *Football in the Republic of Ireland; a statistical record, 1921 – 2005* (Lincolnshire, 2005), pp 10-11; *Sunday Independent*, 17 Mar. 1929.

summer of 1928. The 'lack of detail and omissions' in J.S Smurthwaite's treasurer's report caused heated debate and the adjournment of the meeting after four and a half hours.[122] Although there is no suggestion that anything untoward was at play during this episode, the nature of the squabbling that subsequently led James Harrison to refer to the organisation's processes as 'a sham',[123] and to the association's chairman, James Brennan, vacating his chair at a rearranged annual meeting a couple of weeks later, indicates a lack of harmoniousness that is not in keeping with external representations of a successful and forward-looking organisation.[124] Brennan's influence within the FAI certainly instilled vitality to the association administrative structure over a prolonged period of time however. Although he was younger than many of his contemporaries within the association football administration Brennan had been well known within Dublin sporting circles for many years. He was a civil servant and member of the committee of the Bohemian club, while he also served as chairman of both the League of Ireland and the FAI, a post he would occupy in the years prior to the Second World War. He was also a regular member of the FAI's international selection committee,[125] and would go on to become a noted association football broadcaster with the advent of radio.[126]

A dispute had also emerged earlier in the year when the FAIFS informed the Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs that it would be reducing the future rate of hire of the clubs grounds for Free State Cup matches from ten percent of the gross profits acquired at the games to seven and a half percent. Both clubs duly withdrew access to their facilities and the FAIFS was forced to explore the possibility of using the Tolka Park enclosure, which could accommodate only half the spectators of Dalymount Park, for its upcoming semi-final matches.[127] A standoff ensued and the first semi-final between Shamrock Rovers and Dundalk at Tolka Park drew a disappointing crowd as many stayed away for fear of overcrowding and crushing at the smaller venue.[128] Faced with a significant loss of revenue the FAIFS and the clubs reached a compromise before the second semi-final was played. Despite this, the clubs were clearly discontented with the actions of the

[122] *Sunday Independent*, 5 Aug. 1928.
[123] *Irish Independent*, 6 Aug. 1928.
[124] Ibid., 20 Aug. 1928.
[125] Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup*, chapter 6.
[126] Interview with Maighréad Ní Mhurchadha of Skerries, County Dublin (15 Nov. 2012).
[127] *Irish Independent*, 1 Feb. 1929.
[128] Ibid., 4 Feb. 1929.

national administration and called for a change to the FAIFS constitution that would limit the authority of the association to act in such an arbitrary fashion.[129]

Administrative problems between the FAIFS and the MFA also persisted into the latter part of the decade. In echoes of the dispute between the IFA and the LFA in the period before the split, the MFA, feeling that Cork should be entitled to greater input and representation within the national administration, appears to have been dissatisfied with Dublin governance.[130] Cork officials were outraged when the protest and appeals committee of the FAIFS overruled their decision to suspend the Barrackton club for a period of five years for the intimidation of the MFA council in relation to expenses in mid 1928.[131] The judgement caused immeasurable problems for the MFA as the club insisted on playing the fixtures it had since been suspended for, despite the fact that the season had already been completed.[132] Again, such interference with the processes of a regional body was among the foremost grievances of the Dublin administration in the prelude to the split. When it is considered that many of the individuals that had been so perturbed by IFA intrusion on Leinster affairs remained involved in the organisational structure of the sport the manner in which the mistakes of the past were repeated is surprising. The FAIFS was essentially being accused of the very criticisms that its members had levelled against Belfast, and by the end of the decade there were even complaints from provincial parts of Leinster regarding the Dublin-centric character of the Free State game.[133]

Despite the rising crowds during the 1920s, and despite the fact that the FAIFS was in a financial position that allowed it to administer grants and loans that assisted its clubs and associations in their development during the latter period of the decade, it would be false to assume that there was an abundance of money within the sport in the Free State. Although letting agreements with the FAIFS for use of their premises placed the Bohemian and Shelbourne clubs on a relatively sound financial footing, many other clubs struggled to make ends meet. Robert Goggins describes the manner in which Shamrock Rovers consistently struggled to pay the rent on its Milltown ground to the club's Jesuit landlords throughout the period under review in his chronological analysis

[129] *Sunday Independent*, 17 Feb. 1929; *Irish Independent*, 21 Feb. 1929.
[130] Minute book of the consultative committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the consultative committee, 18 Mar. 1927 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/38);
[131] *Anglo-Celt*, 5 May 1928; *Sunday Independent*, 1 July 1928.
[132] *Irish Independent*, 12 Jan. 1929.
[133] Ibid., 16 Aug. 1929.

of the club's history, and it is clear that any money that was accrued was not reinvested in the structure of the sport.[134] At senior level it is likely that shareholders took a dividend from the profits attained by some clubs rather than reinvesting as managements were essentially left to their own devices in the administration of clubs. As such they failed to capitalise on the growing popularity of the sport by improving facilities to make the spectacle of the game a more comfortable experience for those that patronised the grounds.

The manner in which the GAA developed a centralised policy of stadium building and facility development during the inter-war period will be referred to in a later chapter, and it is regrettable that the FAIFS never pursued a similar policy of infrastructural improvement and development that could have solidified the rather unsteady foundations that association football's progression had been built upon. The fact remained that by the end of the 1920s the sport's built landscape was wholly underdeveloped. Mike Cronin and Roisín Higgins point to the fact that Ireland had not experienced the building boom of more industrialised areas within Britain during the late Victorian period.[135] As such stadium and structural facilities were greatly lacking, while the fact that many clubs did not own their premises outright as the sport developed during the decade certainly inhibited development. Association clubs at all levels of the game were dependent on leasing agreements and were privy to the compulsion of the private ownership of the premises on which they played upon, and it is unsurprising that management committees appear to have been reluctant to invest in the sport's infrastructure amid such uncertainty. In many cases the individuals that were involved in the dissemination of association football in Ireland were ill-prepared for the positions they occupied within club managements. This was particularly evident at junior level where those that organised clubs, and were responsible for their administration, were typically very young and inexperienced. There is evidence for this assertion within the FAI records, and during the 1930s a meeting of the association's senior council noted that the secretary of the Meath Rovers club was just 'a boy' as it dealt with a disciplinary matter arising from his behaviour.[136] The youth of the people involved in the dissemination processes at local level is a feature that was common

[134] Robert Goggins, C*hronological history of Shamrock Rovers FC* (Dublin, 2012), p. 5.
[135] Mike Cronin & Roisín Higgins, *Places we play: Ireland's sporting heritage* (Cork, 2011), p. 28.
[136] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, meeting of the senior council, 1 Jan. 1936 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).

throughout the state, and this can perhaps be used to explain the manner in which many teams and competitions imploded after a relatively brief lifespan. In this regard it was a natural process for the participation of young men to fluctuate as they gained new interests, attained employment and settled down, and, as Richard McElligot explains in the context of the early development of the GAA in Kerry, entire clubs could be dependent on the contribution of a small number of men, or even a single individual, and could disappear quickly when their influence was lost.[137]

If any individuals involved in the sport's administrative structure were concerned by issues that had the potential to hamper the future development of association football in the Free State their views were somewhat quelled by the prevailing sense of self-gratification at the end of the 1920s, which was certainly understandable considering the progress that had been made. Despite the inherent problems discussed throughout this chapter, and the lack of foresight that was exhibited in terms of planning for the future, processes of dissemination had occurred at an unerring pace. The expansion of the sport within the state had been completely beyond the comprehension of those that instigated the spilt less than a decade before. At senior level association football portrayed an appearance of prosperity and health, a facade which would only be challenged during the following decade, while at provincial level there was certainly cause for future optimism. Prominent administrators, such as Oliver Grattan Esmonde, publically hailed the progress that had been made. Grattan Esmonde came from an aristocratic Protestant family that held strong nationalist sympathies. His father, Thomas Henry Grattan Esmonde, had served as a nationalist MP, while Oliver himself travelled to Australia and New Zealand in 1921 in an effort to gain recognition for the Irish Republic. He would later serve as the honorary president of the FAI from 1929 until his death in 1936.[138] At the 1929 annual meeting of the LFA Grattan Esmonde, in his role as the association's president, declared that the sport was in 'a flourishing and prosperous condition' with over 300 clubs having taken part in Leinster competitions the previous season, while the expansion of the game in Dublin was a particular source of pride.[139]

[137] Richard McElligot, *Forging a kingdom: the GAA in Kerry, 1884-1934* (Cork, 2013), p. 72.
[138] Needham, *Ireland's first World* Cup, chapter 12.
[139] *Irish Independent*, 16 Aug. 1929.

In Munster the MFA had acquired new premises at the Turner's Cross ground in Cork by the summer of 1929 and could boast of seventy-six affiliated clubs, while local opinion suggested that the organisation had recently been operating more efficiently than ever.[140] The demise of the Fordson club in early 1930 served to temper prevailing enthusiasm somewhat, although the admittance of the Cork Football Club and Waterford Celtic to the Free State League for the 1930-31 season was enough to dispel much of the resultant despondency in the province. Although attendances at association football games in the Connacht region were incomparable with those in Leinster and Munster at the end of the decade the FAIFS felt that the sport was progressing satisfactorily in the province. When the small and dispersed population of the region and its geography are considered in conjunction with the primitive position of the sport during the early 1920s such outlooks appear valid, although when it is also considered that only twenty-five affiliated clubs were recorded from the province as late as 1931 it is clear that the Connacht game remained relatively weak.[141] The exuberance that was displayed with the manner in which the game had progressed must be analysed with caution. Although the new southern administration had remained true to its mandate of spreading the association code throughout the entire area under its jurisdiction for the most part, much work needed to be done to develop the fledgling localised structures that existed under its auspices and to infiltrate areas of the country that continued to remain outside of its influence. In this regard the policy of the FAIFS in fostering, disseminating and developing the sport during the 1920s can be considered a relative success, although as the following chapter will examine more testing times lay ahead.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1920s association football was played in practically all areas of the Irish Free State. Although its diffusion was certainly remarkable in its scope and scale in some regards the sport's expansion can also be considered uneven and unstable. When the FAI came into existence in 1921 its mandate included a commitment to foster the association code throughout the entire area under its jurisdiction, and from a practical standpoint its policy appears to have been successful as the sport effectively infiltrated provincial regions and became engrained within the sporting consciousness

[140] *Southern Star*, 13 July 1929.
[141] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, eight annual report of the junior committee, 1930-31 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/26)

across the state. From its Dublin stronghold the FAI attempted to centralise existing and burgeoning regional association football structures throughout the 1920s. It was relatively successful in doing so. By the end of the decade the sport had been developed in north Leinster, where the most proficient clubs competed in the capital's league structures, in south Leinster, where the game was steadily progressing, in Munster, where a revived MFA was overseeing a thriving provincial scene, and in Connacht and the north-west, where geographical restrictions and connectivity issues were in the process of being addressed.

The social environs of the Free State during the 1920s proved to be conducive to the dissemination and development of association football, and from the moment that the LFA administration disassociated itself from the IFA in Belfast, effectively nationalising the sport as a Sunday concern that was organised within a Dublin-based structure, the game began to prosper and flourish. The relative stability that prevailed after the Anglo-Irish War and the ensuing Irish Civil War eliminated barriers to participation by lifting restrictions on the population's ability to travel without impediment both within urban settlements and throughout the countryside. Likewise, the reconstruction of damaged railway networks and the emergence of more efficient transportation and infrastructural systems were also fundamental as popular mobility was increased, with teams and spectators afforded the opportunity to travel over greater distances to compete in, or watch, football games. 1920s Ireland was characterised by population growth in urban areas, and the conditions that existed within the state's larger urban centres certainly facilitated the development of association football. As will be discussed in a later chapter, the social conditions that prevailed amid urban overcrowding were integral to the sport's emerging popularity as football clubs provided an identity and social focal point for the working-classes who congregated in towns and cities throughout FAI territory. The manner in which the provincial media embraced the association code was also fundamental to the sport's development, and the level to which the game expanded to all corners of the Free State by the end of the decade was certainly beyond what even the most optimistic of enthusiasts could have imagined in the wake of the split.

The FAIFS was justifiably proud of the manner in which association football had progressed under its jurisdiction although the external statistical appearance of the sport somewhat masked inherent weaknesses within the structure that developed under its

auspices. The lack of cohesion between the Dublin and Cork-based administrations was certainly of concern, while the functionality of the Connacht FA was yet to be ascertained amid signs that the centralisation of relatively underdeveloped regional networks held potential pitfalls. The numerical appearance of the sport in terms of the number of clubs affiliated to provincial bodies also belies the reality that many of the emergent clubs were struggling for survival throughout the period. As such, it appears as though the growing participation in the sport did not necessarily translate to financial stability or prosperity. This was certainly the case at senior level, where despite the escalating gate receipts, clubs were encumbered with monetary difficulties. The failure of management committees at senior level to invest in the infrastructural development of their clubs, together with the reluctance of the FAIFS to introduce a centralised policy to this effect, must be considered a missed opportunity to place the sport on a firm grounding that would allow greater progression in subsequent years. As it transpired, the limitations of the protracted dissemination and development that occurred during the 1920s would leave the sport vulnerable to both the internal and external forces that were shaping Irish sport and society during the following decade, and an examination of association football's difficulties during the 1930s forms the basis of the following chapter.

Chapter 5: The financial crisis and stagnation within association football during the 1930s

Introduction

Irish social life was undoubtedly undergoing an invigoration by the onset of the 1930s. Technological and communicational improvements created a wider audience for music, film and the arts, while reference to increasing popular participation in sport and general outdoor activity during the inter-war period has previously been made within this thesis.[1] Increased working-class participation in various social processes continued to occur within the context of poverty and disaffection however, and for much of the population a long shadow continued to be cast by prevailing economic conditions. In his assessment of the relationship between sport and the state Mike Cronin, quoting historian Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch, describes the Irish Free State as 'a drab, rather dispirited place in which to live'.[2] In the main, the promises of improved living conditions for the general populace that had been propagated in the political rhetoric of independence had failed to materialise by the beginning of the 1930s. Unemployment, disease and poverty were constant companions of a population that became ever more embattled as the effects of a global depression, caused by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, reached the Free State, and as the United States closed its borders to protect its ailing economy a traditional and much-travelled route of escape for young Irish men and women was unceremoniously shut.[3] The downturn in emigration had the impact of increasing the population of the Free State's towns and cities as overcrowding added to the squalid conditions in which people were compelled to live, and it is within this context of scarcity and struggle that Irish sport continued to be organised. As discussed in the previous chapter, adverse socio-economic conditions had historically provided no barrier to popular engagement with association football, as the disillusioned found brief respite from their difficulties within the confines of the sport, and as such there was little to substantiate any possibility of external economic forces destructively impacting upon the game. Conversely, association football was engendered by an outlook of

[1] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (2nd ed., London, 2005), p. 344-50.
[2] Mike Cronin, 'Projecting the nation through sport and culture: Ireland, Aonach Tailteann, and the Irish Free State', in *the Journal of contemporary history*, 38, no. 3, Sport and Politics (July 2003), p. 395, available at http://www.jstor.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/sici?origin=sfx%3Asfx&sici=0022-0094(2003)38%3A3%3C395%3E1.0.CO%3B2-v [10 March 2011].
[3] Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 330.

optimism at the beginning of the 1930s, as contemporary observers continued to revel in the dissemination and development of the sport during the previous decade.

This prevailing sense of buoyancy would soon be undermined however, as it became apparent that those responsible for the governance of association football had become somewhat complacent in their approach. As described in the previous chapter, the progression that the sport had undergone since the split was also characterised by deficiencies and frailty, and there is no doubt that the structure of the game was not as strong as many involved in association football had assumed. The problem lay in the fact that the growing popularity of the sport, together with the spiralling number of clubs that were affiliating to the FAIFS, led to the emergence of a misrepresentation of association football as a thriving sporting embodiment of working-class culture. It is clear that a multitude of weaknesses within the movement were hidden amid such portrayals. As the decade progressed the position of association football in the Irish Free State came to reflect the instability and uncertainty that characterised wider society. As the economy floundered so too did the clubs, leagues and associations that appeared to have been strengthening during the previous decade as the finances that resided within the sport were eroded by a combination of self-inflicted wounds and unavoidable external influences. If the narrative of historical commentary on the sport during the 1920s is framed by progress and expansion, the discourse surrounding analysis of the following decade is somewhat less cheerful, and this chapter serves as an examination of the financial crisis and stagnation that enveloped association football in Ireland during the 1930s.

Continued optimism and the cross-channel invasion of the early 1930s

Historian John A. Murphy describes the last years of W.T Cosgrave's Cumann na nGaedhael government within the context of a deteriorating Free State economy that had begun to feel the shockwaves of a wider global depression.[4] In comparison with this portrayal, and indeed with depressing modern representations of the 1930s, the atmosphere surrounding association football in Ireland at the beginning of the decade was strikingly positive however. As alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, contemporary media commentators, such as Pivot, the *Irish Independent*'s association football correspondent, were openly optimistic that the progress of the previous decade

[4] John A. Murphy, *Ireland in the twentieth century* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1989), p. 74.

could be built upon.[5] On first inspection such outlooks appear to have been justifiable. In statistical terms association football looked to be in a state of relative health. The number of clubs affiliated to the FAIFS stood at well over 400, while large crowds were regularly frequenting games in the Free State League.[6] The FAIFS was also encouraged by the favourable financial balance that was in the possession of its finance committee, and had understandably taken great pride in the manner in which the sport had become imbedded in various regions within its administrative jurisdiction.

The representation that emerged from statistical analysis placed association football in somewhat of a false position however. Although reports of large crowds, and of the increasing number of clubs affiliating to the FAIFS, are certainly useful barometers from which an interpretation of the relative popularity of the sport can be gauged, they must be approached with a degree of caution. As stated in the previous chapter, attendance figures provided by various publications during the inter-war period, while providing a useful reference point for modern historians, were not necessarily representative of the exact number of spectators that entered grounds. As the cost of admission to these grounds became increasingly hard to come by for the more underprivileged association football enthusiasts they were certainly not representative of the relative popularity of the sport within the wider community. Likewise, records that highlight the number of clubs affiliated to the FAIFS within any given timeframe fail to take account of emergent clubs that had not yet had the opportunity to affiliate, while those that existed outside of the FAIFS's administrative structure obviously remained unaccounted for. It is easier to draw such conclusions with the aid of hindsight however, and it is unsurprising that statistical representations formed the basis for contemporary depictions that propagated the stature of association football within the Irish sporting landscape. The reality was that the actual position of the sport was somewhat more complex, and by the beginning of the 1930s the seeds of an impending financial crisis and stagnation that would engulf the entire sport were already in the process of ferment.

By the summer of 1930 the policies being adopted by the Free State's senior clubs were changing the characterisation of association football. The growing desire of clubs to

[5] *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1930.
[6] Joe Dodd, 'The first sixty years', George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds), *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), p. 47.

retain the patronage of the public in an increasingly competitive sporting environment led to the introduction of large numbers of professional players from Northern Ireland and Britain to the Free State League. This approach emerged as a result of the increased revenue that clubs were retaining from large gate receipts, as well as from a desire to enhance the commercial appeal of individual clubs. It was widely recognised that the public were far more inclined to attend the fixtures of successful or entertaining teams than those of struggling or unappealing teams, and as such management committees came to view the most practical way of accumulating the best playing squads through what the media began to refer to as 'outsider' or 'cross-channel' recruitment policies. For many British professionals the Free State came to represent an attractive means of escaping the restrictive retain-and-transfer system that placed players in complete subservience to the clubs that held their registration, as well as the established maximum wage structures that were employed in Britain.[7] By 1930 a number of Free State clubs were willing to offer highly competitive contractual terms to 'outsider' players, who could earn up to £2 more than was possible in Britain on a weekly basis, while some were also persuaded to relocate by promises of supplementary employment in local firms and factories.[8]

During the summer of 1930 clubs were recruiting so extensively that prominent association football correspondents were referring to current trends as 'the biggest invasion of Cross-channel talent in the history of the Saorstát'.[9] While clubs such as Bohemians, Shamrock Rovers and St James's Gate continued to incorporate local players, other league members were markedly less conservative in their approach to recruitment.[10] Emergent clubs such as Dolphin, who perhaps did not possess the capability of attracting the most proficient players based in Dublin, felt that the incorporation of 'outsider' players afforded the best chance of competing effectively against their more established counterparts. The availability of talent was also a concern in provincial centres such as Cork and Waterford where individuals within management committees of clubs were quite dismissive of local players, which they felt were not of the requisite standard to sustain public support throughout an entire

[7] James Walvin, *The people's game: the history of football revisited* (2nd ed., Chippenham, 2000), p. 138.
[8] Interview with Plunket Carter of Cork, County Cork (14 June 2013).
[9] *Sunday Independent*, 17 Aug. 1930.
[10] Interview with Robert Goggins of Tallaght, County Dublin (1 Mar. 2013).

season.[11] While the Dundalk club utilised its geographic proximity to the border in acquiring a number of players from Northern Ireland, even established league members such as the Shelbourne club were enthusiastically pursuing cross-channel players during the autumn of 1930, and by the time that the Free State League commenced local players were increasingly conspicuous by their absence.[12] Reports of games from late 1930 in which no more than a two or three indigenous players participated serve to highlight the extent of 'outsider' recruitment policies and the vigour in which they were incorporated by Free State clubs. What is perhaps surprising however, was that there appears to have been relatively little discussion within the press regarding the financial sustainability of such projects, or their potentially damaging impact upon the structure of the sport.[13]

While the majority of the individuals that were enticed to the Free State can be considered veteran players whose athleticism and ability were invariably in decline, the era of their initial introduction to the Free State League was certainly an exciting time for the senior game as large crowds regularly flocked to matches. Contemporary reports indicate that grounds were regularly filled to capacity, with some accounts describing enormous crowds that exceeded 30,000 spectators at matches in Dublin and Cork during 1930.[14] The public reaction to the arrival of 'outsider' players undoubtedly encouraged club officials to continue their cross-channel recruitment drives throughout late 1930, and into 1931. Advertisements that began to appear in English newspapers in which professional footballers who could play in stated positions were encouraged to contact Free State clubs suggest that the ambition of club officials was spiralling out of control, and it was becoming increasingly apparent that the accumulation of a competitive team was accompanied by substantial monetary costs.[15]

The new cosmopolitan character of association football can be considered a contentious development in light of the prevailing anti-British myopia that remained imbedded within Free State society. As such, strong criticism of clubs that were actively encouraging English players to take up residence and work in Ireland was predictably

[11] *Munster Express*, 1 Aug. 1930.
[12] *Sunday Independent*, 17 Aug. 1930.
[13] *Irish Independent*, 6 Dec. 1930.
[14] Robert Goggins, *Chronological history of Shamrock Rovers FC* (Dublin, 2012), p. 50: Interview with Plunket Carter of Cork, County Cork (14 June 2013).
[15] *Irish Independent*, 25 Nov. 1930.

forthcoming within the national media, and even in political discussion in the Dáil.[16] Aside from ideological concerns pertaining to a British invasion of Irish sport, the lack of opportunities that were now available to indigenous players was becoming a growing point of contention. With the media increasingly lamenting the displacement of the local players that were effectively relegated to participation in intermediate and junior football, resentment inevitably emerged towards the 'outsiders' that were held responsible. Although there is little evidence of any culturally-motivated hostility manifesting on the Free State's playing pitches, the prevailing sense of bitterness was becoming extremely pronounced. This resentment is clearly illustrated in an incident that was reported in the *Irish Independent* in December 1930, when the Gardaí were alerted to anonymous threats made against the safety of two British players in the employ of an unnamed Dublin club. The individuals in question were advised, along with all other 'cross-channel professionals', to leave the capital by Christmas and not to return 'or else', and it appears that the Free State, and Irish sport, could be an inhospitable environment for guests that were considered unwelcome.[17] It must be noted, however, that the vast majority of 'outsider' players were welcomed into both the fabric of association football clubs and local communities without any difficulty, and the mounting criticisms of cross-channel recruitment were generally commentaries on the potential dangers of club policy rather than any personal attacks against individuals.

The portrayal of such opinion in the media coincided with reports regarding the increasingly unstable condition of the Waterford club, which by early 1931 was struggling to remain solvent having overextended its resources on accumulating a squad consisting predominantly of cross-channel talent.[18] The club was not raising enough capital from its gate receipts to offset its expenditure on wages and travel, and as other clubs also began to encounter similar difficulties the role of the FAIFS was increasingly called into question. Unlike the IFA, which had firmly opposed any prospective initiatives to incorporate large numbers of English and Scottish professionals into the northern game during the late 1920s, the Free State association had essentially been a passive observer to the recklessness of club managements as no attempts were made to regulate or control either the amount of 'outsider' players that entered league, or the

[16] Deputy W. Davin, 'Public Business - Finance Bill, 1931 - Committee', Dáil Éireann, vol. 39, no. 11, 2 July 1931, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1931/07/02/00010.asp [3 Mar. 2010].
[17] *Irish Independent*, 8 Dec. 1930.
[18] *Munster Express*, 23 Jan. 1931.

amount of money that clubs were spending on their new recruits.[19] When it is considered that representatives of individual clubs, such as Sam Prole from the Dundalk club, L.C. Kealy of Drumcondra, Joe Wickham of Bohemians and A. Byrne of Shamrock Rovers, also occupied positions of influence within the administrative structure of both the FAIFS and the Free State League, this lack of initiative and intervention is perhaps less surprising.[20] In some regards the FAIFS served merely as a facilitator for the increasingly irresponsible actions of its members who were slowly edging their clubs towards the looming prospect of financial ruin.

In some cases Free State clubs were unwilling to pay the summer wages that were required to retain the services of 'outsider' players for a second season, which duly compelled their representatives to once again embark on extensive recruitment drives across Britain during the summer of 1931. By the time that the Free State League commenced in September that year it was estimated that up to half of the players that were registered to play in the competition were 'outsiders'.[21] By now even clubs such as Shamrock Rovers, that had previously shown a reluctance to follow the example set by their counterparts, were recruiting from outside of the Free State.[22] This indicates that despite the financial difficulties that were arising within clubs as a result of their spending policies, cross-channel recruitment was considered to be a necessity if teams were to remain competitive at senior level. Despite this, it was obvious that current trends were completely unsustainable. Club officials exhibited a complete unwillingness to address the situation however, and despite the erosion of any remaining monetary reserves they recognised that the abandonment of cross-channel recruitment policies would, in all likelihood, result in a loss of status as their teams became weakened. This would inevitably lead to diminished gate receipts, and it appears that an embarrassing lack of competitiveness was feared even more than the prospect of financial failure.

The financial crisis of the early 1930s

Outside of Dublin the Free State did not possess a population large enough to support a model of professional sport at the scale that association football interests had been

[19] Neal Garnham, 'One game in two nations? Football in Ireland 1918 - 1939', p. 7.
[20] List of FAI and Free State League representatives for 1934 (U.C.D., FAI Archive, P137/45).
[21] *Irish Press*, 11 Oct. 1932.
[22] Goggins, *Chronological history of Shamrock Rovers FC*, p. 50.

aspiring to, and the inability of provincial clubs to offset their expenditure on 'outsider' players left them particularly susceptible to financial difficulties. Their solvency was also undermined by the substantial expenses that they incurred in regularly travelling over large distances for fixtures in Dublin, and other regional centres, and provincial observers, whose opinions were portrayed in publications such as the *Munster Express*, felt that the disparities between the cost of participation for provincial members of the Free State League and their counterparts from the capital were both excessive and unreasonable.[23] The grievances of provincial clubs were raised at a meeting of the council of the Free State League at the behest of the increasingly unstable Waterford club in late 1931. At the meeting club representatives proposed a revision of the established arrangement whereby clubs were entitled to retain the entire profits from gate receipts collected at their home fixtures.[24] This arrangement was undoubtedly more favourable to the most popular Dublin clubs that played in the most spacious grounds, and it was legitimately argued that allowing visiting clubs a twenty percent share of any such profits would represent a fairer distribution of the resources that were entering the senior game.

Waterford officials argued their case by pointing to the fact that the attendance figures recorded at fixtures involving their club in the capital were significantly larger than those of average gates, and it was their contention that Dublin clubs were profiting more from the Waterford team than its own management committee. Neither the forcefulness of the claims presented by club representatives, nor the fiscal difficulties that the club was experiencing were enough to effect change however. Although there was genuine sympathy for the deteriorating position of the Waterford club, a majority of Dublin members within the league's administration were opposed to any resolution that would force them to share their gate receipts.[25] Although the league's Dublin members were clearly concerned with protecting their own interests, and were fearful for their own financial stability, the failure to introduce regulations that would distribute the sport's resources more evenly between the capital and the provinces was certainly a missed opportunity to install a buffer that may have alleviated some of the difficulties faced by provincial clubs during the subsequent period.

[23] *Munster Express*, 6 Jan. 1932.
[24] Ibid., 1 Jan. 1932.
[25] *Irish Independent*, 29 Jan. 1932.

During the summer of 1932 the FAIFS was eager to promote the fact that the number of clubs affiliated to the association, which now stood at 517, had reached record proportions having increased by forty-eight on the previous season.[26] Any remaining exuberance that lingered within the association football administration was replaced by a sense of panic, however, amid reports that the recently elected Fianna Fáil government, in its attempts to stabilise an ailing Free State economy, was intending to reintroduce the derided entertainment tax that had been abolished by Cumann na nGaedhael in 1925. Having initially received intimations that the working-class character of association football would entitle the sport to some form of concession from the entertainment tax, the FAIFS was disappointed to learn that no such dispensation had been afforded by Minister for Finance, Seán MacEntee, in his first budget in May 1932.[27] The sense of injustice was further compounded by the fact that the GAA and the National Athletic and Cycling Association (NACA) had been provided with an exemption from the levy on the contested grounds that the organisations provided a national service to the state in promoting a distinct Irish culture through their games.[28] The following chapter will discuss the ideological significance of the entertainment tax within Irish sport in greater detail, and while vociferous protests centring on the discriminatory characterisation of government policy were certainly imbued with legitimacy, the primary concern of association football administrators was the immediate stabilisation of a sport that was set to see its minimal financial resources further reduced.

The popular perception of association football as a progressive and prosperous sporting structure had led the Minister for Finance to believe that imposing an entertainment on the sport would provide the government with a productive source for the collection of additional revenue. When it was considered that independent calculations established that an average of 60,000 people were attending games in the capital on a weekly basis it is was obviously easy to draw such conclusions, and MacEntee's refusal to re-evaluate the decision not to offer any form of concession was certainly

[26] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932 – 1937, annual report, 1931-32 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).
[27] *Irish Independent*, 3 June 1932.
[28] Entertainment duty: application to Gaelic games and other sports, May 1932 – June 1932, Extracts from Cabinet Minutes, Cab. 6/29, 23-4 May 1932, item no. 7 (National Archives of Ireland, TSCH/3/S6276).

understandable.[29] He had estimated that the annual sum that would be raised from association football alone to be as high as £25,000, although this figure was based on the assumption that the public would continue to patronise the sport at similar rates.[30] This was a conjecture that was discounted as folly by contemporary commentators, such as Cumann na nGaedhael politician, Eamonn O'Neill, who predicted a sharp decline in gate receipts.[31] Despite the fact that the FAIFS had provided substantial loans to both the Cork and Bray Unknowns clubs before the entertainment tax had come into effect, the association immediately adopted an approach of apportioning blame for the deteriorating financial position of its members to government policy. In doing so the FAIFS conveniently deflected attention from its own complicity and the internal inefficiencies within the sport.[32] Similar processes were also observable at club level as the Waterford club cited the 'insurmountable' entertainment tax as the reason for its resignation from the Free State League before a single game had taken place after its introduction. Likewise, the media did little to alleviate growing anxiety by predicting that the entertainment tax 'would not only seriously retard the progress of the game but would eventually paralyse the entire movement'.[33]

Although the role played by the entertainment tax in the financial deterioration of association football was overstated by those within the game, its introduction undoubtedly posed a serious threat to ailing clubs. As the disposable income available to association football supporters was further reduced by unemployment rates that almost doubled between the spring and autumn of 1932 club managements became justifiably concerned by the very real prospect of diminished gate receipts during the forthcoming season.[34] This unease was rooted in the fact that the cost of attending senior matches had risen with the introduction of the taxation. The entertainment tax necessitated a supplementary charge of 1d on the standard 6d cost of admission to grounds, and as supporters, who as previously stated possessed less financial resources than had previously been the case, became increasingly selective in their attendance at

[29] Deputy M.J. Corry, 'Finance Bill, 1932 – Committee (Resumed)', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 3, 7 July 1932, http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/07/07/00012.asp [21 Aug. 2013].
[30] *Irish Independent*, 4 Aug. 1932.
[31] Deputy E. O'Neill, 'Finance Bill, from the Seanad', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 10, 3 Aug. 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/08/03/00006.asp [3 May 2013].
[32] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, May 1931 – Mar. 1937, meeting of the finance committee, 25 June 1931 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12).
[33] *Irish Independent*, 13 July 1932.
[34] Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2005), p. 77.

matches senior clubs found themselves in a position of vulnerability. The widespread apprehension that emerged after the introduction of the levy was not enough to persuade clubs to abandon their 'outsider' recruitment policies however, and as irresponsible spending continued the entire senior structure was in danger of complete capitulation. By late summer reports suggest that even established clubs from the capital were now operating under mounting financial strain.[35] As an increasingly forlorn FAIFS continued to unsuccessfully beseech MacEntee to remit a taxation that it was describing as a shameless assault on working-class culture it was clear that the association had effectively lost financial control of the game under its auspices.[36]

With the majority of its senior clubs now under increasing financial pressure an exacerbated FAIFS came to the conclusion that the substantial loans that it had previously administered to its affiliates would be difficult, if not impossible, to recoup. In an attempt to determine whether clubs were in a position to make any form of repayments the association launched a belated investigation into the fiscal position of the clubs that were indebted to its finance committee. While enquiries predictably found that the clubs were operating far beyond their capabilities in paying large wages to 'outsider' players, it was also clear that club managements had arrogantly done so on the premise that the FAIFS would be on hand to offer financial assistance when the need inevitably arose.[37] The association was obviously viewed as a soft touch that existed merely to facilitate the compulsion of increasingly negligent club officials, and to fund their reckless spending policies, and in truth little effort had been made to discourage the emergence of such perceptions. Although the FAIFS had undoubtedly exhibited a commendable willingness to use its resources to aid the clubs as they encountered mounting difficulties, a degree of naivety had been shown in placing no regulations or stipulations on how the financial assistance it provided should be used. Critical self-assessment revealed that the association had essentially relinquished the reserves it had accumulated over the course of the previous decade without the

[35] *Irish Independent*, 14 July 1932.
[36] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, annual general meeting, 30 June 1932 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).
[37] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, May 1931 – Mar. 1937, meeting of the finance committee, 2 Sept. 1932 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12); *Irish Press*, 6 Oct. 1932.

possibility of being recompensed, and by the autumn of 1932 was itself facing a struggle to remain financially solvent.[38]

The position of the provincial game

As media discussion was focussed predominantly on the potential threat that the entertainment tax posed towards the Free State League and its member clubs, the condition of the sport at regional level was somewhat overlooked by FAIFS officials whose immediate concern centred on preventing a collapse of the senior structure. Although individuals such as Dublin's Lord Mayor, Alfie Byrne, were prepared to highlight the plight of junior clubs that depended entirely on local subscriptions and private contributions for their survival, relatively little consideration was afforded to the regional processes of expansion and development that had so characterised FAIFS policy during the previous decade.[39] As such the number of affiliated clubs decreased from 517 during the 1931-32 season to 471 a year later.[40] The scant coverage of regional association football structures that was portrayed to a national audience was far removed from the depictions of vitality that had engendered the discourse of the late 1920s. The reality was that the sport had regressed in many parts of the state, not least in Cork, where the Munster Senior League had apparently become monotonous and uninspiring.[41] A similar situation was also in evidence in north Leinster, where it was claimed that not enough 'decent teams' existed within the once vibrant association football landscapes of Athlone, Mullingar and Longford to support a strong regional league competition during the early 1930s.[42] In areas such as Galway and Sligo conflict within local administrations was thought to have been stunting the development of the sport, and it is no coincidence that the weakening of association football in certain centres occurred in conjunction with the strengthening of the GAA and the growing popularity of Gaelic games.[43]

[38] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, May 1931 – Mar. 1937, meeting of the finance committee, 2 Sept. 1932 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12).
[39] Deputy A. Byrne, 'Finance Bill, 1932 - Committee (Resumed)', Dáil Éireann , vol. 43, no. 1, 5 July 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/07/05/00028.asp [21 Aug. 2013].
[40] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, annual report 1932-33 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21); Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, annual report 1933-34 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).
[41] Interview with Plunket Carter of Cork, County Cork (14 June 2013).
[42] Garnham, 'One game in two nations?', p. 16.
[43] Interview with Paul Gunning of Sligo, County Sligo (5 June 2013).

It is clear that the FAIFS had failed to identify the seriousness of the stagnation that was taking place within its jurisdiction. Despite this, by the autumn of 1932 it had become concerned enough to establish a committee, under the chairmanship of Myles Murphy, a sibling of the aforementioned Robert and John, who like his brothers worked as a civil servant.[44] The objective of the committee was to investigate reports of decline and to definitively establish the true position of the game at regional level. The association also tasked Murphy's committee with the mandate of conceiving ways in which the sport might be further stimulated in provincial areas, which suggests that there was an acute awareness that the information that was to be reported back to council may not be encouraging.[45] Few members of the organisation could have predicted the scale of the regression that would later emerge, however. To the dismay of FAIFS officials, the committee's findings placed association football 'in anything other than a healthy condition' in many provincial centres, while it highlighted the complete dearth of suitable playing areas throughout the state as the primary cause of the general lack of development within regional networks. This issue was said to have been particularly damaging to the expansion of the game in the north Munster and Connacht regions,[46] and when it is considered that only one pitch was available in Cork for over twenty local clubs the scale of the problem becomes glaringly apparent.[47]

The complete lack of financial resources within association football during the 1930s made the acquisition and development of further playing grounds at regional level impossible for the most part, while it was also becoming clear that the unavailability of money was threatening the hierarchical administrative structure that had developed within the sport over the course of the previous decade. Throughout the state clubs were struggling to fund the travel expenses that were required to keep their teams active within regional competitions. This had the effect of disrupting league structures and causing an increased number of postponed or cancelled matches.[48] The ensuing disorganisation and uncertainty within the sport did little to enhance its popular appeal as local enthusiasts grew weary of the ad hoc fashion in which the game was functioning, and as stated above well-ordered Gaelic games increasingly provided an attractive alternative to a crumbling association football structure. Like their senior

[44] Interview with Maighréad Ní Mhurchadha of Skerries, County Dublin (15 Nov. 2012).
[45] *Irish Independent*, 26 Sept. 1932.
[46] *Irish Press*, 27 Sept. 1932; Interview with Paul Gunning, Sligo, County Sligo (6 June 2013).
[47] *Sunday Independent*, 13 May 1934.
[48] *Munster Express*, 18 Sept. 1936.

counterparts junior clubs were completely dependent on public patronage, and a perceptible sense of anxiety permeated through the sport as interest in local competitions declined. The foreboding atmosphere that enveloped the sport as the 1930s progressed is aptly surmised in the plea of E. Preston, who when serving as the honorary secretary of the Athlone Town club, warned that 'two or three bad Sundays would ruin the gate and place your Committee in immediate difficulty' if a certain level of local support was not maintained.[49] This was undoubtedly a sentiment that was familiar to club members holding similar fears in various parts of the Free State, and the harsh reality was that association clubs were wholly at the mercy of their socio-economic surroundings and individually could do little to affect any change in their fortunes.

Any attempt to reverse the stagnation would necessitate centralised action directed from the FAIFS administration in Dublin. In the wake of the inquiries that had been made on its behalf members of the association admitted that they had become complacent in failing to provide adequate support to the regional association football networks that had been established during the 1920s.[50] As well as taking responsibility for its own shortcomings, the FAIFS also lamented the role played by its divisional bodies in Leinster, Munster and Connacht, and it openly charged organisations such as the MFA with failing to effectively nurture the game in provincial regions.[51] The channels of communication within the sport's hierarchical administrative construct had clearly broken down, and the Free State association was gaining little success in recouping either repayments on outstanding loans, or the affiliation fees that it was owed, from its struggling divisional organisations.[52] In some regards the FAIFS had lost touch with the processes that had come to characterise association football outside of its Dublin stronghold. In further echoes of the pre-war Leinster grievances portrayed against the IFA, individuals involved in the sport away from the bustle of the capital's association football scene were now questioning the advisability of affiliation to an organisation that, in their view, had been providing them with minimal encouragement. The collapse of a number of regional competitions resulted in the replacement of the broad

[49] Lynch, *A history of Athlone Town FC: the first 101 years*, p. 135.
[50] *Irish Press*, 27 Sept. 1932.
[51] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, May 1931 – Mar. 1937, meeting of the finance committee, 30 Aug. 1933 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12).
[52] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, May 1931 – Mar. 1937, meeting of the finance committee, 31 May 1933 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12).

association football structures that had been envisaged in the centralisation policies of the FAIFS with a return to more localised and isolated networks. As such, it can be argued that by the early 1930s much of the progression that had previously been made was in a process of reversal. Regional towns were becoming increasingly remote in terms of association football connectivity, and without financial support from the FAIFS local clubs were unable to maintain functional relations with their contemporaries in neighbouring areas.

Turmoil within the senior game

As regional administrations became more insular in character the influence of the FAIFS was effectively limited to within the confines of Dublin, and to the senior game, where, as had been predicted after the introduction of the entertainment tax, and the rising cost of admission to Free State League matches had led to declining crowds and diminishing gate receipts. Of the gross profits that clubs were attaining from gate receipts estimates suggest that perhaps as much as twenty percent was siphoned away from the sport by the entertainment tax. It had not taken long for the financial crisis that had undeniably enveloped the Free State League to impact upon even the state's most popular and prestigious clubs.[53] Principal among these clubs were Bohemians, which despite the retention of its traditional amateur recruitment policy, was increasingly exposed to financial difficulties as it struggled to generate sufficient capital to meet the repayments on the loans it had accrued in developing Dalymount Park during the late 1920s. Realising that the club could not survive on gate receipts alone, officials devised a plan to establish a Ways and Means Committee to raise money from club members, as well as from the wider community, through social initiatives such as dances and raffles in 1933. This was certainly an innovative strategy that allowed the club to benefit from its stature within the communities of north Dublin.[54] The club also became a limited company, as a number of other senior clubs did during the inter-war period, which allowed it to accrue greater debt.[55] Like Bohemians, the Shamrock Rovers club was struggling to pay its debts. It was consistently late with the rent that was due on the ground at Milltown throughout the early 1930s, and ultimately remained in tenancy only

[53] Deputy H.M. Dockrell, 'Finance Bill, 1932 – Committee (Resumed)', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 3, 7 July, 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/07/07/00012.asp [21 Aug. 2013].
[54] Phil Howlin, *Bohemian times*, available from http://www.bohemians.ie/club/history/87-bohemian-times.html [12 June 2012].
[55] The Bohemian Football Club Limited, Memorandum and articles, no. 6584165, 31 July 1934 (C.R.O., 8751).

through a combination of the impressive negotiation skills of club officials such as Joe Cunningham and the continued good graces of its landlords.[56] Other senior clubs were not so fortunate however, and as the government's Economic War with Britain plunged the Free State economy into further crisis 1934 brought renewed concerns for an association football structure whose frailties were becoming increasingly visible.[57]

By the spring of 1934 the Free State League was on the verge of collapse as its members faced a constant battle to raise the money that was necessary to fund the travel expenses of their teams. In April the Cork Bohemian club, which had been elected to the competition just two years earlier, became the latest club to succumb to its financial difficulties.[58] Like its counterparts, the club had overextended its resources in pursuing 'outsider' players, and by the end of its tenure in the competition was not in a position to send its players to Dublin to honour fixtures, or to pay the outstanding fees it had accrued in hiring Gardaí for its games.[59] The erratic performance of the team had also led to diminishing public support, and in the period before the club resigned from the league its gate receipts had declined to an unprecedented level for senior football in Cork.[60] To compound the general sense of disarray, the Shelbourne club refused to fulfil its remaining fixtures towards the end of the 1933-34 season in protest at the lack of compensation it had been offered when the counterattraction of an international fixture was held in Dublin on the same day as one of its matches. The club was subsequently outraged when it was administered with an unrealistic fine of £500 for its insubordination. In a moment of fury its management committee, led by its president, T. McCormack, and chairman, P. Guileful, hastily resigned its membership of the Free State League before committing the ultimate affront in applying to join both the Irish League and the IFA.[61]

As sport in Northern Ireland was not subjected to any legislation governing entertainment tax, and as the crowds that attended fixtures in the Irish League had remained relatively high throughout the early 1930s, the prospect of absconding to the

[56] Goggins, *A chronological history of Shamrock Rovers FC*, p. 5.
[57] Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland*, p. 69.
[58] Plunket Carter, 'Troubled periods in Cork soccer history'.
[59] An Garda Síochána: claim against the Cork Bohemian Football Club in respect of services, 1934- 1935 (National Archives of Ireland, 90/5/43).
[60] Interview with Plunket Carter of Cork, County Cork (14 June 2013).
[61] Peter Byrne, *Green is the colour* (London, 2012), p. 144.

northern game may have been quite appealing to Shelbourne officials.[62] Despite this, the prospect of the club competing in a competition outside of the Free State was never a realistic possibility, as under the terms of the 1923 Liverpool agreement it was impossible for a club residing within the Free State to register with an association in a foreign territory. At a time when the FAIFS was attempting to gain the support of the international association football fraternity in its claims against the IFA it was certainly not in the best interests of the Belfast association to draw unwanted attention to itself by accepting an application from one of Dublin's most prominent clubs. As such, the IFA duly informed the club's representatives that their application had been rejected, and with the northern route of escape now firmly blocked Shelbourne and its committee were left to face the wrath of a belligerent FAIFS.[63] The club was banned from participation in organised football for a period of twelve months, while the individuals that instigated the revolt were banished from the game indefinitely.[64] When it is considered that the Free State League had come to its conclusion with just eight remaining members, the summer of 1934 must surely have represented the lowest ebb to date for the sport under the governance of the FAIFS.

Renewed optimism from the mid 1930s

By the time that the Shelbourne episode had been resolved the prevailing atmosphere of despondency surrounding association football had somewhat dissipated, to be replaced once again by a renewed sense of optimism. This was resultant of the Minister for Finance's decision to remove the entertainment tax that many continued to hold culpable for the deteriorating condition of the sport. After it was admitted by government representatives that the levy had indeed failed to raise the amount of capital that had been projected at the time of its introduction a strong sense of vindication was felt throughout the entire association football structure.[65] The subsequent election to the Free State League of additional provincial clubs in the guise of Waterford and Sligo Rovers for the forthcoming season also fuelled the perception that association football was entering a period of revitalisation. Half of the league's membership was now based outside of Dublin, and the provincial clubs were provided with further encouragement

[62] Garnham, 'One game in two nations?', p. 9.
[63] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association, meeting of the emergency committee, 26 June 1934 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4196/N/1).
[64] *Irish Press*, 28 June 1934.
[65] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, report to the annual general meeting of the FAIFS (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).

when a resolution that allowed visiting clubs a twenty percent share in the profits attained from gate receipts at all fixtures was finally passed by the council of the Free State League in June 1934.[66] It is ironic that a regulation that had been rejected as undesirable at the beginning of the decade, and could perceivably have lessened the damaging effects of the financial crisis on certain clubs, was introduced only after the remittance of the entertainment tax, and the timing of the backtrack does suggest that club officials from the capital also felt that larger amounts of revenue would soon be at their disposal.

Localised press reports also suggest that association football was in a process of rejuvenation at regional level during the middle of the decade, although, as argued throughout this thesis, the accuracy of such accounts are at times questionable, and varying agendas that existed within such commentaries necessitate an apprehensive approach in attempting to establish their historical value. Closer examination reveals that accounts of the sport's recovery in certain parts of the Free State may have been embellished to portray a more vibrant association football culture than actually existed for the purpose of raising the profile of the game. As conflicting testimonies of development emanated from different areas it is difficult to form a generalised conclusion on the condition of the sport on a national scale. Because regional association football structures were the product of the socio-economic environments in which they were based, it is more productive to assess the inherent strength or weakness of the sport during the 1930s in the context of the local. Although spatial constraints within this project do not allow for the comprehensive analysis that the complexities within individual sporting landscapes are deserving of, it is possible to establish the position that was occupied by association football in the areas where it was strongest.

While the LFA continued to function under an immovable shadow of financial uncertainty throughout the 1930s, the stagnation that had imbedded itself within the sport in provincial parts of Leinster appeared to be lifting by the middle of the decade.[67] In northern areas of the province association football was clearly resurgent in towns such as Athlone and Mullingar, where strong clubs once again emerged to participate in Dublin-based competitions, while the attendances that were being recorded at games in

[66] *Irish Independent*, 11 June 1934.
[67] Garnham, 'One game in two nations?', p. 16.

Longford during 1936 were said to have been the largest for over five years.[68] While it would take longer for defunct regional league structures to be rejuvenated in places such as Dundalk,[69] association football was in an encouraging position in Kildare, where the emergence of a network that encompassed clubs from throughout the county appears to have increased the game's popular appeal.[70] Although the most ambitious clubs in south Leinster continued to intermittently attempt to gain access to established competitions in Waterford, towns in Wexford and Kilkenny were productive centres for the development of association football. Kilkenny in particular came to be viewed by the FAIFS as an important strategic location for its future aspirations. By the latter years of the decade the association happily invested sizeable sums in the development of a large ground in the town, and it is clear that the geographic position of Kilkenny made it the ideal base from which to launch imminent dissemination processes.[71]

Although the position of association football in Leinster during the mid 1930s was certainly more encouraging than had been the case during the early years of the decade, a multitude of concerns remained ingrained within the fabric of the sport. The reality was that many of the rejuvenated league structures that were hailed in press reports as evidence of a recovery were invariably weak and were organised with a lack of efficiency. The manner in which the Athlone Town club was excused from fulfilling its remaining fixtures in the Sunday Alliance League in 1935 on the basis that the outcome of the competition had already been decided provides a stark illustration of the over-casual organisational processes that were prevalent within the sport at regional level. Amid such disorder it is hardly surprising that frustrated association football enthusiasts continued to be disengaged with the sport.[72] Issues relating to the functionality of league structures were also common in Munster during the 1930s. In Cork clubs were increasingly reluctant to enter the Munster Senior League, preferring to compete in the junior ranks, where the prospect of longer participation in competitions consisting of less capable teams was more appealing than recurrent fixtures against a dwindling number of more proficient intermediate clubs.[73]

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[68] Lynch, *A history of Athlone Town FC*, p. 160.
[69] *Meath Chronicle*, 11 Feb. 1939.
[70] *Kildare Observer*, 1 Dec. 1934.
[71] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1936 – Mar. 1940, seventeenth annual report of the junior committee, 1938-39 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/28).
[72] Lynch, *A history of Athlone Town FC*, p. 150.
[73] Interview with Plunket Carter of Cork, County Cork (14 June 2013).

The general lack of ambition shown by clubs in Cork is representative of a wider sterility that had infiltrated the sport in the city by the mid 1930s. The decline in the number of spectators that were attending football matches in Cork allegedly led concerned local clubs to open their gates to the public without charge in an effort to entice crowds to watch their fixtures.[74] Although this would undoubtedly have had the effect of generating a more vibrant atmosphere, it did little to address the scarcity of resources within the sport. It would be false to suggest that popular interest in association football had significantly waned in Cork however, and it is clear that the wider socio-economic environment was a prominent factor in dwindling attendances at matches. With unemployment figures peaking at around forty percent during the middle of the decade association football enthusiasts within the city's working-class population faced a constant struggle to find the disposable income that was necessary to attend association football.[75] Photographic evidence portraying spectators watching games from the vantage points that provided a view of the pitch at the Mardyke ground indicate that economic scarcity and not large-scale disengagement with the sport was primarily responsible for diminishing gate receipts, and despite the problems that clearly existed within the local structure the continued reverence in which association football was held by the Cork public is incontestable.[76]

In comparison with depressing accounts pertaining to the position of association football in Cork, press reports from Waterford suggest that the sport was in a relatively vibrant condition in eastern parts of Munster during the 1930s. It would appear that the failure of the senior Waterford club in 1932 had the effect of strengthening the local game as large crowds returned to junior matches.[77] By the time that the city once again provided the Free State League with a senior club a strong regional league structure had been afforded the necessary time to develop. The continued popularity of the sport in Waterford would subsequently result in the formation of the Waterford and North Munster League in 1936, which also incorporated clubs from Tipperary. During the latter years of the decade this competition became strong enough to halt the departure of the most proficient local clubs which had traditionally tended to enter the Munster

[74] *Irish Press*, 2 Jan. 1934; *Sunday Independent*, 4 Oct. 1936.
[75] Henry Alan Jefferies, *Cork: historical perspectives* (Dublin, 2004), p. 209.
[76] Plunket Carter, 'Troubled periods in Cork soccer history'.
[77] *Munster Express*, 28 Aug. 1932.

Senior League in Cork.[78] Waterford also provided the setting for one of the most romanticised sporting stories from the inter-war period, and the 'meteoric' rise and subsequent demise of the Rookies club from the small coastal town of Tramore is certainly deserving of individual analysis within the context of the wider environment surrounding association football at regional level.

The Rookies club was formed in 1928 by a group of energetic youths that had taken to tormenting the town's residents by organising vociferous impromptu football matches on the local strand.[79] The club ascended through Waterford's league structure to gain entry to the Munster Senior League during the early 1930s, before qualifying to participate in the Free State Cup on four separate occasions between 1933 and 1936. From a position whereby its members had been unable to afford a football at the outset of their adventure, the club was engaging in competition with names such as Bohemians and Drumcondra, before financial constraints necessitated its disbandment in the autumn of 1936. The regular cost of travel for fixtures in Cork, together with the loss of revenue sustained by the consistent refusal of Cork clubs to travel to Tramore, had proven insurmountable, and in retrospect the Rookies' tale can be described as considerably more than just a much-regaled account of sporting achievement in the face of adversity.[80] It also serves as a vivid insight into the experience of a multitude of less publicised or successful clubs from throughout the state, who after emerging on a wave of initial excitement and exuberance were broken down by the difficulties associated with financially sustaining a functional team. In addition the poignantly brief existence of the Rookies clearly illustrates the fragility of clubs that were wholly dependent on wider sporting and socio-economic processes at both micro and macro scales for their survival. It was not just financial concerns that led to the disbandment of association football clubs at local level. As stated in the previous chapter, the reality was that most clubs were run by young men who naturally grew up and gained other interests and commitments, or perhaps moved away from the area, and the survival of clubs depended on younger enthusiasts becoming involved in clubs to take their place.

Association football in Limerick was also framed by the typical combination of variables which were headed by the lack of financial resources available to clubs and an

[78] Ibid., 14 Aug. 1936.
[79] Ibid., 2 July 1937.
[80] Ibid., 18 Sept. 1936.

inadequate number of playing pitches. As was the case in Waterford however, reports suggest that a strong junior structure was in operation in a city that possessed a unique sporting landscape as a result of the large-scale working-class patronage that was afforded to the rugby code.[81] The growing stature of association football within a centre of Limerick's size naturally led local enthusiasts to propagate the formation of a senior club that could compete in the Free State League, which duly occurred with the establishment of the Limerick Football Club during the summer of 1937.[82] There existed considerable opposition to the concept of the new club however, and some locals were apparently fearful of the potential impact that the presence of senior football in Limerick would have on the junior game. The dissenting voices felt that spectators would desert junior teams in favour of attending Free State League fixtures, while the entire local structure would ultimately be overshadowed. Despite this, enthusiasm generated by the senior club was to the fore for the time being, as publications such as the *Irish Independent* proclaimed that pioneering association football work was 'carving out a new soccer kingdom where rugby and hurling had formerly held sway'.[83]

The localised antagonism between proponents of senior and junior clubs in Limerick had precedence in other areas of the state, not least in the northwest, where the unerring progression of the Sligo Rovers club during the 1930s was blamed for diminished popular interest in regional competitions. Despite the participation of the Rovers club at national level, the Sligo structure remained relatively isolated, and the reluctance of clubs from the wider Connacht region to travel for fixtures did little to alleviate the long-standing concerns of local officials who continued to lament the lack of input from the FAIFS. As discussed in the previous chapter, affiliation with the FAIFS had long since cut the supply of competition with clubs over the border in IFA territory, although limited relations did continue to exist with the healthy association football structure in south Donegal. It had also become clear that the notion of greater regional centralisation of the sport under the influence of the Connacht FA was a misnomer in view of geographic and financial constraints. In fact, by the middle of the decade the CFA had been effectively rendered obsolete in its administrative processes. Although local reports that describe a thriving Connacht game can be discounted as propaganda in some cases, emergent association football structures were in the process of development

[81] Interview with Plunket Carter of Cork, County Cork (14 June 2013).
[82] *Irish Independent*, 1 July 1937.
[83] Ibid., 4 Jan. 1938.

in places such as Galway, Westport, Manorhamilton and Boyle. Overall it must be noted, however, that association football in Connacht remained underdeveloped in comparison with more populous regions of the state.[84]

For all of the shortcomings of FAIFS policy in regard of association football's regional development its members remained determined to facilitate the expansion of the game where possible, and by the latter years of the decade FAIFS intervention had achieved some limited success in raising the profile of the sport in provincial areas. The association had utilised the most practical and affordable tool at its disposal in organising well-publicised exhibition matches that increased the sport's visibility within local communities. It had also introduced a policy of staging important fixtures from the latter stages of the national junior cup competition in provincial centres, in spite of the fact that greater profits could be attained by holding the matches in Dublin.[85] Although the association showed a commendable willingness to place the promotion of the sport in provincial areas before its own financial gain, it still lacked influence in the most geographically remote regions within its jurisdiction, and continued to possess little knowledge of the position of association football in various locations. This is apparent in the inclination of clubs from northern Donegal to remain unresponsive to FAIFS advances up until the end of the inter-war period. It is also in evidence earlier in the decade when the association had been startled to learn of the apparent existence of an association football structure in Kerry which had been accidently discovered at a meeting that its representatives had held with Munster administrators.[86]

Association football at juvenile level

The FAIFS's renewed eagerness to promote the sport in provincial areas from the mid 1930s was also evident in its approach to juvenile football in the Free State. By the standards set by its counterparts in Northern Ireland the association was noticeably active in facilitating the game at youth level. According to Neal Garnham, the IFA had minimal input into the development of the sport among children, although in the Free State the popularity of GAA, which was in the process of formalising minor competition at county level, and the general competitiveness within the sporting

[84] Interview with Paul Gunning of Sligo, County Sligo (6 June 2013).
[85] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1936 – Mar. 1940, financial statements to the fifteenth annual report of the junior committee, 1936-37 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/28).
[86] *Irish Independent*, 11 Aug. 1931.

landscape was perhaps the motivation behind the FAIFS policy of early engagement.[87] When the growing popularity of underage association football within the Free State during the 1930s is considered this approach certainly appears both prudent and productive. In places such as Galway it was claimed that juvenile games were more popular than those participated in by adults at certain junctures, and as was the case with regional association football structures throughout the state, a highly charged and competitive local scene, no matter what age group was involved, was appealing to the public.[88]

As an increasing number of juvenile teams emerged in centres across the Free State, the FAIFS decided to plan a national minor cup competition, which was to be open to clubs comprising of players under the age of eighteen. The Free State Minor Cup tournament was launched in 1935, with fifty-four clubs from locations across the state entering the inaugural tournament, and during subsequent years both the prestige and scope of the competition were enhanced at a steady rate.[89] By the end of the period the FAIFS was even organising international fixtures for minor representative teams, and there is no doubt that juvenile networks were a productive source for the few senior clubs that were willing to incorporate local players into their ranks.[90] There are also instances of juvenile teams collectively making the transition to the adult leagues in certain locations, and the energy and enthusiasm of former underage players often led to success on the field as more seasoned opponents were outplayed by teams that possessed the considerable advantages of familiarity and youth.[91] A darker characterisation to juvenile competition in the Free State is also evident however, and sources reveal that a culture of cheating was inherent within the game. The frequency of complaints and suspensions suggest that a widespread tendency to include boys that were older than stated age limits in juvenile teams in an effort to gain an advantage over opponents often prevailed. In an era when documentation pertaining to personal details

[87] Garnham, 'One game in two nations?', p. 11.
[88] *Connacht Sentinel*, 28 May 1935.
[89] *Irish Independent*, 22 June 1935.
[90] *Sunday Independent*, 15 May 1938.
[91] *Connacht Tribune*, 2 Jan. 1937.

was sometimes not freely available there was a significant amount of confusion and suspicion imbedded within the underage structure as a result.[92]

Continued problems at senior level

While encouraging reports suggested that the stagnation of association football at regional level had peaked by the mid 1930s, concerns regarding the stability of the Free State League remained to the fore of discussion. By 1936 it had become apparent that despite the remittance of the entertainment tax crowds had not returned to frequent the sport at the rate at which many had anticipated. This provides further evidence that the impact of the levy on association football had been previously overstated, and indicates that the unpredictability of supporters and their habitual behaviour was just as prominent in the decline of the senior game as any government policy. The plight of the state's senior clubs was showing little sign of improvement, even after morale was briefly raised by the reinstatement of the Shelbourne club to the Free State League in the autumn of 1936. To make matters worse further anguish was soon forthcoming when a particularly wet spring in 1937 reduced attendance figures at senior matches to a level that caused panic within the league administration.[93] This episode highlights the fact that the financial stability of individual clubs was in some ways just as susceptible to climactic conditions as it was to the socio-economic influences that were shaping Irish society, and as such contemporary media reports frequently portrayed the colloquial fears of club officials who anxiously waited to see what the day's weather might bring on the morning of their matches.[94]

The dependency of clubs on favourable weather was aptly surmised by Gerard Whelan, chairman of the Waterford club, who in late 1937 emphasised the fact that 'a dirty day is a serious thing' for the finances of an association football club.[95] There is no doubt that the reluctance of spectators to patronise the sport in times of wet or cold conditions was among the foremost grievances expressed by club representatives at all levels of the game. Association football enthusiasts could hardly be held accountable for their non-attendance at football grounds however. During an era in which weather-related disease

[92] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, July 1932 – Oct. 1936, fourteenth annual report of the junior committee of the FAIFS, 1935-36 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/27); *Irish Press*, 11 Aug. 1933; *Connacht Tribune*, 22 Jan. 1938.
[93] Interview with Robert Goggins of Tallaght, County Dublin (1 Mar. 2013).
[94] *Munster Express*, 17 Dec. 1937.
[95] Ibid.

was rife within urban settings it is unsurprising that individuals were disinclined to wilfully expose themselves to the elements, and the potential onset of illness, for the sake of watching what many considered to be a poor standard of football. Most grounds offered little in the way of protection from the rain, and without the resources to improve facilities there was essentially nothing that club managements could do to address existing trends short of scheduling the entire football season during the summer months, as Dundalk representatives had tentatively proposed in the wake of dwindling attendances.[96]

Something that club managements could affect was the cost of entry to matches involving their teams however, and during the summer of 1937 the Free State League passed an edict that doubled the price of admission to senior fixtures for the forthcoming season. The restructuring of what had been a long-established pricing policy was certainly a controversial development as the minimum cost of attending a game for an adult was now set at one shilling. For most observers it was clear that the increase would effectively price the more underprivileged supporters out of participation in the sport. At a time when unemployment figures in the Free State had risen to almost 150,000 amid an extensive ongoing industrial strike in the state's construction industry the position adopted by the clubs was certainly an insensitive stance that portrayed a blatant indifference to the economic circumstances experienced by many members of the wider community.[97] Despite unpersuasive claims to the contrary the Free State League's member clubs had acted in complete self-interest with the sole motivation of achieving immediate monetary gain. The decision to double the price of admission to senior matches had been taken in the knowledge that the actual crowds that were expected to attend games would inevitably be reduced even further, although it was anticipated that more profit would ultimately be attained from the patronage of those that continued to attend at the higher cost of entry.[98] This was clearly a bold move as there was no way of predicting just how far attendances would decrease, but as the previous price structure had since proven inadequate in supporting clubs that continued to accumulate financial deficits it was obviously felt that doubling the price of admission was a risk that was worth taking.

[96] *Irish Independent*, 17 Feb. 1937.
[97] Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland*, p. 91; Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 373.
[98] *Irish Press*, 7 June 1937.

The general sentiment that emerged within the public domain on the introduction of the price restructuring was one of complete outrage, with many observers feeling that club policy amounted to an unashamed betrayal of the section of society that had historically been responsible for the sustenance of the sport. Commentators openly questioned what they described as an uncharitable approach by clubs who were apparently unconcerned with the constant state of poverty that their support-base wrangled with. This sentiment was aptly surmised by one contributor to Cork publication, *the Southern Star*, who captured the sense of popular indignation in lamenting the increased admission charge as 'altogether unreasonable in these harsh times'.[99] The displeasure of ordinary supporters was evident in organised protests that took place outside of football grounds in Dublin during the autumn of 1937 while games were proceeding inside, although the clubs remained unified in the face of mounting criticism, and stubbornly refused to bend to public pressure to reinstate the previous price structure.[100] Even deputations that had contacted individual clubs on behalf of the capital's unemployed association football enthusiasts were refused concessions for those without regular income.[101] The harsh reality was that the traditional working-class support for association football clubs had proven insufficient to sustain them within the professional structure that had been created, and as such the patronage of those that could not contribute significantly to club finances was now being dispensed of.

While many association football enthusiasts could not afford to regularly pay a full shilling to watch matches, other spectators were of the opinion that the cost of admission to senior games no longer represented value for money, and it was soon apparent that the clubs had completely alienated a large percentage of their paying public. Within weeks of its introduction it was widely recognised that the price restructuring had been a monumental miscalculation, as the crowds that remained loyal to clubs declined to the extent that idle staff who were employed to collect money from spectators upon entry to the grounds were being made redundant.[102] Despite the increased cost of admission to the grounds the revenue attained from gate receipts had retracted significantly. In Dublin, where senior matches took place with more regularity than in provincial centres, it was clear that current trends were untenable for clubs

[99] *Southern Star*, 21 Aug. 1937.
[100] Goggins, *Chronological history of Shamrock Rovers FC*, p. 57.
[101] *Sunday Independent*, 22 Aug. 1937.
[102] *Irish Independent*, 20 Oct. 1937.

whose immediate survival was increasingly uncertain. Representatives of the Free State League's Dublin members implored the administration to reintroduce the original price structure before the damage that was being inflicted upon the finances of their clubs became irreversible. The league was reluctant to acquiesce to the increasingly vociferous demands, however, as it pointed to the fact that the previous policy had been inadequate in sustaining its provincial members. With discontent escalating within the management committees of Dublin clubs a suitable compromise was finally agreed in November 1937. While provincial clubs would retain the minimum one shilling admission charge to senior fixtures, clubs from the capital would reintroduce the original price structure in an attempt to reengage with association football enthusiasts that had been estranged by the rising cost of entry.[103] This appears to have been a satisfactory outcome when it is considered that senior games usually took place in provincial centres only on a fortnightly basis. While Dublin clubs had been placated, their provincial counterparts were optimistic that the new pricing structure could ease their financial difficulties and go some way to addressing the disparities that continued to exist between the income of clubs from the capital and those from the countryside.

For such an outcome to occur the provincial clubs recognised the need to produce a team that was capable of entertaining the public. As had been the case throughout the 1930s management committees sought to achieve this by recruiting 'outsider' players that could both increase the standard of the team and heighten the popular appeal of the club. 'Outsider' recruitment policies remained fraught with peril however, being particularly dangerous to provincial clubs whose gate receipts fluctuated unpredictably. In the opinion of one contributor to the *Irish Press* clubs were effectively placing 'a halter around their own necks' by recklessly paying high wages to cross-channel and northern professionals.[104] Club officials were in an unenviable position. If they reduced, or even halted, the importation of foreign talent the club risked falling behind its counterparts and losing the patronage of its supporters, and it is clear that any effort to lessen the dependency on 'outsider' players would have to be addressed collectively with the agreement of all senior clubs. 'Outsider' recruitment was undoubtedly a concept that consisted of both benefits and drawbacks. Although there is no doubt that individuals such as Jimmy Turnbull and William 'Dixie' Dean', who were responsible

[103] *Irish Press*, 5 Nov. 1937.
[104] Ibid., 4 Nov. 1937.

for significantly increasingly the popular appeal of association football in Cork and Sligo respectively during the 1930s, made telling contributions to the sport, the contributions made by the majority of 'outsider' players were somewhat less substantial. With that in mind it is difficult to argue that their participation outweighed the ensuing financial damage that was caused to the sport.[105]

For most clubs the continued incorporation of 'outsider' players accentuated the long-standing financial difficulties they had experienced, and by the latter years of the decade the strain that was being placed on provincial clubs was more pronounced than ever. Despite achieving success at national level in 1937 the Waterford and Sligo Rovers clubs were said to have been 'on crutches' by the following year,[106] while in February 1938 the Cork club was forced into liquidation with debts of over £2,000 after a period in which gate receipts attained at senior fixtures in the city had declined astronomically.[107] Without the resources to fund the travel of its team the club had effectively ceased to function,[108] and although accusations implicating club officials in extracting money from the club for their own purposes emerged in the wake of its liquidation, there is no evidence to suggest that any underhanded processes had been responsible for the club's demise.[109] Contemporary sources do reveal a level of mismanagement that shocked FAI representatives who had been commissioned to establish how a club with such a broad support base in a city with a fervent association football culture had succumbed in such a fashion. Enquiries established that no annual meeting of its members had taken place during the three years prior to the liquidation, and it appears as though the club had effectively been left to decay without any serious attempt at intervention.[110]

As the monetary difficulties encountered by senior provincial clubs persisted into 1939 Myles Murphy, speaking in the *Irish Independent* in February of that year, lamented that 'the game was in danger of dying in parts of the country through lack of finance', although subsequent reports do provide conflicting representations of the sport's

[105] Nigel O'Mahony (ed.), *Century of Cork soccer memories*, magazine produced by *Cork Evening Echo*, (Cork, 1995), p. 30; *Leitrim Observer*, 4 Feb. 1939.
[106] *Irish Independent*, 13 June 1938.
[107] An Garda Síochána: claim against Cork Football Club in respect of services, 1935 - 1938 (National Archives of Ireland, 90/5/44).
[108] Plunket Carter, 'Troubled periods in Cork soccer history'.
[109] Interview with Plunket Carter of Cork, County Cork (14 June 2013).
[110] *Irish Independent*, 9 Feb. 1938.

condition.[111] By the end of the inter-war period the narrative surrounding association football was once again engendered by an optimism that appeared to belie the difficulties that continued to characterise its position within the Irish sporting landscape. While much of the discussion portraying association football as a vibrant and prosperous sport at the end of the inter-war period can be placed in the category of exaggeration or propaganda, there were encouraging signs that can be interpreted as legitimate indicators of rejuvenation. It appears that the position of senior clubs in the capital had stabilised somewhat since the aborted price restructuring of 1937, with one publication even insinuating that the capital's senior clubs were all turning financial profits by the end of the decade.[112] Although correspondence between members of the Guinness Athletic Union, which oversaw the operations of the St James's Gate club during the late 1930s, suggests that such testimonies had been embellished, attendances at senior games were certainly increasing in the capital, and it appears that the public were gradually reengaging with the sport.[113]

As it had at the beginning of the decade, statistical interpretations portrayed the position of association football in an artificial state of vitality by the end of the inter-war period. Once again figures pertaining to the number of clubs that were affiliating to the FAI were espoused to provide evidence that the sport had overcome the struggles it had encountered during the 1930s. While reports of the sport's expansion and the increasing numbers of clubs affiliating to the FAI were certainly worthy of favourable appraisal, the fact remained that despite the efforts of the FAI the issues that had led to financial crisis and stagnation within the sport had not been fully addressed or resolved.[114] It is true that successful international tours towards the end of the decade had enhanced the financial position of the FAI, while impressive victories for international and representative teams over Northern Irish, Scottish and continental opponents had lifted spirits and added to the renewed sense of buoyancy that surrounded the sport.[115] While such successes were certainly welcome boosts for the sport, individuals within the association football administration could be under no illusion that further tests were certainly yet to be encountered and overcome.

[111] Ibid., 5 Jan. 1939.
[112] *Irish Press*, 9 May 1939.
[113] Guinness Athletic Union director's files, J.F. Crawford to the Managing Director, 10 Jan. 1939 (Guinness Storehouse, Guinness Archive, GDB/CO04.06/00500.03).
[114] Minute book of the junior committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1936 – Mar. 1940, seventeenth annual report of the junior committee of the FAI, 1938-39 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/28).
[115] Byrne, *Green is the colour*, p. 164.

Conclusion

Although great progression had undoubtedly occurred during the inter-war period, the status and standing of association football within the Irish sporting landscape at the end of the 1930s remained uncertain. While members of the association football administration and representatives of the senior clubs under its auspices fervently propagated the role of external socio-economic forces in causing the financial crisis that enveloped the game during the 1930s, their own complicity in the near collapse of a sporting movement that had developed and expanded to unprecedented levels during the course of the previous decade was somewhat overlooked. What had appeared to have been strong and progressive governance by the FAIFS in a developing hierarchical state-wide structure was exposed for its limitations, as it became glaringly apparent that the influence of the association in regulating its members was extremely minimal. At senior level clubs found themselves in a bind. Management committees realised that they needed the attraction of 'outsider' players to draw crowds to their games, while the reality was that they were wholly unable to afford these cross-channel recruits. The fear of losing ground to rival clubs within such a competitive sporting system led club officials to place their own interests before collective action that was in the best interests of the senior game, and as such the entire structure suffered as a result. Clubs, which in some cases were being bankrolled by the FAIFS, embarked on spending policies that were wholly unrepresentative of their financial capabilities. They aspired to a model of sporting professionalism that neither the finances within association football nor the population of the state's urban centres could support. With increasing numbers of 'outsider' players entering the Free State League from the early 1930s clubs were essentially forced to overextend themselves to keep pace with their counterparts, as failure to provide a competitive team would result in abandonment by an increasingly selective and unpredictable support-base, who, hardened by their deteriorating socio-economic environs, demanded entertainment in return for their meagre amounts of disposable income.

Although there was no doubt that clubs were existing well beyond their means in accumulating expensively assembled playing squads, the scale of the overspending did not surface until the FAIFS itself began to encounter financial difficulties. The association had casually provided substantial loans to clubs within its jurisdiction without any means of gaining recompense, and by the time its officials had come to

their senses the damage was irreversible. The FAIFS' belated realisation coincided with the introduction of an entertainment tax which was set to further add to the scarcity of resources within association football, although the tendency of all parties involved in the sport to cite the levy as the primary reason for the emergence of the financial crisis can be considered a fallacy. The failure of any immediate recovery to materialise within the sport after the remittance of the entertainment tax is testament to this assertion, and as the decade progressed forlorn hopes of a return to the relative prosperity of the late 1920s were dashed as association football lingered in the economic doldrums. To its credit the FAIFS did achieve a limited amount of success in reversing the stagnation of the sport at regional level by regularly staging attractive and important fixtures in provincial centres from the mid 1930s, and by the end of the decade it was justifiably encouraged by the rising number of clubs that were affiliating to its disordered organisational structure.

The manner in which statistical analysis was both deliberately and unwittingly used to misrepresent the true position of association football within the Irish sporting landscape has been discussed throughout this chapter. In many ways encouraging references to growth and expansion that emanated from FAIFS officials into the national media deflected attention from important issues that were stunting the development of the sport in provincial areas. The lack of suitable playing areas in cities and towns throughout the state, together with the inability of clubs to fund the travel of their teams in regional competitions, stand as the primary constraints on the further expansion and development that had been predicted at the beginning of the decade. Although the popularity of the sport fluctuated in different parts of the country, and was stronger in certain areas than in others, it is suffice to say that for much of the decade association football was in a perilous position throughout the territory governed by the FAIFS, and that the movement survived the stagnation of the 1930s is testament to the association football cultures that had been previously imbedded in the sporting consciousness across the country. By the end of the 1930s observers such as Socaro, the *Irish Press*'s association football correspondent, were hailing the most successful period in the history of association football since the formation of the FAI, which at first glance appears an unlikely claim considering the manner in which the sport lumbered through the previous decade.[116] Although such assertions tend to overstate a recovery that was

[116] *Irish Press*, 9 May 1939.

in its initial phase, the imminent conclusion of a decade that had tested the foundations of the association football structure obviously provided cause for celebration in itself.

Chapter 6: Irish sporting culture: Association football and Gaelic games

Introduction

The complexities surrounding the characterisation of the FAIFS as a nationalistic body that was representative of the newly autonomous Irish state have been discussed in a previous chapter, and despite the fact that members of the association undoubtedly revelled in the self-apportioned role of sporting ambassadors during the inter-war period, their legitimacy in making such assertions was certainly disputed. In the view of significant sections of Irish society the true sporting representative of the state was the GAA, an organisation which had become a prominent and influential cultural force within Irish society by the time that the Irish Free State came into existence in 1922. Historians such as Paul Rouse and William Murphy describe how in some respects the standing that the GAA acquired by the inter-war period was achieved as a result of a created historical perception of the association as a direct contributor to the fight for independence, and the imagined sacrifice that it had made in the face of British suppression. Although the relationship that developed in the public domain between the GAA and militant republicanism was overstated after independence, there is no doubt that the activities and organisational processes of the association were significantly obstructed during the Anglo-Irish War, and that its general membership became more politically inclined in their outlooks.[1] The GAA was certainly subjected to a degree of victimisation and persecution by suspicious crown forces, culminating in the aforementioned tragic events of 'Bloody Sunday' in November 1920 when thirteen people were murdered by the British army at a football match in Dublin. In the aftermath of 'Bloody Sunday' the intrinsic relationship between the GAA and the nationalist cause was cemented in the popular perception. As a result the GAA would come to occupy a position of centrality within the new state, and this would significantly limit the ability of association football to itself acquire a comparative status within Irish society.

The manner in which association football expanded within the Irish Free State during the inter-war period has been examined throughout this thesis, and despite the scale of

[1] Richard McElligott, '1916 and the radicalization of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)', in *Éire-Ireland*, 48, nos. 1& 2 (Spring/Summer 2013), pp 95-111.

its dissemination it is evident that the growing strength of the GAA, and an ingrained reverence of Gaelic games, was among the primary obstructions to a more extensive development in many regions. The GAA and its followers enthusiastically propagated the distinction between what were considered to be native or indigenous games, namely those that were considered to have their origins in Ireland, and foreign games, which had their roots in Britain, throughout the period under review. Association football certainly fell into the latter category, and as such the sport had been attacked in cultural terms by proponents of Gaelic games throughout the early twentieth century, which is described by Dónal McAnallen in the context of arguments pertaining to professionalism and amateurism in Irish sport.[2] Attempts to portray the association code as a hedonistic and immoral athletic and recreational pursuit were commonplace, while the GAA's continued exclusionary policy provided the mechanism for a prolonged ideological attack on those involved in the sport at both national and regional level. The GAA was effective in spreading its philosophy from the hierarchy of the association down the societal structure, and its success in doing so would see association football struggle to attain cultural legitimacy in many areas of the country during the period. In this regard the coexistence of the GAA and association football was fraught with considerable difficulty, and as the inter-war period progressed there would be little indication of any thawing of what was a hostile relationship. In the outlook of many GAA advocates association football was simply incompatible with the concept of a pious and Gaelicised independent Irish state that was to the forefront of political and social thought during the push for autonomy and into the Free State era. In addition, the denunciation of association football was also driven by further motivations that were less concerned with the ideological characterisation of Irish sport than with self-preservation, and more with safeguarding Gaelic games against the growing infiltration of perceived foreign games.

The rise of the GAA

Despite the fact that association football had been present in Ireland before any centrally codified manifestations of Gaelic games, the sport came to signify a residual connection to the British occupation in the post-independence era, and the GAA was certainly

[2] Dónal McAnallen, 'The greatest amateur association in the world?: The GAA and amateurism', in Mike Cronin, William Murphy, Paul Rouse (eds.) *the Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884 – 2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 157-81.

complicit in portraying such a representation. As described in the introduction to this thesis, the GAA was founded in 1884 as a direct reaction to the prevailing sentiment that indigenous games had fallen into an alarming state of disrepair. Although the new Gaelic organisation was theoretically formed as an inclusive and apolitical organisation it immediately drew a distinction between games that were considered national and foreign.[3] The GAA's founding members were clearly disposed to the principles and teachings of the developing scholarly movement of the nineteenth century that identified with, and propagated the ideal of, a purified Gaelic culture that had existed in an era before the perceived contamination of Irish society by British influences. They were also undoubtedly sympathetic to organisations such as the Gaelic League and the Land League, which were encouraging a regeneration of the Irish language and championing the rights of tenants in land disputes. Likewise, there was also strong support for the intensified political movement which advocated Home Rule. The GAA swiftly aligned itself with the aforementioned strands of indigenous activism through its selection of inaugural patrons. In this sense the overtures that were made to Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, Michael Davitt, leader of the Land League, and Archbishop Thomas Croke, among the most senior of the country's Catholic clergy, went a long way to establishing the association as a sporting representation of an imagined independent Catholic state, which was based on the idyll of a devout and virtuous rural life.[4] The GAA had presented itself as the sporting embodiment of this vision, and this portrayal extended to the representation that emerged of the association as a culturally distinct body that drew a clear demarcation between indigenous and foreign games. Nationalist Ireland now invariably possessed an athletic movement that was endowed with an acceptable ideological persona, and this immediate distinction between indigenous games and those of the conqueror would have a lasting impact on Irish sport for generations to come.

Many of the social forces that facilitated the initial development of association football in Ireland were also important in the early progression of codified Gaelic sports. An increasingly mobile rural population that benefitted from improvements to infrastructural, transportation and communications networks immediately became involved in, and identified with, the GAA and its games. The association's policy to

[3] Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan & Paul Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history* (Cork, 2009), p. 142.
[4] Mike Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, soccer and Irish identity since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), p. 77.

allow just one GAA club per parish, initiated in 1887, was also particularly important in its early development. It was instrumental in establishing a community identification with the local club, which became the sporting embodiment of rural communities throughout the country.[5] The GAA club provided a tangible representation of the parish unit and the vehicle to pursue athletic competition with, and establish social distinction from, neighbouring areas. It was certainly more demographically inclusive than association football in serving as a community functionary that offered more than just direct involvement in sporting contests. Dances, céilidhe, and other regularly organised social events attracted community members of varying ages and gender to the GAA, while the fact that Gaelic games were organised on Sundays was also vital to their initial progression in many areas.[6] As discussed in a previous chapter, the stance of the IFA in opposing Sunday play made participation in GAA activities more practical than association football for the country's rural workforce. In this regard Sunday play was undoubtedly a distinguishing feature of Gaelic games, setting them apart from Saturday sports which often held connection with Protestantism, unionism and the crown in nationalist discourse.

The GAA ban rules and participation in 'foreign' games

The GAA had also been established for the purpose of providing a Gaelic alternative to British-influenced athletic structures that were strongest around Dublin. In its attempts to do so an exclusionary ban on those who engaged in competition under the auspices of rival athletic bodies, namely the newly-formed Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA), was introduced in 1885, just a year after the formation of the association.[7] The ban, which by the inter-war period had become a fundamental element of the GAA's identity, initially served as a protectionist measure designed to create a loyalty among GAA members that was in deference of the organisation's competitors, and was not necessarily intended to act as an expressed indictment of other sports.[8] Its primary purpose was merely to afford the Gaelic athletic model the time and space to develop in its own right within a highly competitive sporting environment. A second, more

[5] Cronin, Duncan & Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 211.
[6] Ibid., p. 215.
[7] Paul Rouse, 'The politics of culture and sport in Ireland: a history of the GAA ban on foreign games 1884-1971. Part one: 1884-1921', in *The international journal of the history of sport*, 10, no. 3 (December 1993), pp 333-60.
[8] Cormac Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde: the removal of Ireland's first president as GAA patron* (Cork, 2012), p. 18.

politically-motivated, ban was introduced two years later however, which expressly excluded members of the RIC from participation within the association.[9] Despite the fact that the ban rule can be understood as a sporting characterisation of an increasingly potent nationalist movement, it did set a precedent that would be built upon and adapted in later years to prohibit those that the GAA deemed culturally unfit from participating in its games. Although the initial bans were swiftly revoked in an attempt to address the dwindling popularity of Gaelic games during the mid 1890s, their introduction was highly significant as they had made exclusion on political and cultural grounds acceptable.[10]

The decline of Gaelic games during the late nineteenth century was rooted in both the growing IRB influence within the GAA's central council during the late 1880s and the Parnell Split of 1890.[11] As a result of the direction that the GAA was taking the powerful Catholic Church effectively withdrew its patronage of the association, leading to a sharp decline in the number of people involved in its games throughout the country.[12] The weakness of Gaelic games during this period allowed association football to become embedded in certain regions, although by the turn of the twentieth century the GAA's position had once again strengthened. By now the GAA had effectively disassociated itself from overt political influences. Athletics had also been overhauled as the association's primary sport by the field games of hurling and Gaelic football, which placed the organisation in a more directly competitive position with association football.[13] This led to the reintroduction of the association's ban rule in 1901, which excluded individuals who participated in association football, and other games that were considered foreign in origin from the GAA.[14] On this occasion the ban was certainly more politically-motivated than previous policy, and was introduced as an ode to the forceful and energetic nationalist movement of the early twentieth century. Despite this, the exclusionary policy continued to serve as a protectionist measure which was intended to safeguard the future of the GAA by discouraging members from involvement in rival sporting codes.[15] In classifying these sports as 'foreign' or

[9] Rouse, 'The politics of culture and sport in Ireland', p. 342.
[10] Cronin, Duncan & Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 145.
[11] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 23
[12] John Sugden & Alan Bairner, *Sport, sectarianism and society in a divided Ireland* (London, 1993), p. 31.
[13] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 31.
[14] Ibid., p. 34.
[15] Ibid., p. 45.

'British' the GAA was evoking a cultural demarcation between its games and those increasingly portrayed as agents of imperialism, while the public manner in which transgressors were castigated as unpatriotic for non-adherence was designed to create a shame culture that would ultimately deter individuals from involvement in foreign games.[16]

The policy of the GAA was perhaps more successful in rural parts of the country, where smaller communities were particularly receptive of its philosophy. As discussed in previous chapters, during the pre-independence era association football outside of Dublin essentially remained confined to towns that maintained a significant military presence, as well as maritime regions with links to the British mainland. In larger urban areas, the cultural stigma attached to participation in certain sports was less discernible, and the inhabitants of the country's most populous centres generally partook in their sport of choice, quite often association football, without consequent condemnation. This was in spite of the derision aimed at association football from those that claimed to profess nationalist outlooks toward Irish sport. Association football had been consistently criticised by followers of Gaelic games from the late nineteenth century. Whether it was within the context of wholesome amateur games versus the immorality of professional sports, as described by Dónal McAnallen,[17] or in arguments that propagated the virtues of masculine Gaelic games over those of the effeminate association code, as commented upon by David Toms, association football was widely disparaged within Irish sporting culture.[18] Toms describes how this criticism intensified in the wake of independence, as GAA enthusiasts attempted to guard against any complacency that would allow association football to gain a foothold and to become more accepted within the sporting circles that had previously admonished it.

Clearly politically-motivated representations of what were considered indigenous and foreign games were also to the fore in attacks aimed at association football, although ideological perceptions of what constituted 'Irishness' within sport were primarily a concern of those involved in the administrative and organisational structure of the GAA. Although the demarcation between indigenous and foreign games certainly influenced

[16] Rouse, 'The politics of culture and sport in Ireland', p. 341.
[17] McAnallen, 'The greatest amateur association in the world?, pp 157-81..
[18] David Toms, 'Not withstanding the discomfort involved': Fordson's cup win in 1926 and how 'the old contemptible' were represented in Ireland's public sphere during the 1920s', in *Sport in history*, 33, no. 4, 2012, available on eprint.

large numbers of Irish sporting enthusiasts, many others appear to have been generally unconcerned with any political significance attached to association with one form of sport or another. Despite this, there was an acceptance of a cultural distinction, which became more obvious and pronounced during the early twentieth century as political tensions heightened and the push for autonomy from Britain began to gather pace.[19] Although it is impossible to measure numbers, at some level it became less acceptable for certain individuals to be associated with association football, and other foreign games, in parts of the country, and, as stated in the opening chapter, this was a contributing factor to declining participation in the sport during 1917 and 1918.[20] Despite the fact that association football had since become a favourite cultural practice of sections of the indigenous population, a perception of the sport as a British game that was ideologically antagonistic to the furtherance of Gaelic culture was in the process of being reinforced within the popular consciousness. The position of Irish sport was complicated in the years immediately after the Great War however, and with the GAA itself in disarray as a result of the large-scale obstruction of its organisational ability during the Anglo-Irish War, the status of both codes within the Irish sporting landscape was quite uncertain at the foundation of the Free State.

Sport and the Irish revolution

As previously discussed, the publicity generated by the split between the IFA and the LFA in 1921 proved conducive to the development of association football. By the time that the Irish Free State came into existence, the number of clubs affiliating to the new Football Association of Ireland was on the rise, as was the number of people that were becoming involved in the sport in various regions throughout the country. The position of the GAA was somewhat less prosperous in the immediate aftermath of independence however, and it appears as though association football was benefitting from a period of instability and uncertainty within the Gaelic body. Attempts that were being made to stabilise the GAA after the political upheaval of the Anglo-Irish War were stunted by the internal divisions of Civil War allegiance, and the inefficient and ad hoc fashion in which Gaelic games were organised during the early 1920s did little to alleviate the

[19] Rouse, 'The politics of culture and sport in Ireland', p. 335.
[20] Nigel O'Mahony (ed.), *Century of Cork soccer memories*, magazine produced by *Cork Evening Echo* (Cork, 1995), p. 7.

difficulties pertaining to the functionality of the association.[21] The prevailing tension within Civil War society was also evident in the growing number of disputes and public order concerns at GAA matches. Such incidents were apparently serious enough to dissuade supporters from attending Gaelic grounds, while internal administrative quarrelling at local level severely disrupted the activities of the association.[22] Contemporary media commentators, such as Erin's Hope, writing in the *Irish Independent* in February 1923, were under no illusion that the progression of association football was directly related to the problems encountered within the GAA during the early 1920s,[23] although it clear from conflicting reports that Gaelic games were by now in a process of revival.[24] As it transpired the position of the GAA would strengthen significantly within the new state, and the end of the hostilities in 1923 would signal the beginning of an unprecedented period of prosperity for the organisation, which was now permitted to operate without impediment in a climate that was wholly favourable to the development of Gaelic games.

The nature of the relationship that was cultivated between the GAA and the state led to the association's elevation to a position of centrality within Irish society. Large swaths of the membership of the state's emergent political parties were sympathetic to the ideals of the GAA, while some, such as Harry Boland, Dan McCarthy, Eoin O'Duffy, Austin Stack and J.J. Walsh, were members of the organisation, and as such it is unsurprising that the GAA immediately became so intrinsic to the cultural representation of independent Ireland.[25] The alignment of the GAA with nationalist politics had been so enshrined in the popular consciousness that suggestions hinting that an indigenous Irish government would be likely to proscribe association football in its facilitation of Gaelic games within the new state had been taken extremely seriously by the media in Dublin during 1921.[26] Although no direct governmental attack on perceived foreign games would be forthcoming, the interconnectedness of the GAA and the state was undoubted, and as previously discussed, the ideology of the GAA, and the values that it defended so forcefully, were highly compatible with the ideal of a post-

[21] *Irish Independent*, 13 Feb. 1923.
[22] Ibid., 26 Mar. 1926.
[23] Ibid., 13 Feb. 1923.
[24] *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Aug. 1921; *Meath Chronicle*, 4 Sept. 1921.
[25] William Murphy, 'the GAA during the Irish revolution, 1913-23', in Mike Cronin, William Murphy, Paul Rouse (eds.) *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), p. 64.
[26] *Sport*, 17 Dec. 1921.

independence Gaelic utopia espoused by leading politicians.[27] In this regard it became convenient to emphasise the involvement of the association in the actual events surrounding the push for autonomy and to create a sporting nationalism surrounding Gaelic games.

Although the national character of the GAA and its games was unquestionable from the moment of its formation, its direct involvement in republican militancy had amounted to little more than providing a focal point and a cover for combative operations. That said, the administrative hierarchy of the GAA had certainly become more politically-minded in its outlook during the early twentieth century in supporting the republican movement.[28] It had encouraged its members to join the newly-formed Irish Volunteers in 1913, while it is estimated that as many as 350 members were involved in the Easter Rising of 1916, despite the association's resolve to remain disassociated from militant activity throughout the campaign.[29] The eagerness of the GAA to remain outwardly unconnected to republican militancy was certainly a prudent course in maintaining its functionality at a time when hostile organisations were being outlawed by the authorities, although the events of 'Bloody Sunday' in November 1920 highlight the fact that British forces had indeed come to inextricably connect the GAA and the combative branch of the republican movement with tragic consequences.[30]

Perversely, 'Bloody Sunday' served to secure the position of the GAA in nationalist folklore and enshrine its position as an immovable national institution. The association had become a victim of British rule and was now portrayed as an organisation that had openly sought to oppose and resist the imperial regime.[31] The fact that the GAA's games and activities had been severely disrupted during the Anglo-Irish War is uncontested, although, as was the case with many areas of Irish society after independence, certain aspects of the historical memory that were incompatible with the contemporary psyche were either altered or expunged. The representation of the GAA that emerged during the 1920s was that of a sporting body that had effectively

[27] The limits of liberty, RTE documentary presented by Prof. Diarmaid Ferriter (3 Nov. 2011).
[28] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 32.
[29] Cronin, Duncan & Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 151; Minute book of the central council of the GAA, 1911-25, special meeting of the central council, 28 May 1916 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/01/02, pp 373-74).
[30] McElligott, '1916 and the Radicalization of the Gaelic Athletic Association', p. 108.
[31] R.V. Comerford, *Ireland: inventing the nation* (London, 2003), p. 224.

abandoned its footballs and hurling sticks in favour of armed rebellion.[32] In this regard, there was no public recollection of the correlation between membership of the GAA and recruitment to the British army in 1914 and 1915, which had been extensive enough to threaten the survival of numerous clubs throughout the country.[33] Likewise, the association's two most striking acts of defiance; its refusal to pay the entertainment tax on its introduction in 1916, and the organisation of the country-wide 'Gaelic Sunday' protest against the restrictions placed on public gatherings in August 1918; were emphasised as ideological and nationalistic acts of dissention to a greater extent than the spirited displays of self-preservation that they had also amounted to.[34]

The rival codes and the new state

This romanticised portrayal of the GAA and its contribution to the push for autonomy was fundamental to the position of centrality that the association commanded within the new state. The organisation was immediately privy to benefaction and patronage from the political and administrative structure, and its games were exclusively incorporated within emergent state bodies, including the Free State Army and An Garda Síochána.[35] The GAA's position within the official state structure had also been enhanced by its policy of non-opposition to the treaty in the prelude to the Irish Civil War. The revered status of the association, and its representation as a national and culturally devout organisation, was detrimental to the nationalistic aspirations of the FAIFS during the formative years of the new state.[36] The difficulties that the association football administration encountered in establishing itself as a cultural representative of the Free State have been discussed in a previous chapter. There is no doubt that its stunted attempts to do so were directly determined by the central position already occupied by the GAA and the public perception of the organisation as the most legitimate national sporting body.

The comfortable relationship between the state and the GAA was also in evidence in the organisation of the inaugural modern Tailteann Games, a sporting and cultural festival designed to showcase the new state on the international stage. The festival was held in August 1924 and it amounted to an alternative Gaelic Olympiad. A multitude of sports,

[32] Murphy, 'the GAA during the Irish revolution, 1913-23, p. 76.
[33] Ibid., p. 67.
[34] Ibid., p. 72.
[35] *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Apr. 1923; 11 Dec. 1923.
[36] Murphy, 'the GAA during the Irish revolution, 1913-23', p.76.

both indigenous and foreign, were included in the programme, although there was to be no place for association football, despite the growing popularity of the game in the Free State during the early 1920s. The GAA was heavily involved in the organisation of the festival, at times even dictating what games were to be included, while Croke Park served as the focal point of athletic proceedings.[37] The concept of state-building through sport has been discussed in chapter three in relation to Free State participation at the 1924 Olympic Games, and Mike Cronin describes how the Tailteann Games also served as a government endorsed exercise in state-building through sport by showcasing the Irish Free State on the international stage. As the parochial character of Gaelic games excluded the GAA from Olympic participation it is unsurprising that the association was inextricably to the fore in term of the Tailteann Games. The association remained willing participants in the organisation of the games yet again in 1928 and 1932, although by the early 1930s it had become clear that the popular appetite for a static and recurrent festival had dissipated, while the unwillingness of the new Fianna Fáil government to support an event that held connection to its predecessor finally heralded its demise.[38]

Tension between the GAA and the state did emerge during the mid 1920s however, when questions pertaining to the privileged position that was enjoyed by the association in regard of contributing taxation began to surface from within the political structure. As previously stated the GAA had refused to pay entertainment tax to the British authorities and had adopted an identical policy after independence,[39] while it had also failed to contribute income tax since the formation of the Free State.[40] The association reasoned that it had made a stance against British legislative rule through its non-payment of the entertainment tax and should thus be relieved of any obligation to pay it to an Irish government.[41] GAA members also argued that the sacrifices that the association had made during the push for autonomy, together with the ability of other

[37] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 52.
[38] Mike Cronin, 'Projecting the nation through sport and culture: Ireland, Aonach Tailteann and the Irish Free State', in *Journal of contemporary history*, 38, no. 3 (July 2003), p. 402, available from http://www.jstor.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/sici?origin=sfx%3Asfx&sici=0022-0094(2003)38%3A3%3C395%3E1.0.CO%3B2-v [10 March 2011].
[39] Minute book of the central council of the GAA, 1911- 1925, minutes of the annual congress, 8 Apr. 1917 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/01/02, pp 401-2).
[40] Marcus de Burca, *The GAA: A history of the Gaelic Athletic Association* (Dublin, 1980), p. 167.
[41] Deputy S. MacEntee, 'Finance Bill, 1930 – Committee Stage', Dáil Éireann, vol. 35, no. 5, 5 June 1930, available at http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1930/06/05/00015.asp [21 Aug. 2013].

national sporting bodies to financially benefit from international competition, was justification in itself for the preferential treatment it received.[42]

Despite reservations the Cumann na nGaedhael government was not prepared to forcefully oblige the association to contribute taxation to the state. The standing that the GAA had acquired within Irish society would surely have cast any government that attempted to challenge its privileged position in the role of aggressor, and would have attracted undesirable publicity at a time when the association was playing a prominent part in reconciling the opposing Civil War factions within the state structure. In the absence of any appetite to challenge the association on the issue, the government was forced to legalise the arrangement. To this end the rudimentary measure of exempting the GAA from the payment of entertainment tax was introduced in the Finance Bill of 1925. What was perhaps of greater significance however, was the relief that was extended to the FAIFS and other sporting bodies operating within the state, who were also freed from the burden of entertainment tax.[43] The GAA had not countenanced such an erosion of its hegemony and its membership was clearly perturbed by the dispensations provided to foreign games. GAA supporters in the Dáil made their displeasure known, although the Minster for Finance, Ernest Blythe, laid the blame for his decision squarely at the feet of the GAA in stating that the position of non-payment that the association had adopted in regard of taxation had forced him to afford similar concessions to the state's other sporting organisations.[44]

By 1927 the relationship between the GAA and the government appears to have been less strained, and once again the association was provided with a position of privilege by Cumann na nGaedhael. The organisation was relieved of its duty to pay income tax, except on its property. On this occasion the significance of the concession cannot be understated, as, for the first time, a legislative distinction between indigenous and foreign games was made which insinuated that certain forms of sporting pursuit were nationally preferential to others.[45] The actual ideological implications of the special consideration provided to the GAA were perhaps not to the forefront in the motivations of the individuals that sanctioned the concession, who were merely concerned with once

[42] Ibid.
[43] *Irish Independent*, 25 May 1925.
[44] Deputy E. Blythe, 'Financial Resolutions - Report - Resolution No. 13', Dáil Éireann, vol. 11, no. 10, 7 May 1925, available at http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1925/05/07/00027.asp [21 Aug. 2013].
[45] Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2005), p. 35.

again legalising an implicit arrangement between state and association. Despite this, the elevation of one sporting body above others undoubtedly set a precedent that would lead to controversy during the following decade. In the meantime the GAA had been placated, and it is glaringly obvious that it was more advantageous for the government to be aligned with the association than to be in dispute with such an influential social institution.

The ban becomes an ideological tool

The GAA had determinedly and successfully propagated its right to be considered culturally superior to rival sporting bodies within the state structure throughout the 1920s, while at a social level its exclusionary policy continued to make a similar assertion. In the wake of independence from Britain, many observers had predicted the abolition of the GAA's ban rule.[46] As Rouse describes, there existed a sentiment that the policy was nothing more than 'a relic to the past', and that its retention would portray an undesirable message of cultural and social exclusion which was unnecessary in an autonomous Irish state.[47] This was an outlook that was even subscribed to within some elements of the GAA itself, although this viewpoint was submerged from within when a proposal to have the ban removed at the association's annual congress in 1922 was defeated by a margin of twenty-one votes to twelve. Although the British forces had withdrawn from the country, the GAA felt the need to retain the ban rule as a protection against the encroachment of association football, and other perceived foreign sports. As it transpired there was to be no significant alteration of the collective opinion during subsequent years, as similar motions were again defeated by large majorities at the next two annual congresses.[48] The margin of defeat became even more pronounced in 1925, which some historians attribute to the influence of the returning anti-Treaty faction to the GAA administration.[49] After the dismissal of the proposal a year later, a counter-motion which advocated a three year interval between any propositions on the retention of the ban at congress was passed.[50] This effectively halted further internal discussion on the status of the rule, and allowed the association to turn its focus towards

[46] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 50.
[47] Rouse, 'The politics of sport and culture in Ireland', p. 334.
[48] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 51.
[49] de Burca, *The GAA: A history of the Gaelic Athletic Association*, p. 170.
[50] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 52; Brendan MacLua, *The steadfast rule: a history of the GAA ban* (Dublin, 1967), p. 61.

denouncing the foreign dances that were infiltrating GAA clubhouses throughout the country.[51]

There is no doubt that the character of the ban had evolved between the pre-independence era and the inter-war period. It no longer served as a mere protectionist policy, but also as an ideological tool that was used to champion the primacy of the GAA in nationalistic terms. As one contributor to the *Nenagh Guardian* would so starkly assert in 1929, the ban was considered by many as 'the line of demarcation between Imperialism and Gaelicism', and there was a clear tendency to portray individuals that participated in foreign games as in some way unpatriotic, or of questionable character.[52] The ban developed into a mechanism to exclude and punish those that did not conform to the principles of the GAA, and it was felt that such an aggressive policy was wholly justified at a time when a desire to rid the state of Anglophile cultural influences was a strong component of nationalist philosophy.[53] Although the strategy of the GAA may appear autocratic and repressive from the modern viewpoint, it must be considered within the context of Irish society during the 1920s. There undoubtedly remained huge public antipathy towards not only the British authorities but any remnants of British culture, while a clear and widespread myopic outlook towards areas of society that could be connected with imperialism was also prevalent. This process is expressed by Liam O'Callaghan, in referring to the work of Mike Cronin and John M. Regan, when he states that 'post-revolutionary Ireland championed a narrowly-focussed mono-culture which remained remarkably impervious to sources of pluralism', in an assessment that serves as an adequate evaluation of the manner in which perceived foreign influences were denounced and dismissed within the Gaelic agenda.[54] Likewise, Diarmaid Ferriter describes how the Catholic Church was also complicit in denouncing imported cultural influences, including dances, cinemas, tabloid newspapers, and of course sport, and in light of the considerable authority that the church exerted over the lives of the Free State's population it is hardly surprising that such practices continued to be demonised within wider society.[55]

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[51] Annual reports of the GAA, 1928-45, special minutes of the annual congress, 20 Apr. 1930 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/02/02, f. 11, p. 4).
[52] *Nenagh Guardian*, 26 Oct. 1929.
[53] Comerford, *Ireland; inventing the nation*, p. 225.
[54] Liam O'Callaghan, 'Rugby football and identity politics in Free State Ireland', in *Éire-Ireland*, 48, nos. 1 & 2, (2013), p. 149.
[55] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (2nd ed., London, 2005), p. 360.

The threat posed by the dissemination of association football

Such outlooks were particularly visible within the structure of the GAA, and in some regards the lingering anti-British bitterness and resentment that was evident in anti-foreign games rhetoric was directed towards association football in the absence of a more tangible outlet for culpability. There was certainly a misguided yearning to have association football, and other imported sports, exposed to punitive measures throughout the inter-war period. The fact that the GAA, as a thirty-two county entity, possessed six County Boards that continued to operate in the northern Irish state made the premise that it would willingly revoke its ban rule or alter its outlook a fanciful and forlorn expectation, and far from becoming a redundant and obsolete exclusionary measure the ban had been solidified as an inherent value of the nationalist character of the GAA by the late 1920s. Although the ban rule was applied unevenly across various regions it did serve as a practical tool in combating the incursion of association football.[56] As has previously been discussed, association football was increasingly expanding and growing in popularity throughout the state during the mid 1920s, and this development, together with the FAIFS's penchant for promoting itself as a distinctly national sporting organisation, was understood by some to amount to an offensive against Gaelic games.

The GAA had immediately made its perception of the FAI known in the months after the Dublin association football administration had split from Belfast in asserting that the new body was to be considered in no way different to the IFA, and was, in effect, 'antagonistic to the national ideals of the GAA'.[57] Terms such as 'West Briton' and 'shoneen' had long been incorporated into the popular vocabulary as derogatory idioms used to describe Irish people that participated in association football, and during the inter-war period the aforementioned inclination to directly associate imported games with British imperialism led to a growing tendency to connect association football enthusiasts with military oppression.[58] This connection was readily made in places such as Waterford, where large banners bearing the slogan, 'Irish games for Irishmen. No Importations. No Black and Tans', appeared on the city's landmarks at certain

[56] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 135.
[57] Minute book of the central council of the GAA, 1911-25, special meeting of the central council, 15 Oct. 1921 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/01/02, p. 554).
[58] *Munster Express*, 14 Dec. 1928.

junctures, and it is clear that such attitudes and mindsets did not exist in isolation and were replicated across the state.[59]

The national character of individuals involved in association football was routinely challenged during the inter-war period. Although the ideological connotations attached to Irish sport remained primarily a concern of the GAA hierarchy, such attitudes undoubtedly played a role in sporting processes at a more local scale. While the printed media provided the forum for social commentators, media contributors and state politicians to argue for less hostility and exclusion within Irish sport, the same outlets were also responsible for the propagation of the counter-argument. Contemporary newspaper columns carry many such cases and opinions, and a 1923 article that appeared in the *Freeman's Journal*, in which the writer asserts that 'during all these years that men were sacrificing their all to drive the English out of Ireland, the adherents of rugby and soccer were fighting vigorously, through these games, to keep them here' is perhaps the best summation of the mindset of the most ideologically hostile opponents of foreign games. The same article goes on to claim that 'men of this calibre were, and are the biggest enemies of the country', although such viewpoints were undoubtedly tempered in the public consciousness by the revered status of individuals such as Oscar Traynor, an association football player of some distinction and a brigadier of the Dublin brigade of the IRA during the Anglo-Irish War, as well as noted former rugby players, including Eamon de Valera, Kevin Barry, and others whose nationalist credentials were beyond reproach.[60]

With both association football and Gaelic games growing in stature during the late 1920s, conflict between supporters of both codes was inevitable at local level. The correlation between the relative strength of association football and the cultural condemnation it received in the regional press is undoubted, and it is apparent that the level of hostility directed towards the sport was reflective of its stature within individual localities. The fact that association football was increasingly played on Sundays throughout the state during the inter-war period was a significant factor in intensifying the antagonism at local level as the organisers of rival sports competed for use of the limited public spaces that were suitable for field games. Conflict over access to playing grounds was evident in many regions, including Clones in County Monaghan, where

[59] Ibid., 28 Nov. 1930.
[60] *Freeman's Journal*, 27 Apr. 1923.

local GAA clubs were apparently losing access to pitches due to the infiltration of association football in 1928,[61] while in Louth in 1930 GAA officials were claiming that Gaelic games had suffered as a result of association football clubs monopolising the available playing fields in the area.[62] Incidents such as that which occurred in Dundalk in May 1929, when a group of disgruntled GAA players rushed a local pitch, causing the abandonment of an underage association football game were undoubtedly altercations that were repeated in various forms in other localities, and it appears that a peaceful coexistence between the rival sports was extremely difficult in certain regions.[63]

The playing fields that were located within the recreational grounds of hospitals were particularly coveted by both association football and GAA teams because of the accessibility and upkeep of the areas. The most publicised dispute over access to hospital grounds occurred in Mullingar in early 1931, when a bitter clash erupted after the Westmeath County Board lobbied for exclusive GAA use of the playing pitch at the town's mental hospital. The board's president, Captain P. Cowan, who the previous year had rather facetiously boasted of his complicity in the decline of association football in Athlone,[64] disregarded encouragement from the local authority to compromise on the matter and refused to negotiate with the association clubs that also used the grounds. He claimed that the 'GAA was primarily at war with all foreign games...and with every influence that tended to keep alive the Shoneen spirit in the country',[65] and was successful in gaining preference on the grounds, which were duly reserved for Gaelic games on every Sunday for the foreseeable future.[66] The aggressive stance adopted by the local GAA forced the hospital administration to intervene in the matter, and to make the grounds available for association football for one Sunday per month. This was far from agreeable to Cowan however, who warned that the GAA would not share access to pitches with association football under any circumstances.[67]

The availability of more pitches for Gaelic games as a result of the ground development policy employed by the GAA during the 1930s did not halt the prevailing bitterness or

[61] *Anglo-Celt*, 29 Sept. 1928.
[62] *Irish Independent*, 27 Jan. 1930.
[63] Ibid., 30 May 1929.
[64] Ibid., 21 Apr. 1930.
[65] Ibid., 14 Apr. 1931.
[66] *Westmeath Examiner*, 16 May 1931.
[67] *Irish Independent*, 10 July 1931.

animosity at local level, and the hostile relationship between the rival codes remained in evidence.[68] While association football was undoubtedly restricted in its scope in many regions by the popularity of Gaelic games, there is also evidence of association football stunting the development of Gaelic games in certain instances. There are indications that the growing popularity of association football in border counties led local GAA players to switch allegiance and join association clubs,[69] while in places such as Louth and Wexford there are occurrences of entire teams converting to the association code.[70] An even-handed article that appeared in the *Southern Star* in March 1930 also provides a vivid description of the incursion of association football into areas of Munster that until recently held strong GAA allegiances, as contributors called on the organisers of Gaelic games to target the youth of the province to halt current trends.[71] In spite of this it must be noted that the number of clubs affiliated to the GAA by the beginning of the 1930s, which stood at well over 1,500, was approximately treble that affiliated to the FAI, and reports of the success of association football in battling Gaelic games must be taken in the context of relativity.[72]

In certain locations an individual's preferred sport could even impact upon his employment prospects. There were suggestions that some workers who were involved in association football in Portlaw in County Waterford were being threatened with dismissal from their jobs during the late 1920s,[73] while in 1930 accusations that some employers in Athy in County Kildare were pressurising their workforce to forego Gaelic games in favour of association football were in wide circulation.[74] While such reports are unsubstantiated, it is highly likely that individuals that held positions of authority would have attempted to exert their influence in terms of participation in sport, and there can be no doubt that coercion was a factor in the involvement of many people in both Gaelic games and association football during the inter-war period. Variables such as standing within the community, social exclusion and, indeed, employment preservation were certainly considerations for many when decisions on sporting participation were made, although this assertion was undoubtedly true of some regions

[68] Cronin, Duncan, Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 126.
[69] *Anglo-Celt*, 29 Sept. 1928.
[70] *Irish Independent*, 2 Jan. 1930; 24 Mar. 1930.
[71] *Southern Star*, 8 Mar. 1930.
[72] Ibid., 20 Apr. 1930.
[73] *Munster Express*, 15 Mar. 1929.
[74] *Irish Independent*, 20 Feb. 1930.

more than others, and was, in all likelihood, more intrinsic to rural provincial areas than to larger urban centres.

Despite the clear progression of Gaelic games within the capital during the inter-war period, association football remained the most popular sport among large sections of Dublin's urban population, and there appears to have been a relatively peaceful coexistence between the rival codes in the city that was not in evidence in other parts of the country. The frequency of punitive action against GAA members for violation of the ban rule, which was reported in the press, indicates that large numbers of Dublin's inhabitants participated simultaneously in both indigenous and foreign games. The continued migration of rural dwellers also ensured that familial links and connections to the countryside and its cultural practices, not least Gaelic games, were strong within the city. As such, many of Dublin's sporting enthusiasts held an affinity with both association football and the GAA, and even prominent members of the FAIFS administration were keen followers of Gaelic games. Individuals such as the Murphy brothers, who were so influential in the FAIFS's pursuit of international recognition during the 1920s, regularly frequented Gaelic games, and it was common for Dubliners to support the counties and clubs of their ancestral heritage as well as local teams within the capital.[75] There is every indication that the prevailing sense of bitterness towards association football that was inherent within the hierarchical structure of the GAA was not as pronounced within the association football administration. The evidence for this exists in the lack of reference to the GAA throughout the Football Association of Ireland archives during the inter-war period. Surprising there was little commentary on the character of the ban rule from within the association football administration. There seems to have been an uneasy acceptance of the position of the GAA, and once again it is perhaps surprising that no real effort to directly challenge the ideological outlook of the GAA was made considering the vigour with which the FAIFS sought to correct other perceived injustices against the association during the period. Evidently the assertion of its rights within its own sport was of paramount importance to the FAIFS, although the reintroduction of the entertainment tax by the incoming Fianna Fáil government during the summer of 1932 would cause the association football administration to vehemently question the legislatorial distinction that was made between indigenous and foreign sports.

[75] Interview with Maighréad Ní Mhurchadha of Skerries, County Dublin (15 Nov. 2012).

The introduction of entertainment tax in 1932

The destructive impact that the entertainment tax inflicted upon association football within the Free State during the 1930s has been discussed in the previous chapter. While the imposition of the levy was difficult for the sport's administration to countenance on its own merits, the fact that the GAA, along with the NACA, was to be completely exempted from payment on apparent ideological grounds made the blow even harder to bear.[76] A vociferous movement within the government was of the opinion that indigenous games were deserving of preferential treatment in regard of taxation on account of both the service that they provided to Irish culture and the ability of the FAIFS, and other national sporting bodies, to profit from the spoils of international competition. Despite this, the GAA exemption can be interpreted as a state endorsement of the organisation's exclusionary policy. The decision of Seán MacEntee to legislatively favour one form of athletic pursuit over another, and officially characterise certain games as more 'Irish' than others in his role as Minister for Finance, was a point of contention that caused much debate within the state's political structure. As previously stated in discussion on the financial crisis that enveloped association football during the early 1930s, the minister remained unmoved by criticism however, and even a recommendation for the remittance of the entertainment tax from Seanad Éireann failed to sway MacEntee, who continued to assert the necessity for the levy at a time of national economic distress.[77]

There is no doubt that MacEntee's position would have been accepted more readily had the taxation not ideologically discriminated between the state's sporting organisations. There was also opposition to the favouritism shown to the GAA within the Oireachtas, and in view of the economic motivation for the reintroduction of the tax, commentators such as Cumann na nGaedhael deputy, Brook Brasier, began to question why the GAA, as a self-professed national body that had become increasingly solvent, did not volunteer to contribute financially to the stricken state during such a trying period.[78] On the contrary, it appears that MacEntee had indeed intended to include the GAA in the taxation system only to be dissuaded by internal pressure from his colleagues within

[76] Entertainment duty: application to Gaelic games and other sports, May 1932 - June 1932, Extract from Cabinet Minutes, Cab.6/29, 23-4 May 1932, item no. 7 (National Archives of Ireland, TSCH/3/S6276).
[77] 'Finance Bill, 1932 - From the Seanad', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 10, 3 Aug. 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/08/03/00006.asp [21 Aug. 1932].
[78] Deputy B. Brasier, 'Finance Bill, 1932 - From the Seanad', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 10, 3 Aug. 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/08/03/00006.asp [21 Aug. 1932].

Fianna Fáil.[79] Although the minister himself was wholly apologetic regarding the imposition of the entertainment tax, others within the party were not so contrite, and there existed a clear sense of satisfaction from within certain quarters of the political structure that delighted in the financial impediments that were placed upon foreign games.[80] As previously stated, the Finance Bill of 1927 had set a precedent in elevating the GAA to a privileged position within Irish society, making the imposition of the entertainment tax on the association almost impossible, and once again there had been a clear unwillingness within the state structure to challenge its hegemonic status. The GAA was by now more influential than ever, and was in an unprecedented position of financial strength, while the inherent internal limitations that existed within the administrative and organisational structure of the association code were about to be crudely exposed after the imposition of the government levy.

The protests against the entertainment tax that were developed in the media and within the association football administration highlighted the perceived injustice of the preferential treatment afforded to Gaelic games. In this regard the distinction that had been made between indigenous and foreign games was compared to the penal laws by politicians such as Cumann na nGaedhael's Thomas Hennessy, while others questioned whether the taxation was a contravention of the constitution of the Irish Free State in that it impinged upon the right of the population to exert free will and expression.[81] In practical terms the contribution that association football made to the state economy through job creation in the tourism and construction sectors was also extolled as grounds for the immediate remittance of the levy, while it was argued that the national service that the FAIFS provided in promoting the Free State internationally was equal to any duty that the GAA offered in terms of advancing nationality.[82] It was not only association football enthusiasts that bemoaned the introduction of taxation on sport, and many influential state figures were critical of the manner in which Irish sport had become intrinsically politicised. There were those who despaired of a financial penalty being imposed on athletic or recreational activity whatever the chosen game may be, and concerns regarding the general health of the nation at a time of widespread

[79] *Irish Independent*, 14 May 1932.
[80] Deputy M. J. Corry, 'Finance Bill, 1932 - From the Seanad', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 10, 3 Aug. 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/08/03/00006.asp [21 Aug. 1932].
[81] Deputy T. Hennessy, 'Public Business - Finance Bill 1931 - Committee Stage', Dáil Éireann , vol. 39, no. 11, 2 July 1931, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1931/07/02/00010.asp [21 Aug. 2013].
[82] *Irish Independent*, 29 June 1932.

nationalist fervour across Europe were also dominant within the thinking of politicians such as the former Bohemians footballer, Oliver St John Gogarty,[83] who considered the taxation an imposition on the population's wellbeing.[84]

The association football administration understandably felt a sense of victimisation after the reintroduction of the entertainment tax. Despite this, it would be inaccurate to describe the levy as a defined government strategy that was deliberately established to damage or to even eradicate foreign games. The motivation of the Minister for Finance was clearly one of genuine economic concern. Although, as stated in the previous chapter, he had significantly overestimated the amount that would be raised by the tax, his intentions were certainly not designed to serve as an ideologically punitively measure on association football. Although MacEntee had previously propagated the virtues of native over foreign games in the Dáil, it appears that his motives in introducing the taxation were initially devoid of political subtext, and the levy was duly remitted in 1934 when its limitations were taken into account.[85] After his decision to abolish the entertainment tax the FAIFS thanked the minister for his fortitude without any degree of irony, while members of the Oireachtas, including Oscar Trayor, William Norton and Robert Briscoe, were also acclaimed for their contribution to the campaign against the taxation.[86] Despite the relief that accompanied the remittance the damage had already been inflicted upon association football, and has as has been examined in the previous chapter the sport suffered a crippling stagnation during the remainder of the inter-war period, while the GAA and Gaelic games continued to grow in stature.

Amateurism and professionalism

The romanticised ideal of nationalist Ireland was in many respects an anti-materialistic concept based on a model of morality and virtuousness that was propagated in Catholic social thought, and the evolving character of association football during the inter-war period made it even more ideologically incompatible with this representation than had

[83] David Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup: the story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic football team* (Dublin, 2012), chapter 10, available on kindle
[84] Deputy O. St. J. Gogarty, 'Finance Bill, 1932 – (certified Money Bill) – Committee Stage', Seanad Éireann, vol. 15, no. 27, 27 July 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/seanad/1932/07/27/00006.asp [21 Aug. 2013].
[85] Deputy S. MacEntee, 'Finance Bill, 1930 – Committee Stage', Dáil Éireann, vol. 35, no. 5, 5 June 1930, available at http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1930/06/05/00015.asp [21 Aug. 2013].
[86] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932 – 1937, annual report of the senior council, 1934, (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/21).

previously been the case.[87] The increasing commercialisation of association football at senior level during the late 1920s and early 1930s portrayed the sport as the antithesis of the implicitly amateur GAA in the perception of its detractors. Although the amateurism that was inherent within the GAA was certainly more plebian in character than the gentlemanly and elitist sporting ethos of the Victorian age, many of its members found the professionalism surrounding association football both distasteful and morally corrupt.[88] For many observers professionalism in sport was associated with the concept of imperialism, and according to GAA historian, P.J. Devlin, it was 'fundamentally pagan, basically carnal and foreign'.[89] The fact that young Irish men were theoretically bought and sold by football clubs in Britain was widely abhorred, while, as stated previously, the presence of scores of cross-channel professionals within the Free State League and the resultant displacement of local players was also a point of contention for many.[90] Considering the actual amount of professional association footballers that played in the Free State; Peter Byrne estimates the figure to be less than 0.1% of registered players; the representation that emerged of the sport as an endemically professionalised game was skewed and overstated.[91] The reality was that like Gaelic games, most participants became involved in the association code simply for leisure, camaraderie and a sense of belonging. As was the case with ideological perceptions of the GAA ban it is likely that at local level the connotations of attachment to professionalism would have been unimportant to those involved in the sport, and would not have been a significant deterrent of participation. Again, such concerns were the domain of a hierarchical societal group that lamented the contamination of Irish culture with practices such as sporting professionalism, and were in many ways unrepresentative of popular sentiment.

Association football, the church and education

The concept of professionalism in sport was also incompatible with the doctrine of the most socially influential organisation in the Free State, the Catholic Church, which re-

[87] McAnallen, 'The greatest amateur association in the world, p. 166; Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland*, p. 360; 403.
[88] Cronin, Duncan, Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 216.
[89] McAnallen, 'The greatest amateur association in the world?', p. 167.
[90] Deputy W. Davin, 'Public Business - Finance Bill, 1931 - Committee', Dáil Éireann, vol. 39, no. 11, 2 July 1931, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1931/07/02/00010.asp [3 Mar. 2010].
[91] Peter Byrne, *Green is the colour* (London, 2012), p. 136.

established a close relationship with the GAA during the inter-war period.[92] The cultural bond between the GAA and the church was forged at local level through a mutual connectedness with the parish unit, and was most obviously on display at national level during the celebrations surrounding the Eucharistic Congress of 1932.[93] Clergy members became increasingly involved in the activities of the GAA during the 1930s, and in rural areas Catholic priests were allied with local GAA groups in encouraging their flocks to participate in Gaelic games, to the detriment of association football, which undoubtedly received condemnation from church influences.[94] In urban areas the connection was more fluid however, and members of the Catholic clergy were also involved in the organisation of association football, which is explained simply by the fact that it served as the most popular sport within these localities.[95] To identify with a local community efforts had to be made to infiltrate its social structures, and in places such as Dublin, where clergy members were heavily involved in facilitating altar boy's leagues and in the foundation of local clubs,[96] and Waterford, where Catholic organisations, including the Knights of Columbanus and the Catholic Young Men's Society promoted association football, there was a clear connection between the church members and the association code.[97]

The Catholic structure of education that emerged within the Free State after independence was more conducive to the progression of the GAA however, and involvement in Gaelic games came to be viewed by society as an 'extension of the education process and as a means of building character and national identity'.[98] The educational segregation of Catholics and Protestants in the Free State facilitated the promotion of Gaelic games in Catholic national schools,[99] while the growing number of clergy members that were administered with teaching roles also led to the further encouragement of indigenous games.[100] The position of Gaelic sport within second and third level educational establishments was less dominant however, and the prominence

[92] Cronin, Duncan, Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 251.
[93] Comerford, *Ireland: inventing the nation*, p. 223.
[94] Cronin, Duncan, Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 246.
[95] Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), p. 45.
[96] Joe Dodd, 'The first sixty years', in George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds.) *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), p. 48; Neal Garnham 'One game in two nations? Football in Ireland 1918-1939', p. 18.
[97] *Irish Independent*, 26 Jan. 1931.
[98] Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland*, p. 34.
[99] Annual reports of the GAA, 1928-45, minutes of the annual congress, 17 Apr. 1938 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/02/02, f. 18, p. 5).
[100] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (2nd ed., London, 1989), p. 546.

of the rugby code in the state's most prestigious colleges was a thorn in the side of the GAA administration. Association football was also central to the university sporting programme, and was most obviously on view in the Collingwood Cup competition that was played annually between the island's leading educational establishments. The association code was particularly to the fore among the sporting fraternity at University College Dublin, where a college team competed with consistent distinction in the Leinster League throughout the inter-war period.[101] The standing of foreign games within the third-level curriculum led members of GAA County Boards in places such as Dublin, Wexford and Galway to propose successful motions aimed at halting scholarship schemes that were provided to educational establishments that facilitated the playing of rugby and association football during 1930 and 1931 in what was a punitive action designed to force Gaelic games into the state's colleges.[102] As GAA interests had already been successful in excluding association football and rugby from the Free State defence forces it is unsurprising that a similar approach was taken in terms of the state's educational establishments. The fact that members of the GAA felt justified and entitled to challenge how public funds were administered to students and colleges is a clear indication of the standing that the association had achieved within Irish society. It had moved from controlling the games that its own members participated in to dictating what athletic activity the general populous could engage in, and there was now apparently no limitation within the sphere of influence that the association had developed.

The growing strength of the GAA and the Hyde affair

By the late 1930s the central status of the GAA within Irish society was unquestioned as the association stood in a position of unprecedented prosperity. While association football struggled to recover after the monetary crisis and stagnation of previous years the GAA was in a financially sound position. Gaelic games were visibly increasing in popularity as the crowds that attended its showpiece annual All-Ireland finals at the enlarged Croke Park had almost doubled from figures recorded during the mid-1920s.[103] The development of the GAA and its games during the 1930s had in many ways left association football trailing behind, and the standing and influence that it had attained

[101] Annual reports of the GAA, 1928-45, special minutes of the annual congress, 31 Mar. 1929 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/02/02, f. 10, p. 3).
[102] Cronin, Duncan, Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history*, p. 223; *Irish Independent*, 27 May 1930.
[103] McAnallen, 'The greatest amateur association in the world?', p. 166.

by the end of the inter-war period caused the organisation to initiate one of the most controversial episodes in the history of Irish sport. In December 1938 the central council of the GAA, responding to pressure from Gaelic clubs throughout the country, took the decision to remove Dr Douglas Hyde, the inaugural state president, as a patron of the association after he had attended an international association football match between Ireland and Poland in an official capacity the previous month.[104] Hyde, a renowned public figure due largely to his involvement in the Gaelic scholarly movement of the late nineteenth century and tireless efforts to preserve the Irish language, had been a GAA patron since 1902.[105] Despite the esteem in which he was held the GAA judged that he had technically been in contravention of the association's ban rule, and that there were no grounds for special dispensation on punitive action regardless of Hyde's civic position and reputation.

As described by Cormac Moore in his analysis of the episode, the public reaction to the decision to remove Hyde as patron was one of general outrage. There was a sense of disbelief that the GAA had been audacious enough to disrespect and humiliate the symbolic figurehead of the state and a steadfast contributor to the furtherance of Irish culture in such a manner.[106] The action of the GAA was considered an insult of the highest order to a man who was held in such regard, and it had the unwanted effect of bringing the association and its processes under intense scrutiny. While the president's office remained silent on the issue the national press was damning in its condemnation of the GAA, and the intensity of the criticism led GAA officials to address the episode at its annual congress in April 1939. Far from leading to a retraction of the punishment, as some observers may have expected, the stance of the GAA was fortified when the secretary's report to congress asserted that the association had 'no desire to retain those whose allegiance to the [Gaelic] games is failing or divided',[107] before a subsequent motion to have Hyde reinstated was defeated by a staggering 120 votes to eleven, with five members abstaining.[108] With the position of the association plainly defined, GAA president, Pádraig MacNamee, forcefully and unapologetically defended the decision in his address to congress, stating that 'as long as the ban remained in force no exception

[104] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, p. 101.
[105] Ibid., p. 39.
[106] Ibid., p. 136.
[107] Minute book of the central council of the GAA, 1939-41, secretary's report to the annual congress, 1939 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/01/07, p. 117).
[108] Minute book of the central council of the GAA, 1939-41, minutes of the annual congress, 9 Apr. 1939 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/01/07, p. 178).

could be made'.[109] He went on to reassert the organisation's unwavering devotion to its exclusionary policy in claiming that 'the critics say 'a man should be perfectly free to do what he likes in the matter of games'. Quite so we admit: he is perfectly free to come into the Gaelic Athletic Association or stay outside it',[110] before addressing the mounting criticism of the ban by stating that the rule would become unnecessary 'only when Irishmen support their own games'.[111]

The behaviour of the GAA during the Hyde episode certainly tainted the association and somewhat damaged its reputation in the popular perception where there was a general acceptance that the organisation had gone too far. The GAA was portrayed as an autocratic and arrogant body, and was described as a 'Hitler-like' organisation that employed 'jack-boot methods' in the Seanad in the aftermath of the controversy.[112] Further comparisons with Europe's fascist regimes were also forthcoming from both the national and international media.[113] There is also evidence that those within the hierarchy of the GAA had regrets over the treatment that Hyde had received from the association in moments of personal reflection, and had perhaps accepted that such an unsavoury incident could have been handled better or possibly avoided.[114] Outwardly no such admissions were forthcoming however, and the action taken against Hyde can in part be considered a response to the growing popularity of association football, which was increasingly receiving acceptance from the state during the late 1930s. The GAA, while certainly not threatened in its hegemonic position by the attendance of state officials at international association football fixtures, was clearly discontented with the changing outlooks, and prominent members of the association made little attempt to hide their disgust that perceived foreign sports were now receiving state benefaction.[115] Despite this the Hyde episode, and the ill-feeling that was resultant, could surely have been avoided. The incident did nothing to enhance the GAA's public image, while it

[109] Annual reports of the GAA 1928-45, minutes of the annual congress, 9 Apr. 1939 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/02/02, f. 20, p. 6).
[110] Minute book of the central council of the GAA, 1939-41, minutes of the annual congress, 9 Apr. 1939 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/01/07, p. 176).
[111] Annual reports of the GAA, 1928-45, minutes of the annual congress, 9 Apr. 1939 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/02/02, f. 20, p. 4).
[112] Senator J.J. Counihan, 'Institute for Advanced Studies Bill 1939 - Second Stage', Seanad Éireann, vol. 24, no. 15 May 1940, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/seanad/1940/05/15/00004.asp [27 Aug. 2013].
[113] Moore, *The GAA v Douglas Hyde*, pp 107-8.
[114] Ibid., pp 166-8.
[115] Annual reports of the GAA 1928-45, minutes of the annual congress, 9 Apr. 1939 (Croke Park, GAA Archive, GAA/CC/02/02, f. 20, p. 6).

brought its policies into sharper focus and caused the re-emergence of the long-standing debate on the character of the association's exclusionary ban.

The role of the ban and Irish sporting nationalisms

Whether the ban rule was actually beneficial to the GAA during the inter-war period is open to interpretation. Despite the fact that autonomy from Britain had been achieved, proponents of the ban argued that the cultural impact of imperial occupation constituted the need for the continuation of a policy that would serve as a protection for indigenous games throughout the inter-war period. The changing characterisation of the ban, from a protectionist policy to an ideological weapon, has already been discussed, and it was certainly influential in framing negative representations of foreign games in the public perception, although there was a feeling, not least from within some quarters of the GAA itself, that the retention of the ban amounted to an 'admission of weakness', and a stain on the persona of the association.[116] Those who concurred with this outlook were of the opinion that by the 1930s Gaelic games were sufficiently strong to compete with any foreign code on their own merits and did not require any artificial stimulation. Some even felt that the ban was in fact counter-productive in that it inhibited many individuals, particularly in urban centres where the GAA was less dominant, from becoming involved in Gaelic games by so stringently dictating what other activities they could participate in.[117] Such arguments carry some validity and there is no doubt that people throughout the country were alienated from the GAA by the ban rule, although it is impossible to assert that the ban impacted negatively upon Gaelic games in a general sense considering their growing stature and popularity during the inter-war period.

Despite vocal opposition to the GAA's exclusionary policy from various sources throughout the period, it must be emphasised that the ban commanded widespread contemporary support and was viewed as an inherent part of the identity of the GAA. Although the ideological implications of the ban were of greater concern to the hierarchy of the association, the policy could not have survived without the steadfast support of ground-level membership who viewed native games as culturally superior to association football and other foreign codes. For those without any strong outlooks on the ban it was accepted as a traditional and intrinsic characteristic of the Irish sporting

[116] *Nenagh Guardian*, 26 Jan. 1929.
[117] Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan & Paul Rouse, *The GAA: county by county* (Dublin, 2011), p. 94.

landscape, and there is little suggestion that a significant portion of Irish society considered the policy of the GAA as overtly oppressive or unfair. Even when the ban had come under the most intense scrutiny during the Hyde episode many commentators were more concerned with the treatment administered to the state president than with actually calling for an overhaul of GAA policy. There clearly remained a lingering anti-British sentiment within sections of the public consciousness that did frame the perception of foreign games among large sections of the population. It must also be noted that the ban was widely violated or ignored throughout the state by those that wished to play both indigenous and foreign games, and there is no doubt that penalties for infractions were unevenly applied in different localities and circumstances. In this regard many individuals were unconcerned with the ban, while even those with strong nationalist outlooks had little objection to flaunting the rule. Such attitudes even suggest that there was a widespread lack of respect for the ban rule within sections of the sporting community. In many ways the GAA ban was viewed as an established national policy on sport, although, as has been discussed in a previous chapter, representations of what was defined as national sport were evolving by the end of the period.

The nationalisms of Irish sport during the inter-war period are both complex and flexible. The position of Gaelic games as the foremost national athletic pursuits has been discussed throughout this chapter, and at first glance the ideological attack that was aimed at association football appears quite harsh considering that the third most popular football code among the state's population was overtly indifferent to portraying any nationalist representation or to promoting the Irish Free State. The development of Irish rugby, which can be considered comparative to that of association football during the post-independence period, has been overlooked in this thesis to date. Irish rugby was decimated by the involvement of its players in the Great War, and, as was the case with association football, changing social and economic variables later facilitated a slow recovery of the sport. This culminated in the protracted growth of the rugby code in many urban centres during the late 1920s, before a marked stagnation set in during the 1930s.[118] The reluctance of Irish rugby's governing body to adopt the symbolism and insignia of the new southern state has been discussed in a previous chapter, and it was certainly a point of some contention for many commentators during the inter-war

[118] Esmund Van Esbeck, *One hundred years of Irish rugby* (Dublin, 1974), pp 106-7.

period, who were particularly critical of the IRFU's refusal to fly the tricolour at Lansdowne Road, and perturbed by its memorialisation of Irish involvement in the Great War. [119] In this regard the created history of Irish rugby was contradictory to that produced by the GAA during the period. It was a recollection and outlook that was necessitated by the continued participation of a northern unionist element within the IRFU, and it is clear that the cultural position that the rugby association occupied made it nationalistically incompatible with the prominent forces that were attempting to eradicate any memory and residual influence of British occupation.

Although the rugby code was also the target for sustained virulent attacks from the GAA during the inter-war period, it was not quite at the same level as the campaign that was waged against association football. This can perhaps be explained by the perception of the rugby code as a more gentlemanly pursuit than association football, with a history in Ireland that pre-dated other football codes, while the amateur ethos that characterised rugby also set it apart from association football. The most likely rationalisation, however, is that association football was a greater threat to the GAA in sporting terms. Rugby was viewed by many as a middle-class sport that exuded intrinsic 'snobbery', while Gaelic games and association football were generally competing throughout the country for the patronage of a more working-class demographic.[120] In practical terms association football impinged upon the development of Gaelic games to a greater extent than other sports, and accordingly drew the most vocal condemnation. The fact that the FAIFS was promoting itself as a nationalist sporting organisation, while claiming to represent the Free State in the international sphere, is also significant in explaining the hostility of the GAA towards association football. Considering the inability of Gaelic games to provide such a national service due to the parochial character of its games, the processes of the association football administration in their perceived role as national ambassadors were of particular irritation to the GAA hierarchy, despite its refusal to even acknowledge that the organisers of a foreign sport could legitimately operate with such a mandate. It is ironic that the sporting association that was most equipped to act as an international representation of the Irish state was unable to do so, and despite the unerring

[119] Neal Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland* (Belfast, 1999), p. 27.
[120] *Irish Independent*, 28 Oct. 1929.

development of the GAA within Irish society during the inter-war period the ever-evolving nationalism surrounding Gaelic games evidently had its limitations.

Conclusion

The cultural representations attached to athletic and recreational participation in various forms have been widely discussed and debated throughout the historiography of Irish sport. When it is considered that the codification of sports in Ireland coincided with a Gaelic cultural awakening, and a resultant campaign to rid the island of British rule, it is unsurprising that organised sports were immediately politicised. Games that were considered to be indigenous in origin had been in a weak condition since the era of the Great Famine, and with the British model of athletic organisation taking a firm root through the Anglo-influenced associations that administrated sports such as association football, rugby and athletics, the formation of an inherently Gaelic sporting body was an inevitability. The development of the GAA, and a Gaelic athletic structure, led to a clear demarcation between indigenous and foreign games, and by the beginning of the inter-war period this distinction had been irrevocably engrained upon the Irish sporting consciousness. The experience of the republican push for autonomy during the early twentieth century had led to a further polarisation of perceptions on Gaelic and imperial cultural practices within Irish society, and these outlooks were conveyed to the general public by organisations such as the GAA throughout the inter-war period with varying degrees of success.

By the end of the period the cultural status of Gaelic games and association football within Irish society had been all but defined, although their positions were somewhat less certain in the immediate aftermath of independence. While the GAA struggled to recover from the obstructions inflicted upon its operations during the Anglo-Irish War, association football emerged as a mainstream athletic pursuit, growing in popularity and stature throughout the 1920s. The progression of Gaelic games was less linear however, and its subsequent recovery was stunted by the participation of GAA members in the Irish Civil War, although the relationship that had developed between the association and the state was one that was highly beneficial at a time when efforts to stabilise the organisation were ongoing. By the end of the 1920s, Gaelic games and association football were both in positions of prosperity, with the former particularly strong within rural and provincial communities throughout the state, while the latter had become

increasingly popular within large urban centres. This position was to prove short-lived however. The greater emphasis on planning within the GAA structure led the organisation to eclipse its sporting rivals in terms of progression as association football struggled to cope with the difficulties that increasing commercialisation brought, while simultaneously wrestling with the economic obstructions imposed by the state. The 1930s brought differing fortunes for Gaelic games and association football, as the GAA strengthened without inhibition or impediment while its foremost sporting rival encountered a staggered and uneven period of development.

The relationship between Gaelic games and association football during the inter-war period was testing and bitter. Although there was certainly bitterness directed from association football interests towards the GAA, the maliciousness with which GAA supporters consistently attacked association football meant that in many ways the hostility was a lob-sided one. The GAA offensive against association football was framed in both ideological and practical motivations. The Anglophile and increasingly commercialised association code was considered the antithesis of the indigenous and amateur Gaelic model, and the representation of association football as a morally questionable athletic pursuit was produced and propagated in the cultural doctrine of the GAA throughout the inter-war period. Likewise, an exaggerated depiction of the GAA as an organisation that had made a significant contribution to the militant push for independence also emerged, shaping a perception of the rival codes as culturally contradictory national bodies. The characterisation of the GAA that developed after independence was one that fitted seamlessly with the representation of the utopian Gaelic idyll that had been longed for in the absence of British rule, and it is no surprise that the association was adopted so readily in the patronage and benefaction of the state structure and its most prominent social institutions. In fact, the GAA became so culturally and socially relevant that its influence was left unchecked, and by the end of the period it had occupied a standing within Irish society that allowed it to go so far as to publically disrespect and admonish the symbolic figurehead of the state.

The development of the GAA during the inter-war period stirs sentiment of both admiration and disapproval. The standing that it came to occupy within the state structure, and within local communities throughout the country, was made possible by the committed efforts of many individuals who believed in the ideal of an inherently indigenous sporting body at various levels. It must also be noted that the foresight that

was exhibited by those tasked with planning for the future of the association was incomparable when considered along with that of those involved in association football. The manner in which the GAA stringently defended its values in spite of external criticism is also commendable, although whether those values were honourable or necessary is open to debate. The ban rule was certainly a controversial policy that divided opinion and its evolution from a protectionist measure to a mechanism for sporting and social subjugation was a questionable process, although within the anti-British outlook that was prevalent throughout Gaelic society its relevance was undeniable. The ban became a cornerstone, not just of GAA policy, but of Irish society during the inter-war period, and was influential in creating a lasting cultural nationalism that would continue to uniquely characterise Irish sport. There is no doubt that the development of association football was limited in its scope by the attitude of the GAA towards foreign games, and its national character brought into question by the all-encompassing national representation extolled by the Gaelic body. A sporting coexistence was problematic and froth with difficulty, not least by the parallel expansion of both codes, and by the end of the inter-war period there was every indication that the tense and uneasy relationship was set to persist without the prospect of more amicable or accepting relations.

Chapter 7: Association football and the sporting community

Introduction

The position of association football within Irish society has been examined in this thesis in the context of the impact of the wider political, social and cultural environment on its development and expansion, although what has been overlooked to date is the actual role that the sport occupied within the community and within the consciousness of those that were increasingly drawn to it. As it is generally accepted that association football was primarily supported by a working-class demographic within the Free State's cities and towns during the inter-war period, an examination of its position within the community is not without difficulty. This is due in part to the lack of written material that was left behind by this section of society in regard of their daily routines. The fact that much historical study from the period tends to focus on the events surrounding the Irish revolutionary period and the inception of the Free State also raises issues in relation to attaining an understanding of the processes that characterised working-class life. This work, while undoubtedly commendable, has been undertaken at the expense of greater discussion on working-class society, and as such difficulties in gaining an insight into the activities of ordinary people are prevalent. Much of the commentary that does exist on the urban working-classes has been dominated by portrayals of the unerring economic depravity and depressing living conditions that framed the lives of large sections of the population. Such representations portray an incomplete story however, and as previously discussed within this thesis, the inter-war period was characterised by great advancements in social and cultural life, as well as by economic hardship. Changing outlooks towards working hours and a growing propensity to seek entertainment increased the demand among the working-classes for outlets for leisure and recreation, and within this context sport had a prominent role to play. For a multitude of individuals that fell within this depiction association football was the sport of choice, and there is no doubt that the game provided its devotees with untold levels of enjoyment amid the drudgery and poverty that otherwise defined their surroundings.

It is over-simplistic to definitively assert that association football was the preserve of urban communities within the Free State however, and further examination must be undertaken to define what the sport actually meant to those that were engaged with it.

In this regard it is useful to identify an observable sporting, or more specifically association football, community within the spectrum of the wider definition of the concept. Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran, in their study of the processes of local history, contextualise communities as fluid and interconnected constructs that consist of a multitude of smaller communities which together constitute a society. These smaller communities are described as the 'building blocks' on which a society is based and can be determined by collective geographic, religious, political, familial, cultural or social identifications, or indeed any variable in which individuals interact.[1] In this context individuals that were engaged with association football can be considered as existing within a defined community, whether at national or local level, and it is within this theoretical framework that the position of the sport in the lives of those it had captivated will be examined in this chapter. The association football community itself comprised of several elements that were fundamental to its existence. It was based on the clubs that often served as the initial point of contact between the individual and the sport, the players that increasingly participated at a variety of levels, the spectators that watched from the terraces, embankments and sidelines, and even those that became engaged with the game through the media or radio from the relative comfort of their homes. The study of these components and their interaction with each other form the basis of discussion within this chapter, while their contribution to the concept of an association football community portrays an interesting and perhaps less publicised representation of the sport and its processes during the inter-war period.

Association football clubs and the workplace

If composite communities can be considered as the building blocks of local societies, then association football clubs can be considered as the foundation on which the structure of the sport was based. As previously stated throughout this thesis, an unprecedented amount of clubs came into existence during the inter-war period. From the publicity that surrounded the split to the unerring expansion of the sport during the 1920s, and even amid the uncertainty of the 1930s, association football clubs emerged throughout the country, and functioned in a variety of divergent settings and circumstances. The clubs that emerged during the inter-war period were founded through the same processes that had been evident in Britain and Ireland since the

[1] Raymond Gillespie & Gerard Moran, 'Introduction: writing local history', in Raymond Gillespie & Gerard Moran (eds), *A various country: essays in Mayo history, 1600 – 1900* (Westport, 1986), pp 11-23.

working-class infiltration of the sport during the late nineteenth century. The state's most successful clubs during the inter-war period originated in the period before the Great War, however. The Bohemian club was characterised by its middle-class roots, having been formed by members of the civil service college based at Bell's Academy in Dublin's North Great George's Street and students of the Hibernian School in the Phoenix Park in 1890.[2] The city's other two most famous clubs emerged from more working-class surroundings, however. According to Neal Garnham, the Shelbourne club was formed in a public house in the Ringsend area of Dublin in 1895,[3] while Robert Goggins identifies the birth of Shamrock Rovers Football Club within the fishing communities of Ringsend and Irishtown in 1901.[4] Association football clubs were essentially contrived in almost any environment in which males of a similar age interacted socially. Clubs originated in spaces ranging from public houses, as was the case with Shelbourne, and workingmen's clubs to youth organisations, such as the YMCA and the CYMS, and could be formed at the behest of an individual that held a passion for the game or through a network of peers that shared a common interest. Clubs also came into existence simply through neighbourhood connections, through the influence of social functionaries, such as theatre clubs or church groups, or perhaps from within the structure of existing sports clubs, whose membership sought ways of sustaining fitness levels during the winter months when their primary sporting activity was not engaged in. The media also increasingly played a fundamental role in the emergence of clubs, as increased coverage of the sport allowed a greater portion of the population to connect with association football, but also to respond to advertisements vaunting the formation of a team. Evidence also indicates that clubs could be formed through both planned and protracted public processes, or similarly through casual or clandestine gatherings in private dwellings.[5]

One of the most fertile spaces for the emergence of association football clubs was the Irish workplace, and the relationship between the sport and those that were fortunate enough to hold regular employment during the inter-war period is among the most fascinating aspects of the historical study of urban societies. Sports clubs that were

[2] Ciarán Priestley, The Bohemian Football Club: the enduring legacy of an idle youth, available at http://www.dublinheritage.ie/media/bohemian_football_club_text.html [23 Dec. 2013].
[3] Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), p. 46.
[4] Interview with Robert Goggins of Tallaght, County Dublin (1 Feb. 2013).
[5] Photograph provided by Professor R.V. Comerford, available at https://myce.nuim.ie/uwc/webmail/attach/DSC02177.JPG?sid=&mbox=Drafts&charset=escaped_unicode&uid=17&number=2&filename=DSC02177.JPG [19 Sept. 2013].

based in industrial settings had become an integral feature of working-class life in Ireland's cities from the late nineteenth century as legislation that shortened working hours was introduced. Endowed with an increased amount of spare time that could be devoted to recreational pursuits employees began to engage with sport at unprecedented rates.[6] The fact that association football became the foremost sporting activity among the industrial workforce is purely reflective of individual preference and the low cost of participation, and after initial reservations within company managements pertaining to the potentially distracting influence of games the emergent clubs were swiftly embraced.[7] It was recognised that an athletically fit workforce could be beneficial to employers, while time spent participating in games was certainly more favourable than hours that may have otherwise be frittered away in the public house. Encouraging engagement with sport within industrial settings also served to forge a greater affinity between the employee and the workplace, while the additional promotional value of clubs that held the company name aloft in their participation within local communities was undoubtedly an added bonus. The promotion of clubs within the workplace hence became a vehicle for processes of social engineering as the activities and routines of the working-classes could be monitored and regulated to a larger degree, and this concept of industrial paternalism became ingrained in the approaches of managers and directors who concerned themselves with all aspects of employee life.[8]

During the inter-war period a number of clubs that originated in industrial settings could be considered amongst the foremost names in the Irish game and competed with distinction in the Free State League. In Dublin, the city's two most prominent industrial employers, the Guinness brewery at St James's Gate, which was the largest of its kind in the world, and the W & R Jacobs factory, which ranked among the most important global manufacturers and distributors of biscuits, were represented by clubs in the inaugural League of Ireland competition.[9] St James's Gate was certainly the more successful of the two clubs, winning both the League of Ireland and the FAI Cup at the first attempt during the 1921-22 season, although Jacobs was a consistent performer in its own right until the changing characterisation of association football in the Free State

[6] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 11.
[7] David Toms, 'Not withstanding the discomfort involved': Fordson's cup win in 1926 and how 'the old contemptible' were represented in Ireland's public sphere during the 1920s', in *Sport in history*, 33, no. 4, 2012, available on eprint.
[8] David Goldblatt, *The ball is round: a global history of football* (2nd ed., London, 2007), p. 219.
[9] Desmond A. Gillmor, 'Land and people', in J.R. Hill (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vii, Ireland 1921 – 84* (Oxford, 2003), p. 70; *Irish Times*, 16 May 1985.

during the late 1920s and early 1930s rendered its team impotent. Jacobs had admirably clung to a policy of selecting players exclusively from the workforce of the biscuit factory during a period when many of their counterparts where in the process of professionalising and acquiring cross-channel talent. This policy held obvious pitfalls however, and by the time that the club was demoted to intermediate level in 1932 it had become derided among sections of Dublin's association football community for its inability to compete with any semblance of vigour against its fellow league members.[10]

Conversely, the St James's Gate club was prepared to adapt to the changing characterisation of association football in the Free State, and the club did incorporate a professional policy during the 1930s. The club operated as the association football branch of the Guinness Athletic Union (GAU), which had been established to administrate over a wide variety of employee sports in 1905 at the behest of Dr Sir John Lumsden, the chief medical officer at the brewery, who took a keen interest in the health of the workforce.[11] Throughout the 1920s the St James's Gate club had relied primarily on the participation of talented players in the employ of the brewery. As the decade progressed prevailing economic conditions necessitated redundancies however, and this left an ageing workforce in place which was incapable of supplying the requisite playing resources to sustain the club at senior level.[12] By the end of the decade it had become apparent that the club needed to externally recruit players on professional terms to remain competitive within the Free State League, and dialogue surrounding the prospect was characterised by much apprehension within the GAU. Amid an air of indecision the management of the brewery intervened. Although it officially stated that any decision regarding the impending professionalization of the club was solely the responsibility of the committee of the GAU, it informally notified its members that any course that would result in a loss of status or prestige within the association football structure was wholly undesirable.[13] Apparently the promotional value of possessing an association football club that was highly visible within the national sporting landscape outweighed the financial cost of sustaining the club in the Free State League. Despite this, it is certain that neither the brewery management nor the GAU officials that were

[10] *Irish Independent*, 19 Jan. 1931.
[11] David Needham, *Ireland's first World Cup: the story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic football team* (Dublin, 2012), chapter 7, available on kindle.
[12] Guinness Athletic Union director's files, A.H.C. Barker to the managing director, 28 Mar. 1928 (Guinness Storehouse, GAU archive, GDB/CO04.06/0050.02).
[13] Guinness Athletic Union director's files, 'The St James's Gate Association Football Team No. 4798' (marked as confidential) (Guinness Storehouse, GAU archive, GDB/CO04.06/0050.02).

involved in the discussions could have predicted the level of dependency that would emerge between the club and the company during the 1930s, as the crowds that attended senior fixtures declined and the club was faced with mounting financial deficits.[14]

It was not only Dublin that provided industrial clubs with the capacity to compete at the highest level of the Irish game, and the emergence of the Fordson club, which was formed by employees of the Ford motor manufacturer based in Cork's marina area in 1921, also warrants attention.[15] After a meteoric rise in local competition, Fordson was elected to the Free State League in 1924 before claiming the Free State Cup for Munster for the first time two years later. The club was afforded substantial and passionate local support, which is vividly described by David Toms in his informative *Sport in History* article on the 1926 cup success. Fordsons became a mainstay of the Free State League during the 1920s until the club was confronted with a similar situation to that which would lead to the demise of Jacobs and the professionalization of St James's Gate. Faced with the spiralling cost of maintaining a club at national level the management of the Ford factory informed the club's committee that it was withdrawing its support, and would only be associated with a factory team that competed locally.[16] The replacement of Fordson by the Cork Football Club in the Free State League during the summer of 1930 marked the beginning of a decade that bore witness to the culmination of an era in which clubs that were reliant on industrial paternalism could be considered among the hierarchy of the sport in the south of the country.

At more localised scales association football and industry continued to remain highly compatible however. The Free State's industrial employers clearly provided an environment that was conducive to a strong association football culture and a social focal point for employees, and indeed members of the wider community. As such the sport was an integral component of workplaces throughout the country at varying dimensions. Although the Dundalk club had become aesthetically disassociated from the Great Northern Railway Company by the time it became an established member of the Free State League, its origins were indicative of similar processes that were evident in the formation of a multitude of clubs founded in workplaces, ranging from railway

[14] Guinness Athletic Union director's files, J.F Crawford to the trustees of the Iveagh Ground, 4 May 1932 (Guinness Storehouse, GAU archive, GDB/CO04.06/0050.04).
[15] *Munster Express*, 7 Feb. 1930.
[16] Nigel O'Mahony (ed.), *Century of Cork soccer memories*, magazine produced by *Cork Evening Echo*, (Cork, 1995), p. 18.

companies and the construction sector to tertiary traders, such as butchers and fruiterers, and the civil service. Workers' football clubs had the potential to raise morale and increase productivity, and great pride was taken in the defeat of a rival firm or factory, or victory in one of the inter-company or inter-house league competitions that were a feature of the association football landscape in urban centres such as Dublin, Cork and Waterford.[17] As was the case with all areas of Irish society after independence ideological criticism of the degenerating influence of British cultural practices within the Irish workplace was forthcoming. There were even calls for the produce manufactured by companies that encouraged association football amongst its employees to be proscribed in some cases, although it is clear that when provided with the opportunity to portray social identification through sporting and recreational pursuit the primary concern of the Irish working-classes was the association code.[18]

Working-class patronage of association football in Dublin

The working-class characterisation of association football was particularly evident in Dublin, and the parliamentary debates surrounding the introduction of the entertainment tax in 1932 serve to highlight the public perception of a sport that was readily connected to the city's industrial population. It was widely remarked in both the Dáil and the Seanad that the tax that was to be placed upon association football effectively amounted to a financial imposition on the section of society that could least afford to absorb it.[19] The speakers that opposed the prospective levy also provide vivid descriptions of the prominence of the sport in the capital. The reverence in which the game was held by large sections of Dublin's population is clearly evident in the testimonies of deputies such as Patrick McGilligan, who attested that 'there is no game which brings out more enthusiasm in the city than the game of Association Football'.[20] Likewise, the sheer scale of the popular patronage is apparent in the commentary of Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll, the sister of the revolutionary leader Michael Collins, when she describes the sight of huge crowds leaving Dalymount Park and contemplates 'where they have

[17] Plunket Carter, 'Soccer in Cork city'.
[18] *Nenagh Guardian*, 23 Apr. 1938.
[19] 'Finance Bill, 1932 - Committee (Resumed)', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 1, 5 July 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/07/05/00028.asp [27 Aug. 2013].
[20] Deputy P. McGilligan, 'Finance Bill, 1932 - Committee (Resumed)', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 1, 5 July 1932, available from http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/07/05/00028.asp [27 Aug. 2013].

all come from, the crowd is so large'.[21] Association football certainly thrived amid the economic hardship and squalid living conditions that characterised urban life in the increasingly overcrowded capital, and during the inter-war period clubs were evident throughout the length and breadth of the city. The expansion of the sport in Dublin in statistical terms has been addressed in earlier chapters, and it appears as though at certain junctures the number of clubs that were forming outpaced the available playing resources in the city, leading to problems pertaining to the sustainability of teams. It is also apparent that crowds that attended junior games in the capital could be significantly inferior to those recorded in provincial centres. This can be explained simply by the abundance of games that spectators could choose between on any given weekend however, and despite what at first glance appear to be rather low attendance figures across many games there is no doubt that a fervent and fanatical association football scene existed in Dublin throughout the era.[22]

The hub of the junior game in Dublin was undoubtedly the city's Phoenix Park, which held a long-standing association football tradition. In 1901 the Commissioner for the Board of Public Works had agreed to lay a number of playing pitches in the area of the park known as 'the Fifteen Acres'. Of the thirty-one available pitches twenty-nine were used for association football, and, predictably, protests pertaining to the near monopolisation of the grounds swiftly emanated from interests associated with the GAA.[23] The dominant position of association football within the Phoenix Park would come under threat amid the prevailing intolerance of the remnants of British culture in the post-independence era however, and in January 1923 Cumann na nGaedhael politician and staunch GAA supporter, J.J. Walsh, called for the pitches on 'the Fifteen Acres' to be reallocated for Gaelic games.[24] The best eight pitches were duly confiscated in March which caused 'less surprise than regret' within the association football administration.[25] The decision exhibited a clear short-sightedness on the part of local authorities that failed to consider the importance of the association code to Dublin's population, as it became clear that even the confines of the sport's stronghold within the capital offered little sanctuary from attempts at cultural cleansing.

[21] Deputy M. Collins-O'Driscoll, 'Finance Bill, 1932 - Committee (Resumed)', Dáil Éireann, vol. 43, no. 3, 7 July 1932, available at http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/07/07/00012.asp [27 Aug. 2013].
[22] Frank Lynch, *A history of Athlone Town FC: the first 101 years* (Athlone, 1991), p. 147.
[23] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 12.
[24] *Irish Independent*, 30 Jan. 1923.
[25] Ibid., 26 Mar. 1923.

In 1925 a government survey deduced that the twenty-four pitches that were currently available to association football within 'the Fifteen Acres' were insufficient when considered in conjunction with relative demand. Despite this, no alteration of the existing arrangement was to be forthcoming.[26] The perceived injustice of the pitch allocation led to debate within the media, with one contributor to the *Irish Independent* arguing that 'although the people of Ireland were deprived of many privileges under the old regime they were always allowed perfect freedom of movement in the Phoenix Park'.[27] Despite the propagation of similar arguments authorities were generally unreceptive to approaches from association football interests. The attitudes of the local authorities did not alter either the standing or popularity of association football among the capital's sporting community however, and during the 1930s local clubs were in a position to avail of the increased amount of public space and parklands that were being developed by the Dublin Corporation throughout the city.[28] As more football pitches were laid clubs increasingly began to play their fixtures within their own localities, and in some regards the dependency on the Phoenix Park was lessened, although 'the Fifteen Acres' undoubtedly remained integral to the functionality of association football in Dublin throughout the inter-war period.[29]

The culture of street football

For those that engaged with association football at recreational level in the Free State's urban centres the lack of available public space gave rise to a culture of street football, and youths and adults alike participated in informal games on streets and thoroughfares as the popular appeal of the sport increased. Prior to independence the suspicion of public gatherings among the British authorities had led to a strong reaction against street football, and in the Free State the Gardaí proved to be equally as intolerant of the practice as arrests and summonses became relatively common. In the first half of 1925 alone 821 cases against people suspected of 'obstructing the public thoroughfares' were brought before the courts in Dublin, and media coverage of the issue suggests that street football was a legitimate public nuisance that caused considerable irritation to the

[26] Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland*, p. 12.
[27] *Irish Independent*, 7 Feb. 1927.
[28] Dublin city parks – Dublin Corporation parks and landscapes services division, pamphlet produced by Dublin Corporation.
[29] *Sunday Independent*, 5 Dec. 1937.

inhabitants of urban centres.[30] Noise pollution, damage to property, and even personal injuries to by-passers were frequently reported in the press.[31] Concerns pertaining to the safety of those that took to the streets to play football were also to the fore, and were greatly enhanced as the period progressed in response to a significant increase in the amount of motor vehicles on Irish roads.[32]

The death of a fourteen-year-old boy after a collision with a vehicle in Dublin in June 1927 prompted a strong reaction from the local community. The incident led one social commentator, writing in the *Irish Independent*, to surmise popular concerns by claiming that 'Dublin is scandalously behind other cities in respect to open spaces and playing grounds for children', before bemoaning the fact that the Phoenix Park was 'out of reach for most slum-dwelling children who cannot afford the tram fare even to the outskirts of the park'.[33] Organisations such as the Irish Women Workers' Union became involved in the debate, and called on local authorities to develop derelict sites within the city as public parks, and it is glaringly evident that the law enforcement issues that were being encountered as a result of street football were directly related to the lack of available space for games and not any widespread public disorder.[34] In Dublin it was estimated that a mere 5.7 acres of open space per 1,000 inhabitants was available within the city during the 1920s, while in Cork the figure stood at just 0.54 acres per 1,000 residents.[35] The lack of space for games was an obvious concern, and there was certainly validity in the defence of youths that were arrested for playing football on the mall in Castlebar in 1936, when they argued that there was simply nowhere else for them to play.[36] According to parliamentary debates from the late 1930s civic disturbances that were resultant of street football were apparently in decline as additional parks were opened up, and as dances and the cinema afforded urban inhabitants with a broader choice of social activity. Despite this, the eradication of the practice was completely impractical and street football remained a constant feature of

[30] *Irish Independent*, 25 June 1925.
[31] David Toms, 'Those pesky kids! football on the street', available at http://thedustbinofhistory.wordpress.com/2013/02/06/those-pesky-kids-football-on-the-street/ [25 Apr. 2013].
[32] *Irish Independent*, 30 Sept. 1931.
[33] Ibid., 15 June 1927.
[34] Ibid., 22 July 1927.
[35] Kevin Hourihan, 'The evolution and influence of town planning in Cork', in Patrick O'Flanagan & Cornelius G. Buttimer (eds) *Cork: history and society, interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1993), p. 958.
[36] *Connaught Telegraph*, 6 June 1936.

urban life, and continued to serve as the stage on which burgeoning players that aspired to play the game at the highest level developed their skills.[37]

Representations of association football players

Association football was a relatively inclusive sport and individuals that participated came from a variety of divergent backgrounds. Despite this, a perception of those that played the game as an unruly and anti-social rabble had been instilled in the popular consciousness by the inter-war period. As wealth was generally no barrier to participation it is perhaps unsurprising that the working-class character of the sport came to be associated with a rather decadent representation within social commentaries. This representation is evident in a joke that appeared in the *Anglo-Celt* publication in May 1921. The joke stated that when players were sent from the pitch it was necessary for them to be accompanied to the dressing room to prevent them from stealing the belongings of their teammates, and this offers a candid insight into how association footballers were perceived in the public eye.[38] In truth the behaviour of some players on the field did little to alter such preconceptions. Both the records of the FAI and contemporary match reports are littered with accounts of players fighting with each other, or with spectators, and the intimidation of referees and even physical attacks on match officials were strikingly common.[39] In extreme cases fatalities were known to have occurred as a result of players engaging in fights during matches, and the death of a twenty-three-year-old man who was set upon by opposing players at a game in the Phoenix Park in 1924 caused shock and outrage in the national media, and resulted in murder charges against three individuals that had allegedly been involved in the fracas.[40]

As stated in the previous chapter the popular perception of association football was also increasingly imbued with a representation of the sport as a professionalised game that was played for financial gain. The reality was somewhat different however, and most of

[37] Deputy T. Linehan, 'Committee on Finance - Vote 45 - Office of the Minister for Education', Dáil Éireann, vol. 70, no. 8, 24 Mar. 1938, available at http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1938/03/24/00010.asp [27 Aug. 2013].
[38] *Anglo-Celt*, 14 May 1921.
[39] Minute book of the protests and appeals and emergency committees of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1921 – Oct. 1928, meeting of the protests and appeals committee, 22 Nov. 1922 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/14); Minute book of the protests and appeals and emergency committees of the Football Association of Ireland, Oct. 1928 – Jan. 1932, meeting of the emergency committee, 19 Oct. 1928 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/15)
[40] *Irish Independent*, 9 Dec. 1924.

those that participated in the sport did so purely for enjoyment and recreation. Even those that were fortunate enough to receive payment from clubs generally did not make a living exclusively from association football, and most footballers twinned their playing duties with other forms of employment. Even at the highest level of the game players were often unavailable for their clubs because of work commitments, and it was particularly difficult for clubs to field all of their best players for fixtures that took place on Saturdays or on weekdays.[41] Problems relating to the availability of footballers are also evident at international level, and a player's chance of representing his country could be affected by the nature of his employment, as was the case when Walter Walsh of Waterford turned down an invitation from the FAIFS during the 1930s for fear of losing his job at a local construction firm.[42] The prospective cost of recompensing players for loss of earnings also dissuaded the FAIFS from considering invitations for lengthy international tours to the Americas during the inter-war period, and it is clear that employment concerns took precedence over association football for most individuals, which is completely understandable given the difficulties involved in finding work in such a dismal economic environment.[43]

Footballers that signed professional terms were effectively at the mercy of clubs in terms of their playing careers due to the restrictive nature of contracts. The contractual structure employed by Free State clubs was identical to the retain-and-transfer system which had long been an established feature of the professional game in Britain. Within the existing arrangement clubs held the registration of players and were solely responsible for decisions on whether they could join other clubs, even if the stated contractual obligations had been concluded. The system was designed to act as a protection from the poaching of players for clubs that possessed less financial resources than their contemporaries. It did not serve as a protection against poaching from Britain however, and as previously discussed in reference to international relations between the FAIFS and the national associations of Britain, the refusal of the International Board to recognise the processes of the FAIFS left the clubs under its auspices susceptible to losing their best talent to cross-channel clubs for either nominal transfer fees or no recompense whatsoever. The financial rewards that were available to professional

[41] O'Mahony, *Century of Cork soccer memories*, p. 27.
[42] Minute book of the senior international team 1931 – 1939, J. Holden (secretary Waterford FC) to J. Ryder, 16 Nov. 1935 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/42).
[43] Minute book of the international affairs committee of the Football Association of Ireland, Mar. 1936 – Nov. 1956, meeting of the international affairs committee, 26 Aug. 1936 (U.C.D., FAI Archive, P137/39).

footballers in Britain unsurprisingly led to an exodus of young Irish talent during the period under review, and as early as 1923 it was estimated that upwards of sixty players born in the area that had become the Irish Free State were employed as professionals in the English and Scottish leagues.[44] Despite this the number of players that participated at the highest level of the British game was relatively select considering the amount that made the move. In this regard individuals, such as Alex Stevenson, Harry Duggan, Paddy Moore, Tom Farquharson and Johnny Carey that were equally lauded for their talent on both sides of the Irish Sea were few and far between.[45]

The threat of injury was also a concern for those that participated in association football at all levels during the inter-war period, as a serious injury sustained on the field of play could potentially curtail a player's ability to work and to provide for his family. Such anxieties were based in the frequent occurrences of broken limbs and concussions in matches throughout the country, and there is no doubt that association football was an overtly rough and physical athletic pursuit when judged by today's standards. Although certain GAA discourses attempted to feminise association football,[46] and those that participated in the sport, some media commentators considered it more dangerous than sports such as boxing and rugby, and a level of toughness was certainly required for participation.[47] At a time before substitutions were permitted footballers were expected to continue playing despite injury, and an incident that occurred in a fixture between Jacobs and St James's Gate in late 1921 offers a valuable insight into the playing culture surrounding the sport, as two players were taken to a local hospital for treatment after a clash of heads only to return with their wounds stitched to complete the match.[48] On occasion injuries sustained during association football games proved fatal. The most publicised football-related death was that of twenty-two year old Gerard O'Sullivan, who collapsed after a shield fixture while playing for Bohemians in April 1931.[49] The rough nature of the game was a concern portrayed frequently within the media, where it was felt that the English referees that had been increasingly commissioned to oversee the most important fixtures in the Free State were too lenient in their approach to

[44] *Irish Independent*, 17 Sept. 1923.
[45] Patrick West, *Beating them at their own game: how the Irish conquered English soccer* (Dublin, 2006), p. 25.
[46] David Toms, 'Not withstanding the discomfort involved'.
[47] *Irish Independent*, 4 Dec. 1919; 4 Oct. 1938.
[48] *Sunday Independent*, 27 Nov. 1921.
[49] *Irish Independent*, 9 Apr. 1931.

discipline.[50] The FAIFS also attempted to address the over-physicality that existed within the sport with the threat of fines, suspensions and expulsions at certain junctures, although the game continued to be played with a vigorousness that was demanded by spectators.[51]

Irish association football players could achieve relative fame. The best players residing at clubs in the Free State League became household names within the association football community, and were revered by followers of the sport throughout the country. Association football enthusiasts eagerly turned out to attend benefit games that were held for injured players or testimonial matches that were organised by clubs for a team member that had provided lengthy service. Such occasions could provide an individual with a measure of financial security after their career had ended, or perhaps supply the capital for an investment or business opportunity. The media descriptions of the ceremony surrounding fixtures that were held in appreciation of stalwarts of the Dublin game, such as Val Harris of Shelbourne and William 'Sacky' Glen of Shamrock Rovers, serve to highlight their standing within local societies. Both men were afforded well-attended testimonial games, Harris at the beginning of the period and Glen towards its conclusion, and such occasions portray a great sense of popular admiration for footballers.[52] Although clubs could sometimes provide popular players with positions that encompassed coaching responsibilities, medical and physiotherapy roles, or ground maintenance duties, most players recoiled from the sport after their retirement, and when the routine of participation in association football was curtailed there is no doubt that isolation and loneliness became a factor. Pamela Dixon and Neal Garnham have undertaken a study on the relationship between retired footballers and alcohol in researching association football in Britain and Ireland during the Victorian period, and within a culture that was enmeshed with drinking and the public house there is little to suggest that issues relating to alcoholism were not as prevalent in the lives of ex-players during the inter-war period.[53]

[50] *Irish Press*, 22 Oct. 1931.
[51] Ibid., 2 Dec. 1931.
[52] *Freeman's Journal*, 5 May 1922; *Irish Independent*, 1 Apr. 1937.
[53] Pamela Dixon and Neal Garnham, 'Drink and the professional footballer in 1890s Britain and Ireland', in *Sport in history*, 25, no. 3 (2005), pp 374-89.

The developing supporter culture surrounding association football

Alcohol also played a central role in a growing supporter culture within the association football community, which is wholly unsurprising considering the part that drinking played in the social lives of the Free State's urban populations. The fact that the state possessed twice as many public houses in proportion to its population than that of England, and three times as many as Scotland is a telling statistic in validating such observations.[54] During the inter-war period the association football community was primarily, although not exclusively, the domain of working-class males. Again parliamentary debates authenticate media observations, with deputies such as the aforementioned Patrick McGilligan and J.J. Byrne respectively referring to association football as 'a game which destroys the tedium of work for working men' and 'a poor man's amusement' during the early 1930s.[55] Although many of the sport's followers found it difficult to find the disposable income required to regularly attend football matches, and, as has been described in chapter five, clubs were far from preoccupied with the economic plight of their supporters, a great affinity between association football clubs and the public was developed throughout the period. In this sense clubs undoubtedly formed an integral part of urban communities, not least through generous contributions they regularly made to a wide array of charitable causes.[56]

Like their GAA counterparts association football clubs served as a vehicle for the portrayal of social and geographic identities, despite the fact that the nature of the sport dictated that the players that represented clubs were not necessarily from within the localities in which they were based. Uruguayan novelist, Eduardo Galeano, describes the manner in which association football provides a sense of belonging for the individual within a group construct, and for many people the sport was an important outlet for self-expression and a means of gaining social acceptance.[57] Crowds that attended association football matches during the inter-war period became increasingly partisan in their support of their favoured clubs. Some adorned the colours of their teams on hats, caps and coat lapels, while badges and rosettes were also worn by the

[54] The limits of liberty, RTE documentary presented by Prof. Diarmaid Ferriter (3 Nov. 2011).
[55] Deputy P. McGilligan & Deputy J.J. Byrne, 'Finance Bill – From the Seanad', Dáil Eireann, vol. 43, no. 10, 3 Aug. 1932, available at http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1932/08/03/00006.asp [27 Aug. 2013].
[56] *Irish Independent*, 2 May 1922; 18 Aug. 1928.
[57] Joe McGinniss, *The miracle of Castel di Sangro: a tale of passion and folly in the heart of Italy* (New York, 2000), p. 239.

most fanatical of followers.[58] Association football crowds could also be extremely vociferous and boisterous in conveying their support. They could be cruel in criticising their own players, or in heckling those of the opposition, and in July 1923 a contributor to the *Irish Independent* joked that the 'best players are always in the stand', before vividly describing the scenes that engendered football grounds in referring to crowds as 'a great institution for voice production on the major scale'.[59] Media depictions of the pageantry that greeted triumphant teams on their return from victories in national cup finals also provide a colourful insight into the supporter culture that had developed within the Irish game, and the standing of association football within local sporting communities. The victory of the Athlone Town club in the Free State Cup final in 1924 was followed by a 'torchlight procession' led by the customary brass band,[60] which historian James Walvin describes as 'the manifestation of the new working-class social life'.[61] Likewise, the huge crowd which carried the Fordson players shoulder high through the streets of Cork as tar barrels and bonfires blazed brightly after the Free State Cup victory two years later has previously been described within this thesis.[62]

Similar scenes were once again witnessed in Cork in 1934 when the Cork Football Club claimed the trophy for the city for a second time, with 25,000 people filling the streets as 'a vast procession with five bands' escorted the player's to their club rooms in Princes Street.[63] Victories for the Longford Town, Sligo Rovers and the Waterford clubs at national level in the late spring and early summer of 1937 were also followed by excited displays of local exuberance among supporters.[64] In Dublin supporter culture was just as evident as it was in provincial centres, and was particularly observable on the occasion of cup matches. Tradition dictated that when the Shamrock Rovers club reached the Free State Cup final its supporters would parade behind a white horse through the streets of Dublin on route to the game,[65] while the press described the manner in which 'many a thrifty housewife...brought forth her husband's club colours' for what was referred to as the 'annual disease' of the cup competition.[66] Large

[58] *Sunday Independent*, 18 Mar. 1928; *Irish Independent*, 2 Feb. 1938.
[59] *Irish Independent*, 3 July 1923.
[60] Lynch, *A history of Athlone Town FC*, p. 97.
[61] James Walvin, *The people's game: the history of football revisited* (2nd ed., Edinburgh, 2000), p. 77
[62] Toms, 'Not withstanding the discomfort involved'.
[63] Plunket Carter, 'Troubled periods in Cork soccer history'.
[64] *Irish Press*, 11 May 1937; *Roscommon Herald*, 8 May 1937; *Irish Press*, 20 Apr. 1937.
[65] Interview with Robert Goggins of Tallaght, County Dublin (1 Feb. 2013).
[66] *Irish Independent*, 2 Feb. 1938

numbers of devoted supporters also regularly gathered outside the offices of newspaper companies in the state's cities to hear the latest results of their favourite clubs as they became available, and there is no doubt that supporters took great pride in the achievements of their clubs and felt their failures equally as hard.[67] As previously stated, association football supporters could also be very fickle during the inter-war period. As such they were often disinclined to attend games when their clubs were performing badly or were playing against an opponent that did not excite the popular imagination. Apparently the poorest supporters were considered to be the most loyal, which casts further doubt on the sensibility of the decision to double admission charges to senior games in 1937, and the management of clubs such as Waterford were critical of what were described as 'bob' supporters that possessed the affluence to pay the higher entrance charges to games, but did so only infrequently and irregularly.[68]

The increased mobility of the association football community

The repair of the state's railways after the conclusion of the Civil War and the ongoing development of its road networks, which have previously been discussed in relation to the dissemination of the sport, made the association football community an increasingly mobile entity, and during the inter-war period crowds travelled in support of their favourite teams at unprecedented rates. As was the case with clubs that increasingly competed over larger geographic distances as the period progressed, association football enthusiasts were enabled to travel further and more regularly than ever before. Like their counterparts in Ulster, Free State railway companies were quick to recognise the commercial potential of transporting association football followers between urban centres, particularly as more provincial clubs entered the Free State League. As such they began to offer competitive rates to crowds that embarked on tiring excursion trips in support of their clubs.[69] Despite the gruelling schedule that often required supporters to depart on trains in the early hours of the morning, long-distance excursion trips were much anticipated social occasions, and the incorporation of Sunday play in the Free State was certainly fundamental to the processes surrounding increased mobility. The assertion of Myles Murphy, who in 1939 commented that 'the soccer public was a

[67] *Sunday Independent*, 3 Oct. 1926.
[68] *Munster Express*, 25 Mar. 1938.
[69] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football League, 1923 - 1985, meeting of the emergency committee, 17 Aug. 1927 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA archive, D4511/1/19).

Sunday public', stands as an apt summation not only of the character of the sport's followers, but also their travel habits.[70]

It is clear from the reports that appeared in contemporary newspapers on a weekly basis that a substantial amount of people that may otherwise have lived localised and parochial existences in towns and cities travelled throughout the state to watch association football. As such sporting mobility can be considered an extremely important social process. This sporting mobility also existed at a more local scale as transportation and infrastructural improvements in the Free State's urban centres provided populations that had been heavily restricted in their movement during the upheaval of the Anglo-Irish War with the means to travel within their localities with more efficiency and greater freedom. Bus and tram services were intrinsic to the movement of the association football community within Dublin throughout the inter-war period, while the new public transport network that was launched in Cork in 1931 to replace the outdated and dilapidated tram service was also central to internal mobility.[71] The arguments produced throughout this thesis have propagated the prominence of urban populations within the association football community, although that is not to discount the fact that in many cases individuals that came from what would be considered rural settings also held a strong affinity for the sport. It is apparent that provincial centres throughout the state acted as a nucleus that attracted association football enthusiasts from the surrounding countryside. Given the size of the crowds that attended fixtures in places such as Athlone and Longford in relation to the populations of these towns, it is clear that clubs were being supported by individuals from smaller towns and villages in the wider hinterland, while depictions of crowd behaviour in places such as Waterford and Sligo also suggest that support was drawn from surrounding regions as well as the urban conurbations in which clubs were based.[72]

While the supporter mobility that was associated with the senior game was defined by the movement of large crowds and organised travel schedules, the junior game provided the setting for more informal processes as association football enthusiasts made their way to matches by any means available. Accounts from Dublin from 1922 describe the manner in which lorries were utilised to transport supporters of the Edenville club of

[70] *Irish Independent*, 6 Apr. 1939.
[71] Henry Allen Jefferies, *Cork: historical perspectives* (Dublin, 2004), p. 208.
[72] *Munster Express*, 13 Feb. 1931; *Leitrim Observer*, 4 Feb. 1939.

Dun Laoghaire into the city for a local shield final against the Williamstown club of Blackrock, while supporters also tended to regularly travel in the company of the players on team buses.[73] Provincial towns also witnessed influxes of association football supporters on match days, and a depiction of the pageantry surrounding a fixture between the local Navan United club and the Lipton club of Dublin that appeared in the *Meath Chronicle* in April 1928 offers a colourful insight into the spectacle of junior games. On this occasion the Lipton team was accompanied by three buses full with supporters adorning the colours of their clubs, as well as by a miniature jazz band that led the visitors on a procession through the streets of Navan prior to the match.[74] The junior game also appears to have been a more inclusive gender space with contemporary press reports alluding to a significant female presence, and perhaps the more intimate surroundings of junior football were more welcoming for women who were connected to clubs by spousal or familial relationships or through social linkage. The fact that many junior games were reportedly followed by pre-arranged dances or related functions also hints at the participation of 'the fairer sex' in the social processes surrounding the sport, and association football was invariably just as appealing to, and accepting of, female involvement as it was of the conventional male contribution in certain circumstances.[75]

Press commentaries on the last two national finals of the inter-war period indicate the level to which a strong culture had developed within the association football community in respect to supporter mobility. The *Irish Independent* depicted the following that the Sligo Rovers club was expected to receive in the 1939 FAI Cup final as what will be 'the greatest soccer following that ever crossed the Shannon'.[76] Likewise, the *Irish Press* predicted that the Donegal town of Killybegs would resemble 'Goldsmith's Deserted Village' for the FAI Junior Cup final, and these reports clearly portray the continued inclination and willingness of local enthusiasts to travel over large distances in support of their clubs.[77] Although incoming supporters were undoubtedly beneficial to regional economies in augmenting the profits of shopkeepers, publicans and hoteliers, many locals became increasingly apprehensive about the prospect of large association

[73] Joe Dodd, 'The first sixty years', George Briggs & Joe Dodd (eds.), *Leinster Football Association: 100 years, the centenary handbook* (Dublin, 1992), p. 44.
[74] *Meath Chronicle*, 7 Apr. 1928.
[75] Ibid., 22 June 1929.
[76] *Irish Independent*, 19 Apr. 1939.
[77] *Irish Press*, 5 May 1939.

football crowds visiting their towns.[78] This trepidation was fuelled by unfavourable representations that emerged in the media which portrayed association football crowds as confrontational, volatile and aggressive entities. Although such characterisations can be considered harsh, the frequency with which crowd disturbances were reported certainly made concerns pertaining to the potential for trouble quite legitimate.

Spectator violence within the association football community

Spectator violence had been evident within association football in Ireland throughout the pre-independence era. It had become particularly pronounced in Ulster as tensions intensified during the republican push from Home Rule, with large-scale rioting and even gunfire reported at football grounds in Belfast during the early twentieth century.[79] Although instances of violence were somewhat less serious and more infrequent in the south of the country worrying trends began to emerge in the period immediately preceding the split as crowds in Dublin appear to have become increasingly volatile and unpredictable. Disturbances at fixtures became more common as the *Freeman's Journal* spoke in 1919 of 'the danger of inciting the roughs of the crowd, who nowadays need very little excuse for mobbing', while, as stated in the opening chapter, the threat of sectarian violence when northern teams played in the capital was a contributing factor to the events leading to the split.[80] While Ulster descended into political violence that would claim the lives of around 550 people during the early 1920s and displace countless others, sectarian tensions manifested within an association football community that reflected the Catholic and Protestant divide that was tearing northern society apart.[81] During this period civil disturbances were being reported at matches in Belfast on a weekly basis.[82] In the territory that would become the Irish Free State what Dermot Keogh describes as the 'religious homogeneity' of the population effectively eliminated sectarian and politically-motivated violence from association football.[83] Crowds did remain prone to aggression and occasional violence however, and the inter-war period is littered with reports of disturbances at matches, as well as

[78] *Munster Express*, 8 Aug. 1930.
[79] Neal Garnham, *The origins and development of football in Ireland: being a reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880* (Belfast, 1999), p. 22.
[80] *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Dec. 1919.
[81] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972* (2nd ed., London, 1989), p. 526; Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (2nd ed., London, 2005), p. 282.
[82] *Sunday Independent*, 10 Dec. 1922.
[83] Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2005), p. 28.

condemnation of the acceptance of such practices from within sections of the community.

Rising trends of supporter violence surrounding association football in the south of Ireland during the early 1920s mirrored trends that were emerging throughout Europe. In places such as Scotland, where the sport was endowed with a similar sectarian characterisation to that of Ulster,[84] in Scandinavia, where a drinking culture around fixtures led to growing public disorder,[85] and in Central Europe and Italy, where populations that had been exposed to the violence of the Great War era and the political unrest that followed were swift to become aggressive, association football was marred by unpleasantness and inherent danger.[86] While the disturbances that were reported in the Free State were not as widespread or ferocious as elsewhere they were certainly serious enough to tarnish the popular perception of the game. Although the vast majority of games passed off without incident, fights between rival supporters were reported throughout the period under review. Possibly the most violent of these episodes occurred in April 1928 when over 100 spectators were involved in altercations at a game in Dundalk between the local club and Bohemians of Dublin, which was the culmination of a number of less serious incidents during the preceding weeks.[87] The furore that followed was enough to compel the FAIFS to launch an investigation into the cause of the fighting, and it was predictably ascertained that the level of stewarding at the ground had been wholly insufficient to react to the situation as it had developed.[88]

The reality was that clubs were not in a position to deploy large numbers of stewards to control any potential disturbances as many of those that worked at football grounds during fixtures did so voluntarily. Likewise, the deployment of Gardaí for the purpose of crowd control could be problematic. Records reveal that when clubs came upon financial trouble during the 1930s they were inclined to dispense with the services of Gardaí at their grounds as they could not afford the expense of hiring them.[89] Even when Gardaí were commissioned they were hardly in a position to control large crowds. When it is considered that less than twenty Gardaí were commissioned for the 1926

[84] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, p. 187
[85] Ibid., p. 220.
[86] Ibid., p. 242.
[87] *Irish Independent*, 18 Apr. 1928.
[88] Ibid., 11 May 1928.
[89] An Garda Síochána: Gardaí services requisitioned, Dolphin Association Football Club Limited, 1937 (National Archives of Ireland, 90/5/45).

Free State Cup final, which was attended by over 25,000 spectators,[90] it is clear that they were effectively powerless in the event of a large-scale disturbance and that supporters were essentially expected to police themselves.[91] In this sense it is to the credit of supporters that serious incidents did not occur with greater frequency. While association football crowds could be intimidating, they were generally good-natured, and invariably it was a minority element within the association football community that tainted the representation of their contemporaries. The supporters of certain clubs became more associated with anti-social and aggressive behaviour than others during the inter-war period. The Bray Unknowns club were consistently warned by authorities about the conduct of their supporters during the early 1920s.[92] Likewise, the followers of the Shelbourne and Waterford clubs were involved in violent clashes on a number of occasions during 1930,[93] before the management committee at Waterford threatened to withdraw the club from the Free State League in 1937 after continued disturbances at its fixtures.[94] A well-known Dublin referee also referred to sections of the Dundalk support-base as 'cornerboys', before describing them as 'the most cowardly lot of blackguards that ever attended a football match', after the aforementioned incident against Bohemians in 1928,[95] and a concerned FAIFS did sporadically attempt to address the issue with further threats of fines, suspensions and banishment from the sport for clubs in extreme cases.[96]

Spectator violence could be just as pronounced at junior level as it was within the senior game, and several disturbing incidents were reported in various parts of the country during the period. Among the most serious were the scenes that were reported in late 1931 when a fixture in Ardee in County Louth descended into rioting after the referee had abandoned the match because of crowd trouble. In this instance players and supporters, including a number of the women that had been in attendance, duly took to

[90] Alex Graham, *Football in the Republic of Ireland: a statistical record, 1921 – 2005* (Lincolnshire, 2005), p. 8.
[91] Minute book of the protest and appeals and emergency committees of the Football Association of Ireland, Nov. 1921- Oct. 1928, meeting of the emergency committee, 4 Mar. 1926 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/14).
[92] *Freeman's Journal*, 2 Mar. 1922.
[93] *Irish Independent*, 15 Sept. 1930; *Munster Express*, 12 Dec. 1930.
[94] *Irish Press*, 1 Sept. 1937.
[95] Minute book of the protest and appeals and emergency committees of the Football Association of Ireland, 1921-1932, J.J. Kelly (Referee's Association of the IFS) to the editor, 3 Oct. 1929 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/14).
[96] *Irish Independent*, 20 Oct. 1928.

the streets of the town to fight with weapons including hurling sticks and fire-irons.[97] Similar violent scenes were also recorded at a junior fixture in Waterford in 1937 when fighting between spectators carrying glass bottles left some supporters with 'blood-streamed faces' and left the pitch resembling a warzone.[98] There was the suggestion that the nature of such incidents were exaggerated in the media by interests that sought to portray association football in an unfavourable light, and whether such claims carry any validity is unclear and impossible to prove. Further assertions that GAA enthusiasts were purposely attending association football games with the intention of inciting violence appear fanciful however, and such claims were in all likelihood manufactured as a means of passing responsibility for the problems that existed within elements of the association football community to an alternative source.[99]

One of the most frustrating aspects of spectator behaviour at junior level was undoubtedly the inclination of crowds to interrupt matches to save the team that they supported from losing. Crowds regularly encroached on the pitch and caused the abandonment of fixtures, which understandably enraged media commentators who lamented the fact that control of the game was being taken out of the hands of referees.[100] In many ways individuals that refereed association football games had a thankless task, and often became the focus of spectator violence. Physical attacks or threats made against referees were a common feature of association football during the inter-war period, and at times officiating at fixtures could be a highly dangerous profession. The safety of referees was a pressing concern for the sport's administration. It worried that a similar incident to that which occurred in Italy in 1920 when a referee was beaten to death by spectators could occur within their jurisdiction, as it was widely recognised that accepted societal norms were replaced by a mob culture that could potentially get out of hand in the volatile environs of football grounds.[101] The implicit threat of violence against referees was also portrayed in the media with one contributor to the *Sunday Independent* in 1927 joking that match officials required a 'suit of armour' to protect themselves,[102] while three years later reports of a crowd of up to 200 people chasing a referee to the local Garda station in Bray and waiting outside for his

[97] *Leitrim Observer*, 5 Dec. 1931.
[98] *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1937.
[99] Ibid., 11 May 1928.
[100] Ibid., 16 Dec. 1925.
[101] *Freeman's Journal*, 5 May 1920.
[102] *Sunday Independent*, 17 Apr. 1927

re-emergence did little to improve the perception of the association football community within wider society.[103]

Again it must be emphasised that it was a small minority within the association football community that engaged in violence or anti-social behaviour, and in many ways the issues that emerged during the period were societal concerns that merely manifested within the structure of the sport. Participation in association football crowds served as a means for an often demoralised section of the working-class population to anonymously vent their frustration with their surroundings and the conditions in which they lived in a non-judgemental environment, without fear of reprimand or punishment. In this regard the violence that was associated with the sport in the Free State during the inter-war period can be considered in the context of social disaffection, and it was incomparable to the political and sectarian violence that continuously blighted the northern game. Although several serious incidents did occur in southern Ireland throughout the period the popular representation of the association football community as an uncontrollable and unruly entity was fundamentally false and principally unfair, and it is unfortunate that the actions of the few had the effect of tarnishing the reputation of the wider construct.

In some respects the spectator violence that characterised association football in the south of the country during the inter-war period was a by-product of the sport's built environment, and the underdeveloped nature of its grounds and facilities has been discussed in a previous chapter. Football grounds were typically in a dilapidated condition, and the description of the ground used by the St James's Gate club provided in correspondence between the management of the Guinness brewery and the GAU in 1924 offers a vivid portrayal of a space that had fallen into a state of decay and disrepair. The depiction includes references to worn paintjobs, broken railings and cracked exterior walls, and there is no doubt that such enclosures could be cold, drab and unwelcoming places for association football enthusiasts, particularly for games that were sparsely attended.[104] Conversely, grounds that were filled to capacity for important or attractive fixtures could be even more uncomfortable, and contemporary media reports suggest that crowd congestion was an issue that represented a significant

[103] *Munster Express*, 14 Nov. 1930.
[104] Guinness Athletic Union director's records, C.E. Sutton to J. Lumsden, 4 Jan. 1924 (St. James's Gate, GAU archive, GDB/CO04.06/0050.02).

risk to the well-being of spectators.[105] There were apparently no restrictions in place on the numbers that were allowed access to football grounds, and overcrowding often impaired the visibility of supporters and left them with obstructed views of proceedings on the pitch. This led to light-hearted suggestions that spectators should be lined up according to their height outside the grounds before entry was permitted to allow the shortest individuals to make their way to the front of the terraces and embankments.[106] To this effect a provision that allowed children access to the grounds a half hour before the stated admission time was wisely introduced by the FAIFS in 1936 to afford young supporters a better view from a safer vantage point.[107]

Surprisingly discussion on the implicit dangers of overcrowding at association football grounds was uncommon within the media. Considering the existence of reports that include descriptions of overflows of spectators being forced to break through perimeter fencing to find positions of relative comfort on the sidelines of the playing pitch it is perhaps fortunate that no incident resulting in large-scale injuries or fatalities occurred during the period.[108] Improvements to grounds were infrequent and minimal, and were dictated by the general lack of finance within the sport, and as the GAA acquired and built grounds in a number of provincial centres during the 1930s association football's infrastructure began to appear increasingly primitive.[109] The primary exception to the lack of ground development was the Bohemian club, which undertook expensive and extensive construction initiatives at Dalymount Park during the 1920s and 1930s,[110] some of which were charged to the care of world-renowned stadium architect Archibald Leitch, who had been responsible for designing several of Britain's most iconic grounds.[111] As has previously been discussed throughout this thesis in relation to the development of the sport at regional level, the grounds and facilities used within the association football structure at junior level were even more underdeveloped, and the fact that most clubs played in municipal parks or on privately-owned land made improvements impractical.

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[105] *Irish Independent*, 18 Mar. 1926.
[106] Ibid., 26 Feb. 1921.
[107] Minute book of the finance committee of the Football Association of Ireland, meeting of the finance committee, 3 Dec. 1936 (U.C.D., FAI archive, P137/12).
[108] *Irish Independent*, 18 Mar. 1824.
[109] Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan & Paul Rouse, *The GAA: a people's history* (Cork, 2009), p. 126.
[110] Phil Howlin, *Bohemian times*, available at: http://www.bohemians.ie/club/history/87-bohemian-times.html [12 June 2012].
[111] Mike Cronin & Roisín Higgins, *Places we play: Ireland's sporting heritage* (Cork, 2011), p. 105.

Greater connection with association football through the media

For individuals that did not attend football grounds during the period engagement with association football was made increasingly possible through a variety of alternative avenues. The importance of the printed media in conjunction to the dissemination and development of association football, the formation of popular perceptions of the sport, and the transmittance of information into the public sphere has been discussed throughout this thesis, and there is no doubt that press publications widened the appeal of the sport and the construct of the association football community. While Dublin publications such as *Sport* and *The Football Sports Weekly* provided comprehensive coverage that was specific to association football, at the beginning of the period under review national newspapers consisted merely of concise reports that focussed on the specific detail of games without significant analysis of the wider issues that were impinging upon the sport. This began to change as the inter-war period progressed, and the coverage offered by national newspapers soon reflected the growing popular demand for association football. From the time of the split perceptive and forthright journalists, such as Viator in the *Sport* publication, increasingly provided detailed commentaries that conveyed their opinions to the general public, and by the 1930s analytical coverage of association football was an inherent feature of national broadsheets, not least in the writing of Pivot in the *Irish Independent* and Socaro in the *Irish Press*. Increased coverage also infiltrated regional publications to a much larger degree throughout the period, and the scale of association football reporting in the Free State press became a huge irritation to GAA enthusiasts who argued that their games were receiving inadequate media attention.[112]

Coverage of the British game also increased in the Free State media during the inter-war period, and many association football enthusiasts utilised the information that was provided to wager money on cross-channel fixtures. While betting on sporting contests had been a long-standing practice within Irish society, attempts at social engineering became a greater concern from the late nineteenth century, and as such gambling increasingly came to be viewed as an affliction of the working-classes that had to be controlled and regulated.[113] Like many social commentators, association football administrators were also highly critical of the processes surrounding gambling, although

[112] *Irish Independent*, 30 Jan. 1923; 5 June 1926; *Nenagh Guardian*, 29 Oct. 1927.
[113] *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Oct. 1921.

their concern was rooted in the preservation of the sport, and not any explicit unease with how people were choosing to spend their money. A number of highly publicised incidents in which professional footballers accepted monetary inducements to affect the outcome of fixtures in Britain during the early twentieth century had justifiably made authorities anxious of illicit influences that were attempting to corrupt the sport for their own ends. It was generally felt that the low wages that were afforded to players made them susceptible to such approaches.[114] In 1920 the mutual concerns of those that continued to denounce the immorality of gambling and association football officials led to the introduction of the Ready Money Football Betting Act that was designed to criminalise the existing unregulated coupon system of football betting.[115] The eradication of gambling from the sport was unfeasible however, and after the Irish Free State came into existence the act did allow for the creation of the pools industry in Britain through a loophole in the legislation, much to the chagrin of the IFA, and the English and Scottish Football Associations, who remained in a state of paranoia throughout the period.[116]

Although there is little to suggest that individuals that played association football in the Free State accepted payments to influence the outcome of fixtures, an incident in 1928 in which the Richmond United club of Dublin was fined the large sum of £15 and expelled from competition for alleged 'interference with the result' of a match hints that the sport may not have been as pure as it appeared on the surface.[117] The FAI, for its part, did remain firmly opposed to gambling throughout the inter-war period, and showed a willingness to act when rumours that betting was openly taking place at games involving the Cork Bohemian club reached the association's council during the autumn of 1932. In this case the club was administered with a strongly worded warning to eradicate any such practices that may have been in operation.[118] Like the spectator violence that has been described earlier in this chapter, gambling was primarily a societal issue however, and in reality there was little that administrators could do to halt the practice or dissuade members of the association football community from participation.

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[114] Goldblatt, *The ball is round*, p. 81.
[115] Ibid., p. 185.
[116] Minute book of the emergency committee of the Irish Football Association meeting of the emergency committee, 7 Feb. 1930 (P.R.O.N.I., IFA Archive, D4196/N/1).
[117] *Sunday Independent*, 19 Aug. 1928.
[118] *Irish Independent*, 8 Sept. 1932.

Aside from the printed press, the association football community was afforded the opportunity to engage with the sport through a variety of additional channels and media. Match programmes were increasingly available for public consumption at the most important fixtures in the annual schedule throughout the inter-war period, and by the late 1930s clubs such as Bohemians were commissioning programmes for all of its home fixtures.[119] Further association football literature was also accessible to Irish enthusiasts in the form of manuals that offered advice on coaching techniques as well as tactical observations on different playing styles,[120] while there was even a romance novel that was set to the backdrop of the English FA Cup on sale, which was advertised in the *Irish Independent* on Valentine's Day in 1921.[121] Instruction on how to play the game was also provided by a short picture that was shown on the screen of the St Stephen's Green cinema in Dublin during the spring of 1936,[122] and it appears that the public took a keen interest in a 'talkie' entitled 'the Great Game', that had been exhibited in cities and towns across the country in 1931, and which was based around a cup final at Wembley.[123]

The emergence of the radio during the 1920s was also an important epoch for Irish sport, although predictably it was Gaelic games that took precedence on the national broadcaster, 2RN. David Hassan describes the manner in which the Dublin-based radio station took a conscious decision to desist from providing coverage of association football during the inter-war period, although in truth the FAI was far from inconvenienced.[124] The FAI was slow to embrace the new medium. Like its counterparts in Britain and Northern Ireland, the Free State administration felt that the availability of live broadcasts of association football fixtures on the radio would dissuade spectators from attending the grounds and have a negative impact on gate receipts.[125] As a result any coverage of the sport was typically confined to delayed reports of games and eyewitness accounts from well-respected attendees.[126] Despite this a number of important fixtures were broadcast live to the Irish public during the

[119] Dodd, 'The first sixty years, p. 51.
[120] *Irish Independent*, 18 Oct. 1930.
[121] Ibid., 14 Feb. 1921.
[122] *Irish Press*, 11 Feb. 1936.
[123] *Munster Express*, 3 Apr. 1931.
[124] David Hassan, 'the GAA in Ulster', in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds), The *Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884 – 2009* (Dublin, 2009), p. 85.
[125] Robert Jeffrey, *English football; the complete illustrated history* (London, 2007), p. 80.
[126] *Irish Independent*, 19 Dec. 1936.

1930s, and radio provided an additional means for individuals that may have been unable or unwilling to physically attend football grounds to engage with the sport and to enter the association football community.[127]

Conclusion

The advent of radio was just the latest and most modern connection between the sport and the association football community, and by the end of the inter-war period this community had become an integral 'building block' not only of the wider sporting landscape, but also of mainstream Irish society. Like the game that magnetised and intertwined its individual membership, the association football community was derided for its cultural characterisation, its popular representation, and its social composition by varying sections of society with divergent concerns and agendas throughout the period, although for those that found solace from the struggles of everyday life and a sense of belonging within its construct the association football community was of paramount importance. In many cases it became an important vehicle for the portrayal of a distinct social identity. For the individual that identified with association football engagement with the sport was facilitated through participation on the streets and the limited public space available in the state's urban centres, through familial linkage or geographic proximity to particular clubs or teams, or perhaps through social extensions of the workplace. The development of the media was also fundamental to the strengthening of the bond between the sport and the individual as information expanded familiarity with the intricacies of the game and its processes beyond previous limitations and boundaries. Within this context the sporting knowledge of the association football community was undoubtedly reaching hitherto unattained and unimagined levels during the period under review.

In many ways the dynamic of the association football community was evolving during the inter-war period, and the construct that existed at the end of the 1930s was certainly different to that which had been in evidence before the split. This was dictated by the changing characterisation of the sport, and the association football community adapted to the progression of a game that developed from a concern of a limited section of the country's population to an established and widely-revered component of Ireland's

[127] Minute book of the senior council of the Football Association of Ireland, 1932-1937, meeting of the senior council, 4 Dec. 1935 (U.C.D., FAI Archive, P137/21).

sporting landscape. In this context an observable supporter culture was in the process of development. This supporter culture can be viewed through the microcosm of the increased partisanship that was portrayed at dilapidated football grounds, through the greater mobility of the crowds that followed their favourite teams across the country, and through the local and regional identities that emerged as the sport grew in popularity throughout the period. The representation of the association football community as a male-dominated sphere is glaringly apparent within the historical study of the game and its social processes, and despite evidence of limited female participation within the sport there is no doubt that this representation is wholly accurate.

Much time as been devoted to the prominence of the GAA in the local community within the field of sports history, and although significantly less deliberation has been afforded to association football, and its role, the association football community was equally important to Irish society in its own right. It encompassed such an extensive section of the country's population that to assert otherwise is to discount its impact on the lives of those that had developed an affinity with the sport, and to overlook its emergent position within Irish sporting culture. Despite the difficulties that impinged upon the sport during the 1930s, and the periods of dwindling popular participation and attendance, the strength of the association football community was rarely in question, and by the end of the inter-war period its status within the construct of Irish sport was assured. The expansion of the sport and the reverence of those that supported it placed association football in a position to become even further engrained within the popular consciousness during the period that followed the Second World War, and it is clear that the future constancy of the sport in Irish society was rooted in the development of the game and the community that surrounded it during the inter-war period.

Conclusion

A large amount of the scholarly commentary that has been produced on the history of modern Ireland has been done within the context of the political upheaval of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and this assertion is also applicable to the historiography of Irish sport. Given the unique political character of the Irish sporting landscape this is perhaps unsurprising, and the relationship that emerged between sport and nationalism as particular sports adopted cultural characterisations has proven to be a productive area of research for a plethora of sports historians. Discussion pertaining to the social processes that shaped and defined sporting activity from the time that codified games developed in Ireland has become more common within the field of sports history in recent times however, and the study of the position that sport occupied within society offers endless possibilities for further undertakings within the field. In this regard the inter-war period offers an illuminating insight into the manner in which sport became imbedded within society during a specific timeframe. It must be noted that relatively little historical commentary has been afforded to the study of sport in Ireland during the inter-war period, as academics have been inclined to devote more attention to research of the early history of organised games. As this period was marked by the early development of various sports, as well as by the establishment of the regulatory organisations that promoted individual games on a national scale, the propensity of historians to take this approach is wholly understandable, and there can be no doubting the importance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in terms of the progression of sport in Ireland, or indeed the quality of the related academic work that has been produced.

Despite this, the inter-war period can be considered an equally significant epoch in terms of the development of Irish sport, as a vast array of games and recreational pursuits became increasingly popularised and imbedded within the consciousness of the population. The period saw the Irish people reengage with sport after participation in games had waned within the volatile political climate of strained Anglo-Irish relations. It was also marked by the reinvigoration of an Irish sporting culture that had fallen into a state of disrepair, and even before the last shot had been fired in the prelude to independence there were telling signs that popular interest in games was in the process

of renewal. Like its counterparts across Europe, the Irish population began to pursue leisure, recreation and entertainment at unprecedented rates during the early years of the inter-war period, and as such participation in sporting activity steadily increased. By the time that the Irish Civil War had reached its conclusion social conditions in Ireland were highly conducive to the development of sporting processes, and it is within this context that association football reached hitherto unparalleled levels of popularity.

In many social histories the inter-war period has been portrayed as a dull and depressing era in which despondency caused by endemic poverty and social disaffection prevailed throughout Irish society. Although such representations are certainly valid, they fail to convey the fact that amid the gloom a strong sense of social exuberance reverberated within the working-class psyche that led more individuals than ever before to seek outlets for self-expression in games such as association football. For some this 'craze for pleasure' that saw so many engage with association football was but another characteristic of an increasingly decadent society, although the reality was that the sport offered a measure of respite from the difficult circumstances that engendered life in Ireland's towns and cities. At the beginning of the inter-war period the connection that has been described between the association code and working-class culture throughout this thesis was far from assured however. When the position that the sport occupied within society as it lingered in a state of decay during the latter stages of the Great War is considered there was certainly nothing to suggest the imminent expansion that would soon take place. Although association football had undoubtedly become imbedded within Dublin's sporting landscape, and had developed to varying extents in the relative isolation of a number of provincial centres, the sport had yet to become ingrained on society in the manner in which it had in the industrialised northeast of the country by the time that wartime necessities interrupted the established schedule. While the game subsequently recovered in the north before the climax of the war, it continued to struggle in the south, and there appeared to have been little appetite for association football among a population that was increasingly conscious of nationality and political ideology during a period of high tension.

Although in many cases nationalistic views did not lead individuals to abandon their patronage or preference for association football, the perceived connection between the sport and imperialism was difficult to dispel, and for many others it certainly became less acceptable to be associated with a game that was stigmatised in certain sections of

society as incompatible with nationalist doctrine. As such participation in the sport declined dramatically in the south of the country from 1916 onwards, with the number of clubs affiliated to the Leinster FA retracting significantly, while the Munster FA completely ceased to function. At the end of the Great War period the prospects for association football in southern Ireland appeared decidedly bleak, although similarly to what had earlier transpired in the north, signs of an imminent post-war recovery began to emerge as relatively large crowds subsequently returned to football grounds in Dublin. While the southern game had undoubtedly been damaged in the absence of national competition, members of the LFA had since become emboldened by the manner in which they had sustained the sport during such a testing period without any support from the IFA, and when relations were resumed after the war it was clear that circumstances had changed. Having become accustomed to organising the sport on their own terms LFA officials were loathe to return to a position of subservience, and as they attempted to gain greater influence within the administrative structure of the IFA simmering tensions between Dublin and Belfast became increasingly evident.

While the grievances that emerged in the rhetoric of LFA officials in their criticism of IFA governance were primarily sporting in nature, the conflict between the two bodies was clearly a product of its time, and there is no doubt that underlying political sentiment was a factor as hostilities intensified in the Anglo-Irish War. Both sides, clinging to an etiquette that was rooted in Victorian idealism, remained eager to portray their respective organisations as apolitical bodies however, with neither willing to risk accusation of political bias. Although discussion on the political environment in Ireland was mainly absent from contemporary commentaries on the position of association football, the sport's cross-sectarian character made a separation impossible, and political undertones inevitably came to the surface, not least after nationalist flags were ordered to be removed from view on the occasion of a junior international fixture in Paris in February 1921. The tenuous link that had been holding the northern and southern administrations together was effectively severed in the wake of this incident as it became clear that popular opinion in Dublin held the LFA as a docile and obedient servant to the compulsions of a pro-union organisation in Belfast. That both parties to the split had attempted to keep sectarianism to one side was of little consolation to the membership of the LFA whose nationalist credentials were being undermined in the south of the country by their association with the IFA.

Members of the LFA certainly saw themselves as nationalists, and for their association to be considered as such by southern society they needed to be seen to be acting with self-determination outside of the influence of the IFA. With this in mind the likelihood of a split between the Belfast and Dublin administrations became increasingly probable as the spring of 1921 progressed, and while the LFA was certainly more desirous of such an outcome the IFA provided all the justification that was required for a Leinster breakaway through its continued unwillingness to foster the sport outside of its north-eastern stronghold. It can be argued that the split that occurred during the summer of 1921 along the same boundary as the political partition of the country was a necessity for association football to develop as a central component within the sporting landscape of post-independence Ireland, although in the aftermath of the severance of ties with Belfast the future of the sport within the jurisdiction of the newly-formed Football Association of Ireland was tinged with a large degree of uncertainty. Much of this uncertainty stemmed from the wider view that was taken of the FAI as a mutinous body that had instigated a split from an internationally recognised and established national association, and this was certainly the most potent weapon at the disposal of the IFA as it vowed to isolate the FAI from the global association football community unless a suitable reconciliation could be arrived at.

Crucially, the IFA was afforded the continued support of its fellow International Board members in England, Scotland and Wales in this regard, and the inter-war period was characterised by a prolonged and concerted FAI campaign in which its rights to be considered a legitimate national association were forcefully asserted. Members of the FAI portrayed an unflinching determination to propagate their organisation's rights to govern the sport within the territory that would become the Irish Free State, although this tenacity achieved only limited results. While the FAIFS, as the association became known during the summer of 1923, was afforded a measure of the recognition it so desperately desired in attaining dominion status from the International Board in Liverpool later that year, access to lucrative international fixtures against British opposition remained frustratingly beyond its grasp throughout the period under review. As such the FAIFS was forced to look enviously on as the IFA continued to represent the entire country within the British association football programme. As access to the International Board was an impossibility for the FAIFS on its own merits, the most likely avenue of achieving a favourable outcome undoubtedly lay in negotiation with

the IFA, and although a return to the pre-split arrangement was never a realistic prospect the establishment of a single national team that represented both associations came close to fruition on two separate occasions during the inter-war period, in 1924 and once again in 1932.

Despite the best efforts of FAIFS officials the IFA continued to hold the upper hand in terms of its international position throughout the inter-war period, and with the door to the International Board firmly closed the Free State association consoled itself with the relations that it enjoyed with the national associations of continental Europe under the umbrella of the FIFA organisation. The FAIFS was admitted to FIFA during the summer of 1923, although any expectation that substantial benefits would be forthcoming from its membership to the organisation were swiftly tempered by the extreme difficulties that were encountered in organising international fixtures against continental teams. The launch of the Free State national team at the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 did little to provide encouragement, as the FAIFS faced monetary difficulties and ideological opposition in arranging the passage of its representatives, while it would take a further two years for the association to successfully schedule its first senior international fixture. While the strong nationalist ideologies and outlooks that prevailed within post-independence political and social thought somewhat diminished the claim of the FAIFS to act as national sporting ambassadors, the public was generally indifferent to the attraction of international fixtures against unknown European teams, and during the 1920s the association's greatest successes in the international sphere were achieved abroad where players and officials had been treated with the same respect and esteem as any state dignitary. This did change during the following decade however, and the popular appeal of international football was enhanced as the quality of visiting teams to the Free State increased, and as the fledgling World Cup competition captured the public imagination. Even the attitudes of state officials began to shift as a number of political figures finally became receptive to FAIFS overtures to acknowledge the national team from the mid 1930s, and by the end of the inter-war period changing nationalistic representations of the association allowed its members to claim with some validity to be the genuine sporting ambassadors that they had long aspired to be.

This viewpoint was not universally shared however, and for many contemporary commentators it was simply incomprehensible that a foreign game such as association

football be considered as promoting Irish nationality and the Irish Free State at a global scale. Ideological opposition to association football was forthcoming from a variety of sources during the inter-war period, and such hostility was primarily a consequence of the growing influence of the GAA within Irish society and the demarcation it had drawn between indigenous and foreign games. Efforts were routinely made to portray individuals that participated in association football as unpatriotic and anti-nationalist, while such outlooks were reinforced in the popular psyche by the continued implementation of the ban rule that forbade GAA members from any involvement whatsoever with foreign games. Although the confrontational position that the GAA adopted in relation to foreign games failed to halt the dissemination of association football during the inter-war period, it certainly impeded the sport's development in certain instances and places. Far from becoming less relevant as the memory of the British occupation grew fainter the ban rule was defended more forcefully by advocates of Gaelic games as the era progressed as it became an accepted cornerstone of both the Irish sporting landscape and of wider Irish society. While the GAA was at pains to promote its policy as a moral protection against the culturally deprecating influence of foreign games, the reality was that the ban rule was a highly effective tool in combating any imminent incursion of association football into GAA territory, and in this regard it can be considered a weapon of great potency as much as an ideological stance.

With both codes competing for the patronage of a more plebeian demographic than other sporting bodies operating in Ireland the relationship between Gaelic games and association football was noticeably tense at various levels. As the GAA was adorned with a central role within the structure of the state, the inter-war period saw association football search for its own identity in domestic terms, and examination reveals that significant success was achieved in this regard. In truth efforts to de-Anglicise Irish sport proved to be equally as unsuccessful as attempts that were made to Gaelicise wider society, and the scale to which association football was disseminated and developed during the 1920s stands as the most striking accomplishment that can be credited to the individuals tasked with organising the sport in the Free State. When the accusations of IFA indifference towards the promotion of association football outside of Belfast that emanated from Leinster in the prelude to the split are considered it is no surprise that the FAI exhibited a strong determination to foster the sport throughout its jurisdiction from the moment of its formation. The association was certainly assisted in

this regard by the exposure that was resultant of media coverage surrounding the split, which had the effect of heightening popular interest in association football as it became more visible within the public domain. As had been the case throughout its history the sport became a magnet for working-class populations that were attracted by the relative inexpensiveness of the game in comparison with other recreational activities that required larger amounts of equipment for participation, while the ease with which it could be played within the spatial confines of Irish towns and cities was also appealing to the masses.

Popular participation in association football steadily increased during the early 1920s, as the combination of social factors, including increasing urbanisation trends, increasing media coverage, and improvements to transportation networks contributed to forging an environment that was conducive to the expansion of the sport. The regions in which the sport was strongest during the 1920s were those which had held long-standing association football cultures, with Dublin and Cork accommodating the largest and most vibrant local scenes. The game was also thriving in parts of the Midlands, Louth, Tipperary, Sligo and Donegal, where it had traditionally been strong, while emergent networks were in the process of development in places such as Waterford, Galway, south Leinster, and even Meath. The extent to which the association code developed within the Free State during the 1920s surprised even the most ardent and optimistic members of the FAIFS. These individuals envisaged the establishment of a hierarchical administrative model that would regulate and promote the sport on a national scale, and by the latter years of the decade such a structure had theoretically been put in place. At local level clubs affiliated to regional leagues, which in turn reported to divisional bodies that operated under the instruction of the FAIFS, and within this framework processes of centralisation led to the development of competition and relations between clubs over larger geographic distances.

The prevailing sense of exuberance that accompanied the processes of dissemination and development was to prove short-lived however, and if association football during the 1920s is analysed in the context of success and achievement the following decade must ultimately be described within a narrative of failure. In its mandate to foster the sport in provincial regions of the state the FAIFS became somewhat negligent and complacent, and reports of the growing number of clubs that were annually affiliating to the association served only to conceal the deficiencies that were undermining previous

progression. The external facade portrayed by association football at the beginning of the 1930s certainly belied the true condition of the sport at a regional level, and the reality was that local clubs continually struggled for their survival in the face of a multitude of difficulties. Primary among these was the lack of finance within the sport, which hindered the ability of clubs to travel for fixtures in ailing regional competitions, while the general dearth of adequate playing areas in centres throughout the state was no less damaging. There was a clear lack of foresight and long-term planning within the association football administration during the period under review, and for much of the 1930s the condition of the sport was reflective not only of the dilapidated spaces in which it was played, but also of the deprivation that continued to frame working-class society.

The deteriorating condition of the senior game was of particular concern, and by the early 1930s it was apparent that the growing levels of professionalism that had recently emerged within the sport were having a harmful impact as individual clubs began to flounder. The Irish Free State simply did not possess the requisite population levels or social conditions to support professional sport at such a scale, and as careless and irresponsible management committees remained loathe to accept this reality the senior structure reached the point of collapse as a financial crisis enveloped the game. The financial crisis was rooted in the efforts that were made to provide the most alluring product for the consumption of an increasingly selective public, and in this endeavour certain clubs began to recruit large numbers of 'outsider' players from Britain and Northern Ireland to enhance the quality of their teams. Such processes served only to drain the meagre resources that resided within association football however, while the further blow of a government levy that was placed on the earnings of clubs in 1932 added to the sense of dejection that had come to characterise the atmosphere surrounding the sport. Efforts that aimed at reversing the financial crisis and the spending patterns of individual clubs were hampered by a lack of regulatory initiatives, as conflicted interests between club loyalties and collective action incapacitated the sport's administrative structure. With clubs generally permitted to act as they deemed fit it was association football enthusiasts that were ultimately asked to bear the cost of stabilising the game through higher admission charges to matches.

The relationship between association football clubs and their followers was complex during the inter-war period, and for many supporters association football was a luxury

that became increasingly difficult to afford as economic conditions deteriorated further during the 1930s. Patronage was generally reserved for successful and attractive teams as clubs bemoaned the inconsistent and unpredictable behavioural patterns of spectators, while for their part clubs portrayed a general sense of ambivalence to those that were ultimately responsible for their sustenance. Despite this a discernible supporter culture did develop as the period progressed, and it is clear that engagement with the sport provided an identity and social acceptance for otherwise submerged sections of the population within a distinct association football community. While this community can be characterised as the domain of an urban working-class male demographic, such an assertion discounts the ambiguity that undoubtedly existed within the construct, and in many instances association football played a prominent role within the lives of individuals that in social terms can be classified as existing outside of this loose definition. The popular perception of association football supporters was somewhat tainted by the regularity of violent episodes and disturbances that occurred around fixtures, and the emergence of a rather unfair representation of those that engaged with the sport as unruly, raucous, and anti-social entities was certainly detrimental to ongoing efforts to gain greater acceptance for the game from mainstream society. Although a certain a degree of negativity accompanied characterisations of the association football community, the fact that such a construct had become so relevant to contemporary society provides further evidence of the manner in which the sport had progressed during the inter-war period, and by its conclusion this community was undoubtedly an immovable component of Irish sporting culture.

There can be no doubting the importance of the inter-war period in terms of the development of Irish association football. Despite the failure of association football to build on the progress that had been made during the 1920s, great strides were undoubtedly taken, and the position that the sport occupied within Irish society at the end of the inter-war period was incomparable with its standing at the outset. The FAI had become a formidable sporting body, having consistently battled for legitimacy and acceptance both at home and abroad, and by the late 1930s the association was arguably in a stronger position than at any time since the split. Like the association football supporters that increasingly engaged with the sport, the FAI had attained a distinct identity through surviving the difficulties it had encountered, and by the end of the period under review it was finally receiving the benefaction it had so vigorously fought

for from Irish society. The association had also become an established member of the international sporting community through the strengthening relations it enjoyed with its European counterparts, while national and representative teams continued to hoist the insignia of the FAI and the Irish state aloft through strong performances against foreign opposition. A multitude of concerns continued to prevail however, and domestically it must be noted that the sport remained in a perilous position as the inter-war period drew to a close, as clubs that participated at all levels of the FAI structure remained vulnerable to the socio-economic forces that continued to shape both sporting processes and Irish society.

That association football survived the difficulties and opposition it encountered from a variety of sources and viewpoints during the inter-war period is testament not only to the efforts of a host of committed individuals that relentlessly strove to carve out a worthy position for the sport within the Irish sporting landscape, but also to the strong and distinct association football culture that had become imbedded within Irish society in the years that followed the split. This culture was certainly more apparent in particular areas of the state than in others, and it was this culture that kept association football to the fore during periods of declining participation and diminishing patronage. In an environment where prevailing ideological outlooks led to much indifference, and even open hostility, towards association football it is quite conceivable that the sport could have faded to a peripheral position within the Irish sporting landscape, and that it did not can be explained simply by the connection that had been formed between the game and those that revered it. In spite of the fact that direct engagement with the sport fluctuated at different junctures, this connection was never significantly weakened, and it was in this knowledge that the optimism that abounded at the end of the inter-war period was most likely rooted. At first glance this sense of enthusiasm may appear misplaced considering that many of the problems that emerged within the sport during the 1930s had yet to be fully addressed, although as contemporary commentators took stock as war once again loomed large on the European horizon the undeniable progress that had been made over the course of the inter-war period was quite apparent. The sport had clearly developed from the fragmented and disordered movement it had been at the end of the Great War to become a central component of Irish culture and Irish society, and it was from the base that association football had established during the

inter-war period that future prosperity was subsequently achieved within the game during the following decades.

As has previously been stated, much of the academic work that has been undertaken on the history of association football in Ireland has focussed on the early development of the sport during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Likewise, later representations of Irish association football have been framed by the relatively successful national team that emerged during the 1980s, and the colourful and widely-admired supporter culture that surrounded it. When one thinks of association football in Ireland it is this illustration that immediately comes to mind, and as such it is unsurprising that less consideration has been devoted to the position that the sport occupied within Irish society during earlier eras. The lack of film and photographic imagery that has survived from the inter-war period is also a contributing factor to the manner in which association football has been overlooked in modern times, while as argued within this thesis, within the context of Irish history issues relating to the political upheaval of the revolutionary period cast a long shadow over other areas of interest. As such historical analysis of a vast range of social concerns during the inter-war period represents a relatively fresh opportunity for academic research, and in this regard it is hoped that this thesis has made a contribution to the existing historiography of Irish sport. Although the inter-war period has not received the academic attention that has been afforded to other periods in terms of the coverage that has been given to Irish association football, it was arguably a time that was just as important for the development of the sport as any other epoch. As has also been argued throughout this thesis, the sport was transformed from one which found itself in a state of decline in southern Ireland during the latter years of the Great War to one that occupied a central role, not just within the Irish sporting landscape, but within Irish society by the end of the 1930s. The manner in which this transformation occurred has been recorded throughout the narrative of the thesis, and it is hoped that new light has been shed upon a previously underdeveloped subject matter that is certainly deserving of greater attention.

Appendix 1

Senior fixtures played by the Irish Free State/Ireland national team during the inter-war period:

21 Mar. 1926, Turin;	Italy 3, Irish Free State 0
23 Apr. 1927, Dublin;	Irish Free State 1, Italy 2
12 Feb. 1928, Liege;	Belgium 2, Irish Free State 4
20 Apr. 1929, Dublin;	Irish Free State 4, Belgium 0
11 May 1930, Brussels;	Belgium 1, Irish Free State 3
26 Apr. 1931, Barcelona;	Spain 1, Irish Free State 1
13 Dec. 1931, Dublin;	Irish Free State 0, Spain 5
8 May 1932, Amsterdam;	Netherlands 0, Irish Free State 2
25 Feb. 1934, Dublin;	Irish Free State 4, Belgium 4 (World Cup)
8 Apr. 1934, Amsterdam;	Netherlands 5, Irish Free State 2 (World Cup)
16 Dec. 1934, Dublin;	Irish Free State 2, Hungary 4
5 May 1935, Basle;	Switzerland 1, Irish Free State 0
8 May 1935, Dortmund;	Germany 3, Irish Free State 1
8 Dec. 1935, Dublin;	Irish Free State 3, Netherlands 5
17 Mar. 1936, Dublin;	Ireland 1, Switzerland 0
3 May 1936, Budapest;	Hungary 3, Ireland 3
9 May 1936, Luxembourg;	Luxembourg 1, Ireland 5
17 Oct. 1936, Dublin;	Ireland 5, Germany 2
6 Dec. 1936, Dublin;	Ireland 2, Hungary 3
17 May 1937, Berne;	Switzerland 0, Ireland 1
23 May 1937, Paris;	France 0, Ireland 2
10 Oct. 1937, Oslo;	Norway 3, Ireland 2 (World Cup)
7 Nov. 1937, Dublin;	Ireland 3, Norway 3 (World Cup)

18 May 1938, Prague;	Czechoslovakia 2, Ireland 2
22 May 1938, Warsaw;	Poland 6, Ireland 0
18 Sept. 1938, Dublin;	Ireland 4, Switzerland 0
13 Nov. 1938, Dublin;	Ireland 3, Poland 2
19 Mar. 1939, Cork;	Ireland 2, Hungary 2
18 May 1939, Budapest;	Hungary 2, Ireland 2
23 May 1939, Bremen;	Germany 1, Ireland 1

The Irish Free State also played amateur internationals against Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Estonia and the United States during the summer of 1924, and an unofficial game against a Rhineland XI selection on the summer tour of 1935.[1]

[1] Donal Cullen, *Freestaters: the Republic of Ireland soccer team, 1921-1939* (Essex, 2007).

Appendix 2

List of League of Ireland/Free State League winners

1921-22 – St James's Gate

1922-23 – Shamrock Rovers

1923-24 – Bohemians

1924-25 – Shamrock Rovers

1925-26 – Shelbourne

1926-27 – Shamrock Rovers

1927-28 – Bohemians

1928-29 – Shelbourne

1929-30 – Bohemians

1930-31 – Shelbourne

1931-32 – Shamrock Rovers

1932-33 – Dundalk

1933-34 – Bohemians

1934-35 – Dolphin

1935-36 – Bohemians

1936-37 – Sligo Rovers

1937-38 – Shamrock Rovers

1938-39 – Shamrock Rovers

List of FAI Cup/Free State Cup winners

1921-22 – St James's Gate

1922-23 – Alton United (Belfast)

1923-24 – Athlone Town

1924-25 – Shamrock Rovers

1925-26 – Fordson

1926-27 – Drumcondra

1927-28 – Bohemians

1928-29 – Shamrock Rovers

1929-30 – Shamrock Rovers

1930-31 – Shamrock Rovers

1931-32 – Shamrock Rovers

1932-33 – Shamrock Rovers

1933-34 – Cork

1934-35 – Bohemians

1936-36 – Shamrock Rovers

1936-37 – Waterford

1937-38 – St James's Gate

1938-39 – Shelbourne.[1]

[1] Information taken from Alex Graham, *Football in the Republic of Ireland; a statistical record, 1921 – 2005* (Lincolnshire, 2005), pp 3-25.

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