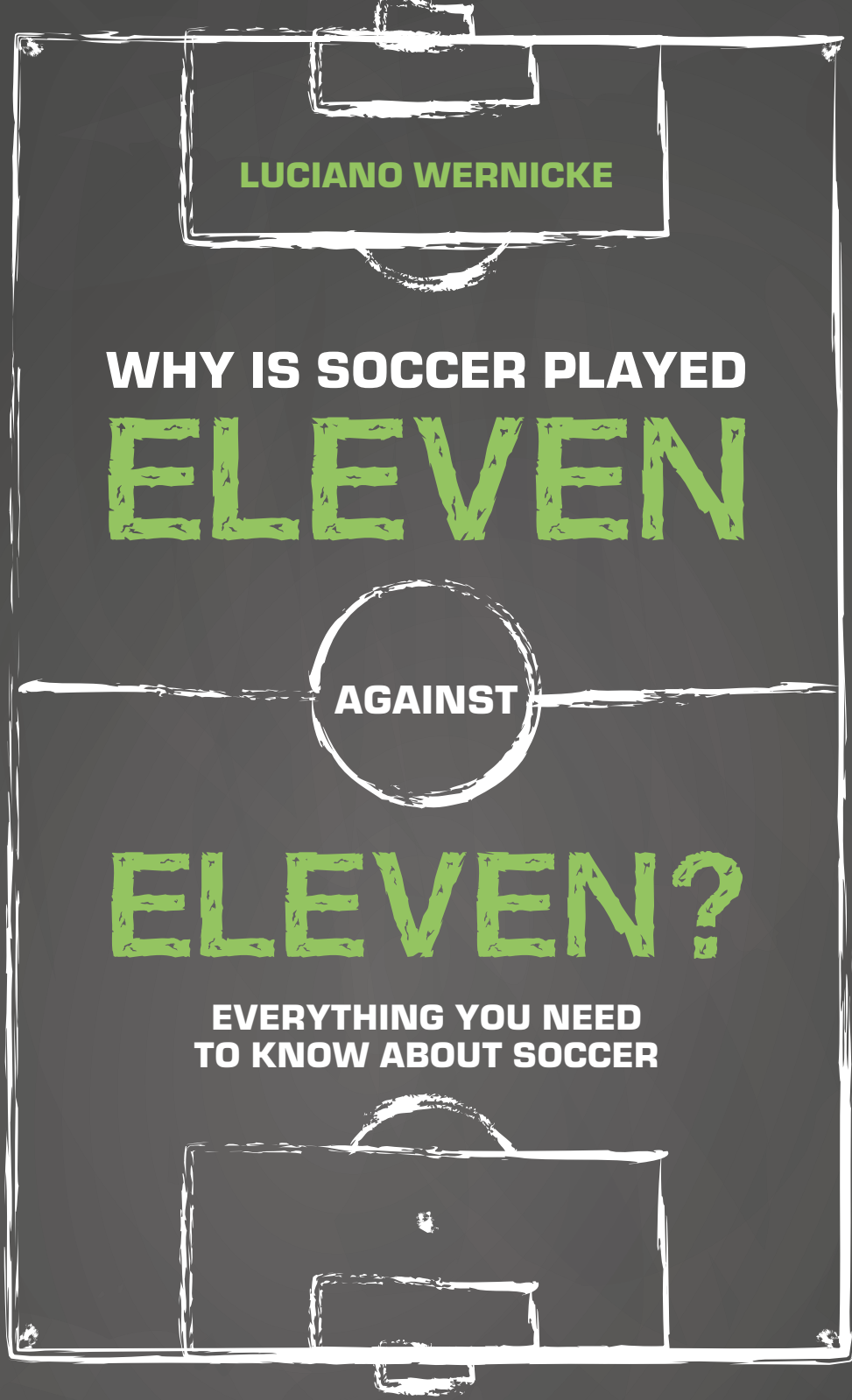




LUCIANO WERNICKE

WHY IS SOCCER PLAYED
ELEVEN

AGAINST

ELEVEN?

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED
TO KNOW ABOUT SOCCER**

Why Is Soccer Played Eleven Against Eleven?

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INTRODUCTION

Did you ever ask yourself where soccer began? Or why soccer teams have 11 players, not 9, or 12, or 15? How was the 90-minute time established for the games? What was the first match to use a referee? How did the penalty kick come about, or how were the nets in the goals invented? Why do we say “hooligan,” “goal,” or “derby”? How was the Champions League, the Copa America, or the World Cup born? This book explains 100 mysteries related to the origin and evolution of the most popular sport—100 enigmas that cannot be resolved easily through online sources. Instead the answers have been found through a profound investigation of newspapers, books, and documents in libraries from around the world.

After the first draft of the universal rules was written in 1863, soccer—a sport constantly developing—was affected by hundreds of unpredicted circumstances during more than a century and a half of official competitions. The unexpected bounce of the ball created strange and hilarious situations that forced modifying norms to better the quality of the competition and, above all, to transform the game into the number one sporting spectacle in the world. In that original rulebook, the temporal duration of the match was not specified, nor was the number of players per team, and the referee was not even mentioned. There was, of course, even less about the goal nets, the penalty kick, or the yellow and red cards, which appeared at a much later date. The appearance of these elements, today so common that they even seem, in fact, to have always been tied to the ball, have interesting beginnings that will be explained here.

This book will also look at some curious records and will shine a light upon some myths, such as the 1,279 goals attributed to

the Brazilian player Pelé or the game with the most goals. There will be, furthermore, many epic and very funny incidents (the professional player with most relegations; the team that lost a penalty shootout without missing one shot; the lineman sent off by the referee; the referee who showed the red card to himself, to name a few) and explanations for incredible cases, such as when a player sent off a referee from the match; a spectator who was invited to play for his national team and scored a goal; and a man who scored a goal...without even stepping on the field!

These are some of the 100 enigmas that will be deciphered in *Why Is Soccer Played Eleven Against Eleven?*, a work of pleasant and light reading that will still surprise and delight all the soccer fans in the world.

1. WHERE DID SOCCER BEGIN?

According to the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the roots of soccer, the most popular sport in the world, began in ancient China. During the time of the Han Dynasty (in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC), an activity called *Ts'uh Kùh* or *Cuju* was practiced in the archaic city of Zibo. This is the first game of foot to ball that we know of. The aim of this game was to put a leather ball full of feathers and hair into a small net about 40 centimeters (16 in.) in diameter that was placed on top of a bamboo stick 10 meters (about 33 ft.) high. Apparently, the players could only push the ball with the legs and feet, the chest, the back, and the shoulders, but not with the hands or arms. According to a study done by a British anthropologist, the *Cuju* could have been invented many centuries before, even 2,000 or 2,500 BC. Around 500 AD, the popular entertainment had been incorporated as part of the military training in the armies of the time. The *Ts'uh Kùh* is not the only footballing game of antiquity. The Japanese practiced the *Kemari*; the Greeks, the *Epislcycros*; the Romans, the *Harpastum*; the Aztecs, the *Tlachtli*. All these pastimes, which combined the use of hands and other parts of the body to push the ball forward, are considered the “grandfathers” of modern soccer. When discussing the *Harpastum*, Roman jurist and writer Marco Tulio Cicero wrote about the tragic death of a man who ended up with his throat slit after a ball entered the window of a barbershop. The ball hit the knife which, in that fateful moment, was passing over his neck.

Games played with balls developed into the English version of soccer we've come to know. Some assert that the first ball that bounced over Great Britain's ground was imported by a legionnaire who had arrived with the epic general Julius Caesar. Others, more romantic perhaps, believe the inaugural ball was the head of a Roman soldier killed in combat. The brave Celts had achieved what few people in Europe had until then: They rejected the powerful imperial hosts launched from the "Eternal City." Yet soccer stayed forever in Britain, and there it developed from the playful sport into the more competitive level through the maturation of its rules and the emergence of regulated skills. Of the other ball games, only ashes have remained, except for versions such as the Italian game *Calcio Fiorentino*, which is closer to a curious circus event than an athletic competition.

From the Middle Ages to modern times, different pastimes and games involving balls were played throughout Britain. They were known as mob football, mass football, and football of multitudes. Almost all of them combined hands and feet, and they often faced teams of twenty, fifty, or even hundreds of participants, usually members of two neighboring villages, and were played in improvised fields in streets, parks, and even fields that separated two villages. Challenges between a team of married men and a team of single men were also common. In general, no goalposts were used, and the objective was to carry the ball with the hands or kick it to a certain point—a tree, the bank of a stream, or the center of town—where it had to be placed. This hobby was like a sort of "soccer-rugby."

One of the mass games was Royal Shrovetide Football, a brutal sport with rules that allowed any maneuver to take the ball away from a rival—everything but homicide. Allowing punches and

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kicks resulted in numerous deaths during these fierce, but usually accidental, encounters. However, a record was found in the library of an old church in the county of Northumberland that detailed an unusual case in the village of Ulgham in 1280. A player was stabbed to death by a rival in the middle of the encounter, which constitutes the first documented soccer crime in history.

Soccer gained a high prestige among the common population, although it did not have the recognition of the authorities until the middle of the 19th century. In 1314, the mayor of London banned matches between the city walls because they caused chaos in streets and parks. Playing the game was punished with time in jail. According to an English bishop of the 14th century, the practice of this entertainment could “arouse many evils, which is forbidden by God.” A few years later, King Edward III vetoed the game “under penalty of imprisonment” because he considered it “a silly game that is useless.” Across the country, more than thirty royal and local laws were written against the widespread pastime, but this only attracted more and more people to the game. In 1410, King Henry IV imposed fines for those who “incur in misdemeanors such as playing football.” Other sovereigns preferred to promote competitions such as archery, as they were “more useful for war.” The derogatory character that the nobility granted to the game’s participants was even evident in the play *King Lear*, written by William Shakespeare in 1606. During the fourth scene of the first act, one of the characters, Earl of Kent, intends to denigrate a servant named Oswald by describing him as a “base football player.”

Curiously, the first record of a pair of soccer shoes came in 1526, when King Henry VIII—known for his many marriages—ordered his tailors to make “45 velvet pairs [of shoes] and a pair of leather

for football.” It is unknown if Henry VIII ever participated in a match, but it is known that his son Edward VI again banned the game in 1548 after a match unleashed a pitched battle between two towns. A few centuries later, once the ban was lifted, Manchester City Council rejected its practice inside the city because it caused the breaking of “many windows.” In Scotland, the ban was legally extended until 1906, though that did not prevent the first official tournament in 1873.

Though it received disapproval from the ruling nobility, soccer continued to be played in school settings. In the 16th century, St. Paul’s School in London highlighted its “positive educational value” and its promotion of “health and strength.”

This is a not insignificant step in the history of soccer and sport in general. Until that time, the concept of “sport” was associated with training for war. All the disciplines that were developed in the Olympics of antiquity were linked with warlike events: boxing, fighting, javelin throwing, and chariot and pedestrian races, some with armor, shield, and spear. Colleges and universities, mainly from the United States, England, and France, served as a platform for the establishment of more fraternal disciplines in which the objective was not to annihilate a rival. Soccer, rugby, tennis, and cricket are examples of games with a common denominator: The only thing getting hit is the ball.

With the passage of time, schools and universities also became ideal discussion areas for the normative development of the game, although each school or college devised its own rules and regulations that differed in many respects from those of other establishments. Thus, soccer took refuge for a long time in the shadow of classrooms and cloisters until it would emerge

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strengthened in body and soul to conquer the world by the power of its charm.

When did soccer start to be soccer? There are two elements that, in this long road, have been fundamental in forming the game of soccer. One: the ball. The balls used between the Middle Ages and the first half of the 19th century were made by butchers. They used bladders of ox or pork, which were inflated and covered with leathers. A 450-year-old ball made from the bladder of a pig and covered with deer skin is on display at the Stirling Smith Museum in Scotland. An Irish story, which seems more myth than fact, asserts that, by the year 1800, balls there were produced with the stomachs of criminals who had been executed! Not only were the materials used an issue, but there was also the problem that those balls did not possess a reasonable spherical quality to be exclusively driven with the feet. Its irregularity impelled the players to carry them with their hands to advance them with greater control. Imagine playing soccer today with a rugby ball. A great step toward ball uniformity occurred when the American inventor Charles Goodyear presented a rubber ball at the World's Fair of Paris in 1855. The perfect inflatable rubber ball allowed Goodyear to win the gold medal for his invention. It also aroused the ingenuity of the owners of a London sporting goods factory, Lillywhites. They adapted the American creation in 1866 to get the first ball, "Number 5," with the dimensions and weight that are used for official matches today. This almost perfectly spherical ball ended up defining a game that, finally, could be played with only the feet on any terrain.

The second element, not any less important, is the goal. Some historians say that the first game played with the objective of passing the ball through a goal took place in the London residence

of the Duke of Albemarle, known as Clarendon House. There, in 1681, a team of the duke's servants faced another team of servants of King Charles II. Before facing off in the courtyard, the players, noting that the space was a little too reduced to play mass soccer and that the walls represented a danger if they were used as goals, agreed to use the gate of the wall surrounding the property and the large entrance door to the interior of the house as goals. This custom also flourished in schools during the 18th and 19th centuries because children also used the doors of classrooms or cloisters as goals.

With combined technology and ingenuity, the stage was set for soccer to become soccer.

2. WHO WROTE THE FIRST RULES OF SOCCER?

In the previous chapter, it was noted that several English monarchs prohibited and tried to eradicate soccer. In those years, passion for the game was kept alive in schools and universities, which were also responsible for starting to build the foundation of the current regulation rules. Until 1863, the pupils were the first to write the drafts of the regulations, although the rules of the game differed in many points among schools. The dimensions of the field varied according to the location of play—from a courtyard surrounded by walls to a vast space demarcated by two buildings or, simply, a land that extended infinitely. In the same way, the goals could be armed with posts or stones or simply established between two trees or two columns of a gallery. Of course, they could also use a door, as had happened in Clarendon House in 1681. It is for this reason that, in Spanish-speaking countries, the terms *portería* and *portero* are used for the goals (they correspond to the English words, gate and gatekeeper, although they're little used in Great Britain).

The most controversial regulatory aspect was the use of hands and arms. A team that visited another could adapt to the opponent's field as well as to the ball. But the most complicated thing was to decide if the ball could be touched or taken with the hands and whether players could use the limbs to push, stop, or hit the opponent. In some establishments, the player was allowed to hold his opponent, run him down, kick him under the knees, and

even knock him down with a tackle. None of these “fouls” were penalized.

The number of competitors was also irregular. In some schools, teams could have between eighteen and twenty players. In Shrewsbury School, a settlement near Birmingham, twelve players were on a team. There, the matches were played “until one team scored two goals.” At Winchester School, a neighboring lyceum on the coast of Southampton, the team was to score 25. Of particular note at this time were Eton College, Harrow School, and Charterhouse School—traditional and elite schools established outside London, all with tuition. In the cloisters and courtyards of these institutions, the teams that participated in the indoor games had 11 players. It is believed that this number was not established by chance, but from the number of students in each bedroom. It was very common at that time that the boys in one room would challenge the boys in another, and everyone would participate in the challenge. Some historians believe these schools to be the cornerstone for the eleven-player team regulation. Why? Because some graduates of these academies, who had experienced the “eleven against eleven,” later became sports leaders with enormous influence in organizations like *the Football Association*. These alumni promoted the number eleven because they understood that it allowed for an ideal balance and distribution of men on the field and facilitated the implementation of offensive and defensive strategies.

In 1840, a group of Cambridge University students wrote the first soccer rulebook with the aim of unifying the rules for competitions between academic institutions and, at the same time, differentiating this sport from its cousin, rugby. That rulebook had curious points, such as changing goals whenever a team

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scored or allowing a player to take the ball with his hands to stop a rival attack, although it was forbidden to advance the ball with hands and arms, and players could only push it with the feet. The Cambridge Rules do not mention of the duration of the game nor the number of players per team. It also does not speak of referees, goalies, or penalties.

In 1862, John Charles Thring, a master at Uppingham School, updated these guidelines and added some unusual points, such as prohibiting players to kick the ball “while in the air.” He also expressly stated that hitting the opponent from behind by tackles or kicks was not allowed. A year later, representatives of the first clubs founded in England gathered in a pub in London to put an end to prehistoric soccer and give the exciting game the status of “sport” with an official and universal regulation. The leaders created *the Football Association*, the first entity dedicated to driving the destiny of the game, and wrote a series of measures that soon traveled by boat to all corners of the world.

3. DID THE GOAL EVER HAVE A DIFFERENT VALUE?

Imagine this situation: With the match tied 0-0, a team moves toward the rival area. The “10” launches the ball; the “9” heads it and nails it into the corner of the goal. Amazing goal! You celebrate the score that allows your team to take the advantage of...3 to 0! No, dear reader, the author of this book has not consumed any hallucinogenic substances before writing these lines. He simply rescued from the roots of soccer history an element that could have slipped into the regulation of the game and changed its destiny, as did the number of players, the offside rule, and the use of hands by the goalkeeper. In 1815, Eton College, established in the city of Windsor, Berkshire County, a few miles west of London, drew up one of the first soccer regulations, which gave two different options for a team to score points. One was the goal, which was scored by passing the ball between two poles perpendicular to the ground, separated by 3.6 meters (12 ft.), with a rope crossbar arranged only 1.82 meters high (6 ft.). However, the goal was too small for the dimensions of the school’s field—almost 110 meters long (120 yd.) by 73 meters (80 yd.) wide (the current goals are 7.32 m wide by 2.44 m high, 24 ft. by 8 ft.). Because scoring a goal was so difficult under these conditions, the Eton students decided to revalue the scoring and make each goal worth three points. In parallel, another element called *rouge* was added to the scoring system, which rewarded the team that performed it with a point. How was a *rouge* scored? In two ways. First, when the ball was kicked

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and went above the horizontal bar (such as the conversion that, in American football, follows the touchdown or the drop of current rugby, although it gives three points); the second, when the ball went over the end line. This situation did not stop the game, but rather play continued until a player took possession of the ball with his hands. If the ball was captured by a defender, the match proceeded as it does now, with the defending team advancing from its backline; if the player that took it was a striker, he scored a *rouge* for his team. The rouge and other similar plays—like the touchdown (kind of like the *try* in current rugby) which did not award points but was incorporated in some prehistoric regulations to determine the winner of a match that ended tied—disappeared from soccer when the use of hands was completely banned, with the exceptions of the goalkeeper and the throw-in.

4. WHAT WAS THE FIRST “OFFICIAL” SOCCER REGULATION?

To standardize the rules of the game and, as FIFA suggests, definitively separate “the paths of *rugby-football* (rugby) and *association football*,” delegates from eleven London clubs—including two representing schools and envoys from teams from other cities who acted only as “witnesses” without discussion or vote—gathered on October 26, 1863, in a pub called Freemasons’ Tavern on Great Queen Street in the center of London. There, between pints of beer and the smoke of fine cigars, the directors agreed to found *the Football Association*—known by the acronym FA—the first governing body of this sport. The 11 institutions that voted for the creation of the FA were Barnes FC, Civil Service FC, Crusaders FC, Forest FC (club led by Charles Alcock, considered the “father” of modern soccer), N.N. FC (a curious acronym meaning “No Name Football Club”), Crystal Palace FC (namesake of the team currently competing in the major English competitions), Blackheath FC, Kensington School, Perceval House FC, Surbiton FC, and Blackheath Preparatory School. The only surviving institution is Civil Service FC, which in early 2016 competed in the Southern Amateur Football League, an exclusive championship for non-professional teams.

In that same conclave, delegates began to draft the first “official” regulation which, after two months and several meetings, contained fourteen rules. The first was dedicated to the size of the playing field and the width of the goals. There it was specified

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that the field should have a maximum length of 200 yards (182.88 m) per 100 yards wide (about 91 m). Can you imagine a 21st century playing field with these dimensions? This point was modified several times and, at present, the field can have a maximum length of 120 meters (130 yd.) and a minimum of 90 meters (98 yd.), while the width should be regulated between 90 and 45 meters (49 yd.), practically half the surface suggested a century and a half ago. In that first point the delimiting lines are not mentioned, although it did order the placement of four flags to mark the rectangle of the field, one in each corner. The goal should be defined only by “two vertical posts,” quadrangular, separated by 8 yards (7.32 m, same distance as today), without any tape or crossbar that would join them. This last regulation meant a setback against the Cambridge rules drafted 23 years earlier.

The second rule introduced a very important concept that remains today: When a team begins play from the center circle, the rival players cannot be placed less than 10 yards (9.15 m) from the ball. This distance was then applied for all free kicks, including the penalty kick.

The third repeated an already extinct concept: to change sides after each goal scored; the fourth determined that a goal was scored by passing the ball between the posts or its extension to the sky, at any height, given the lack of the horizontal bag (in a way, as it is in rugby, with penalties or drops kicked into the “H,” although in this case they must pass over the crossbar).

The fifth point indicated that, when the ball was out of bounds, the throw-in was given to the team that recovered it first; the sixth, that when a player kicked the ball forward, his teammates upfront