

Soccer

Soccer (actually “Association football”) is one of a family of football codes, which emerged from various ball games played worldwide since antiquity. The modern game traces its origins to 1863 when the Laws of the Game were originally codified in England by The Football Association.

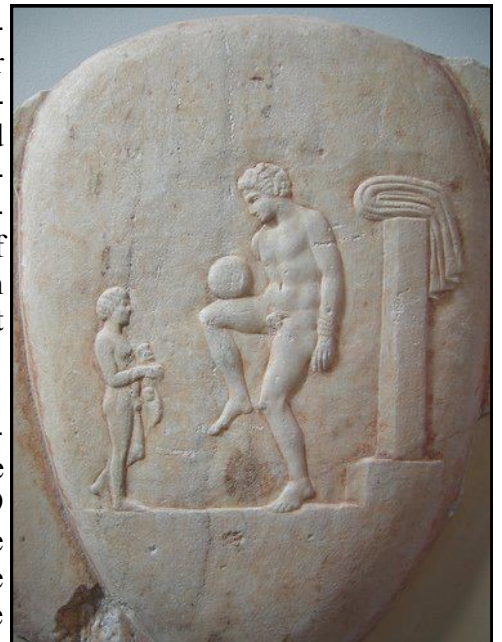
Although the Chinese competitive game cuju is the earliest form of football (2,000 years ago), soccer in itself does not have a classical history. Notwithstanding any similarities to other ball games played around the world, FIFA (The Fédération Internationale de Football Association) has recognized that no historical connection exists with any game played in antiquity outside Europe. The modern rules of association football are based on the mid-19th century efforts to standardize the widely varying forms of football played in the public schools of England. The history of football in England dates back to at least the eighth century AD.

The world's oldest soccer competition is the FA Cup, which was founded by C.W. Alcock and has been contested by English teams since 1872. The first official international football match also took place in 1872, between Scotland and England in Glasgow, again at the instigation of C.W. Alcock. England is also home to the world's first soccer league, which was founded in Birmingham in 1888 by Aston Villa director William McGregor. The original format contained 12 clubs from the Midlands and Northern England.

Today, football is played at a professional level all over the world. Millions of people regularly go to soccer stadiums to follow their favorite teams, while billions more watch the game on television or on the internet. A very large number of people also play soccer at an amateur level. According to a survey conducted by FIFA published in 2001, over 240 million people from more than 200 countries regularly play soccer. Soccer has the highest global television audience in sport.

In many parts of the world soccer evokes great passions and plays an important role in the life of individual fans, local communities, and even nations. The Ivory Coast national soccer team helped secure a truce to the nation's civil war in 2006, and it helped further reduce tensions between government and rebel forces in 2007 by playing a match in the rebel capital of Bouaké, an occasion that brought both armies together peacefully for the first time.

By contrast, football is widely considered to have been the final proximate cause for the Football War in June 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras. The sport also exacerbated tensions at the beginning of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, when a match between Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade degenerated into rioting in May 1990.



An episkyros player on an ancient stone carving at the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

