

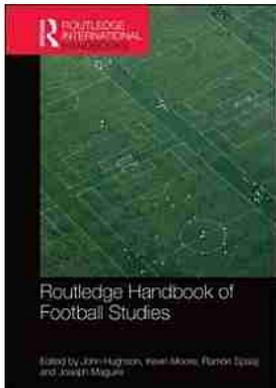
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2

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCALITY AND REGIONAL IDENTITY TO FOOTBALL

Dave Russell

Blackburn Olympic's 1883 FA Cup Final victory over Old Etonians was pivotal in English football history, the moment at which a largely working-class team ended the dominance of the southern amateur gentleman. In neighbouring Accrington, however, there was little enthusiasm. The town's newspaper contented itself largely with local matches before commenting that 'the Olympians also won the English Cup ... One has heard so much of this victory that it is a relief to leave this subject' (*Accrington Times*, 7 April 1883). As this mild but studied insult demonstrates, commitment to a particular place has always been a central force within football culture, engendering and structuring some of the game's most passionately expressed rivalries. This chapter uses the example of English professional club football from the 1880s to highlight the historical importance of local and regional identities to the sport. As the cultural geography of English football clearly exemplifies, such rivalries, and territorial issues more widely, have always been flavoured deeply by national contexts (Armstrong and Giulianotti, 2001). The professional game's origins in the often dense urban networks of the English north and midlands has certainly resulted in an unusually high frequency of rivalries between teams lying in close geographical proximity. The English game is also noteworthy for lacking the depth of political hinterland encountered in, for example, Spain, where football has long articulated powerful discourses of regionalism and repressed nationalism. Support for Barcelona has often served as proxy for degrees of Catalonian national aspiration, while Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad, albeit in distinctive ways and while still maintaining a strong intra-regional rivalry, have proved potent symbols of Basque identity (Duke and Crolley, 1996; Walton, 2001a, 2001b). Religious divisions such as those between Catholics and Protestants that have so forcibly impacted on the game in Glasgow and Belfast have sometimes proved crucial (Murray, 2000; Bairner and Shirlow, 2001), as, elsewhere, have racial and ethnic fissures. In 1920s Lima, race and class merged to structure rivalries between the Peruvian capital's two main clubs, Alianza Lima, rooted in communities of black and *mestizo* (mixed-race) workers, and Universitario de Deportes, initially the team of middle- and upper-class students of European descent (Parfichi and Thieroldt, 2007: 143–4). In comparison, the weakness of England's regionalist political project and its relatively low levels of sectarianism and racial and ethnic conflict have resulted in its territorial sporting conflicts being far less inflected by such manifestations of personal and collective identity. Obviously, there are dangers in stressing the peculiarities of the English too

enthusiastically. Relatively uncomplicated place-related battles are certainly not England's exclusive property, and, conversely, political or quasi-political expression is not entirely unknown within it. Wider conflicts between North and South have often resonated within the game as have specific political events; tensions between communities taking contrary positions during the 1984 to 1985 miners' strike could still surface in terrace chants 20 years later (Luhrs, 2007). Nevertheless, for fans of English club football, attachments to, and conflicts over, 'place', have generally been about precisely that.

Being local

Such attachments have most typically translated into support for the local team. For the 'simple' audience in attendance, as opposed to the 'mass' audience following the game largely through the media (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998), logistical constraints ensured that this was inevitably the dominant mode of English football fandom before the 1950s. From the later 1950s, however, the rapid growth of private car ownership greatly extended opportunities for attendance at clubs further afield. At the same time, the impact of television made it ever more possible for both audiences to embrace clubs with which they had no personal territorial link: this was not entirely novel – in the 1930s, future England captain Billy Wright supported Arsenal while growing up over 100 miles away in Shropshire – but the national or regional 'super-club' became an increasingly potent force. In John Bale's telling phrase, the role of television 'in reducing fan attachment to place – or more precisely, relocating such attachment in space – cannot be overestimated' (1993: 62).

Support for local teams has, nevertheless, remained extremely significant. Three decades after these trends had become fully apparent, a study of Premiership fans could claim that 65 per cent of those surveyed still supported their home town team (Carling Report, 1994: section 48.4). Undeniably, a small number of teams, and most dramatically, Manchester United, have drawn a disproportionately high number of followers nationally, evidence of the inverse relationship that frequently exists between playing success and the level of local, as a proportion of the total support, a club garners. A survey of Premiership fans in the 2012–13 season found that the six teams with the highest proportion of 'local' fans (defined as sharing a postcode district with the club) were, in descending order, Wigan, Norwich, Southampton, Reading, Swansea and Stoke, all sides with modest records at the highest level; Manchester United, Liverpool, Chelsea and Manchester City, in ascending order, unsurprisingly comprised the bottom four (Rightmove, 2013: 1). Similarly, the 2010 Football League Supporters Survey found that while some 65 per cent of respondents supported their local side, the highest proportion was reached among fans of clubs playing in Division Two, the League's lowest level. Supporting a local team has increasingly meant supporting a relatively unsuccessful one, but it is a choice that many are prepared to make.

Crucial to this discussion, of course, is the definition of 'local'. Although studies of both pre-codified and amateur football underline the importance of highly specific neighbourhoods as points of emotional identification (Davies, 1992: 38–9; Hornby, 2008), historians of the professional game concentrate on the larger units of town or city that typically house clubs. In a pioneering study, Richard Holt has stressed professional football's role in animating a form of symbolic citizenship, the game providing:

a new focus for collective urban leisure in industrial towns or cities that were no longer integrated communities gathered around a handful of mills or mines ... a

football club offered a reassuring feeling of being part of something even if the crowd itself were for the greater part strangers to one another.

(1989: 167, 172)

Holt was discussing here the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when football was an especially potent force in helping new urban and industrial communities cope with the dramatic growth of previous decades. The game's role in providing this sense of belonging has remained highly important from that point and, indeed, in many senses, it is still absolutely central to clubs' contribution to their communities.

However, it is undeniably the case that 'football' communities and 'town/city' communities rarely map neatly onto one other. Although the Football League had expanded from its original 12 clubs to its current 92 by 1950, innumerable communities, even of considerable size, have never been formally represented within it. Particularly before 1960, the outcome was high levels of commitment to locally based non-league clubs: a Southern League title decider between Cambridge City and Cambridge United attracted 11,574 fans in 1963. More common has been the adoption of an adjacent League team with the result that a 'local' club has often been simply the nearest one. Communities with strong self-identities in many aspects of life have thus found themselves submerged within a larger one (and to which they may have long been antagonistic in some spheres) in the specific context of football. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Lancashire-based Blackburn Rovers and Darwen FC, situated just 4 miles apart, were fierce and well-balanced rivals. However, successive FA Cup Final victories between 1884 and 1886 saw Blackburn Rovers, situated in a far larger town, quickly rise to national prominence and although some Darwen supporters maintained an increasingly asymmetric rivalry with the club, many attached themselves to it (Lewis, 1996; Nuttall, 2005: 37–55). In this way, while a sense of 'belonging' to Darwen might have remained extremely powerful, a more overtly consumer-oriented sporting attachment led to a form of personal and collective identity (and a decidedly novel one) in which place was clearly present and important but not necessarily paramount.

Independent spectator choices and formal club policies combined to ensure that this process was endlessly replicated across the country and often on a wider geographical scale. By 1900, Newcastle United was drawing miners from Northumberland pit villages previously evincing preference for an intensely local, village-based leisure pattern (Metcalf, 1996: 39). The founders of Chelsea, established in 1905 in an area of west London already served by Fulham FC of the Southern League, and the directors behind Arsenal's move from Plumstead to Islington in 1913 clearly intended to build support networks from across the London region by capitalising on excellent transportation links. Gavin Mellor (1999) has demonstrated how, from the late 1930s, Lancashire clubs Preston North End and Burnley sought to widen their constituencies by drawing on their large hinterlands, with Burnley drawing increased support from along the east Lancashire and west Yorkshire borders. Thus many in the small-town communities of the Calder Valley between Halifax and Todmorden, often both fiercely parochial in outlook and possessed of a strong Yorkshire patriotism, readily adopted a Lancashire football team.

These issues obviously complicate the role of the 'local' in the English game. While many supporters and well-wishers have always been born or resident in the place directly represented by a club, a significant minority have not. Moreover, even among residents of a community, support for its team did not necessarily mean that allegiance to locality was uppermost in their thoughts. Men (mainly), drawn largely from the working class, went to watch football with friends, family and workmates and the pleasure of such masculine camaraderie rather than the

articulation of local loyalty may well have provided the primary emotional motivation. The possibility must also be considered that it was simply as 'United' or 'Rovers' or 'Town' rather than as representatives of a geographical community that teams elicited the strongest commitment; sport can be an autonomous site in which social and cultural contexts are, if not absent, then heavily reduced. One other issue remains. Historians, this one included, often speak of sport as a factor in the articulation and construction of local 'identity' but this term might be rather too easy to invoke, obscuring as much as it reveals. If 'identity' is taken to constitute some deep individual or collective 'essence' (Martin, 2005: 97–102), the behaviours on display may actually fall somewhat short. Civic celebrations of FA Cup success, for example, rather than being interpreted as a display of deep-seated local identity, might sometimes be better described as exhibiting a more conditional local 'pride'.

Acknowledging these complexities, how has football culture influenced, and been influenced by, a sense of attachment to locality, or, 'locality/team', to use a more accurate if clumsier phrase? In one crucial regard, English professional football has rarely been rooted in the locality, with football fans always accepting the fact that their teams will be composed largely of mercenaries. Beyond a period in the 1950s and 1960s when an emphasis on youth development saw many sides draw to some degree on locally or regionally based talent, players are likely to have been drawn from elsewhere in Britain, and, from the 1990s at elite levels, from around the globe (Woolridge, 2010). Although, as will be seen, footballing styles can sometimes be appropriated within specific territorial discourses, a sense of place has usually been expressed and experienced around the pitch rather than on it.

Historians have often based their analyses on aspects of the game – 'derby' matches, civic celebration of FA Cup successes, divisional titles and promotions – possessed of a ritual symbolism specifically flavoured by a sense of place. These are obviously of great importance and will be considered below, but it must be stressed that football is only infrequently so overtly place-rich. Most fundamentally, lack of success has regularly denied fans the opportunities to make great display of local loyalties. Of the Third Division North's founding 20 clubs in 1921, for example, five had left the Football League by 1939 as a result of financial and/or sporting failure and another nine had failed ever to gain the promotion that would have engendered enthusiastic civic celebration. Geographical and administrative accident has also frequently limited scope for the more powerful expressions of local attachment. As is well established, social identities are defined both by loyalty to an inside group and opposition to an outside one and the local derby thereby becomes an immensely important fixture, allowing for large crowds to witness confrontations between teams with long histories of rivalry, often not merely in sport (Mitten, 2008). Lancashire, the west Midlands and London have long enjoyed a large pool of such matches, with Lancashire's First Division clubs, usually six to eight in number, able to assume that some 20 to 25 per cent of their fixture allocation involved derbies of the greatest intensity for much of the period until the later 1960s. However, for clubs in football's more marginal territories such as East Anglia or the south-west, derby matches were limited or even non-existent and even teams in areas reasonably well supplied with clubs could discover that promotion and relegation had reduced their frequency.

Against this background, local sentiment has often been dependent on rather more quotidian, even banal, football experiences. The stadium has been critical here, a 'home' ground with all the implications that the word carries, a place of secular pilgrimage at key moments, but always a familiar site and focal point adding distinctively to a particular sense of place (Bale, 1994: 55–93). Until the vogue for commercial naming rights from the 1990s, football grounds were often prosaically named with reference to particular streets or districts, with those names then becoming powerful signifiers of, and metonyms for, the towns in

which they were located. Particularly before about 1970 when national chains increasingly challenged and absorbed local businesses, the advertisements for local companies, notably breweries, emblazoned on grandstand roofs and pitch-side hoardings and littering match-day programmes significantly thickened the texture of local association (McCrae, 2008). Along with the often mundane surrounding streets, pubs and cafes the stadium became a site of 'topophilia', eulogised, sentimentalised terrain carrying a heavy weight of memory and hope; the vogue for erecting commemorative statues and naming stands after past players that has been such a strong feature from the late twentieth century has added powerfully to such sensibilities (Bale, 1994: 120; Russell, 2006). Significantly, grounds can continue to operate as a site of local memory long after they have been abandoned or even demolished (Edensor, 2008: 321–2). The local press has also played an enormously important role, its weekly cycle of pre-match build-up, post-match reports and regular gossip keeping the community's team in constant view and feeding the endless banter and conversation that so marks football fandom (Hill, 1996; Crolley and Hand, 2002). These formal and informal discourses have often made much use of club nicknames, at least until the 1960s invariably linked to some aspect of a local industry, product or history and valuable in cementing a sense of place (Walton, 2001a: 28–9). They have also always carried versions of club history that celebrate past achievements and construct the careers of locally born heroes so as to embody the virtues most cherished within their communities (Holt, 2010).

Derbies and cup ties have undoubtedly provided much opportunity for the display of attachment to place/team. Before the 1960s, the wearing of club colours, badges and the use of other overt visual symbols of locality such as mascots were generally prevalent only at FA Cup ties; as late as 1954, the *Liverpool Echo* termed rattles, balloons, scarves and rosettes the 'usual cup-tie paraphernalia' (Mellor, 2003: 183). It was this festive sense that helped give cup games so much power within narratives of localism. Derby matches in their turn provided (usually) often highly charged press build-up, large crowds, noise and a passion that occasionally led to violence (a Blackburn Rovers–Darwen match was abandoned after crowd disorder in 1880), although the latter was rare. In the 1960s and 1970s, changes in terrace culture introducing regular parading of colours and chants that celebrated one place and denigrated many others, served to emphasise the culture of place/team attachment, as did, albeit in a rather different way, the growing popularity of replica kit from the 1990s. The introduction, from the 1970s, of formal segregation of rival fans in the face of a rising concern with hooliganism, gave in its turn a highly charged theatricality to the exhibition of place and team attachment.

Football's most significant interventions into local life have resulted from a major success such as victory in the FA Cup Final or a promotion within the Football League; to the present time, these generate popular celebration on a scale rarely experienced in any other aspect of English society. Drawing on a repertoire of practices honed in political and military fields as well as other sports such as rowing or boxing, victorious teams paraded through the town centre, invariably led by a band playing Handel's 'See the Conquering Hero Comes', before reaching a suitable civic location where congratulatory speeches were made. These events could attract quite remarkable crowds, sometimes boosted by the victorious homecoming being taken as the occasion for a local holiday; schools and mills closed in honour of the Burnley cup-winning team in 1914. It was claimed that 80,000 people were on the streets of Preston in 1938, with 30,000 of them packing into the town's market square at the climax of the parade. Women played a prominent role in such events. They were well represented (fainting 'by the score' according to one report) after Blackburn Rovers' Cup Final success in 1928 and 'predominated' in the early afternoon crowds that gathered in Preston in 1938. In the same town in 1954, it was again 'the women's turn' in the early afternoon as the (in this instance,

defeated) North End side returned, ‘the shoppers, the shop assistants and the office girls far outnumber[ing] their menfolk to line the streets’ (Russell, 1997: 99; *Preston Guardian*, 3 May 1954). Although women fans have always existed and have grown in number in the last two decades, football has historically been a male preserve and the behaviour and mentalities explored in this chapter have largely been shaped and expressed by men. This specific context sanctioned an important exception.

Women’s involvement is a specific element of a wider process in which footballing achievement allowed individuals and social classes beyond the confines of the narrower football community to seize on the moment when their town was, in that most hackneyed but resonant of clichés, ‘put on the map’. As Jeffrey Hill has argued in a seminal study of the FA Cup Final and local identity in northern communities, this festival sense of unity and common purpose was made especially potent by a rapidly established repertoire of press narratives. Here, the journey to the match, the game itself and subsequent civic celebrations were reported in terms of a colourful and cheerfully expressed local identity and which depicted the local population as united by sporting achievement. As Hill argues, there was clearly a strong element of wish fulfilment here, the seeking of:

a magical resolution of the many internal tensions that in fact beset the communities ... the wish to amplify this occasional event into a more generalized image of the authentic nature of community reveals an all-too-keen awareness of the actual disharmonies present in the everyday life of Northern towns.

(1996: 106, 108)

Short-lived and often illusory as they were, these ecstatic moments did, nevertheless, provide a rare opportunity for a utopian vision of the local community, while, for the narrower football community, they, and the game more widely, may well have helped spin the threads of mutual interest that could provide a unifying element among potentially contending groups. Football was certainly not powerful enough to quell local class tensions but mediated within the populist languages of localism, it may have helped contain them.

For many supporters, such moments of joy were largely unknown and local pride has often been expressed by stoic loyalty in adversity. An often sardonically expressed acceptance of guaranteed failure and disappointment has been a vogueish sentiment in recent decades, a distinctive element of the knowing and self-aware ‘post-fandom’; in 1985, a Grimsby Town fanzine listed only the club’s relegations and re-elections under the heading ‘club honours’ (*Sing When You’re Fishing*, 2, 1985). For some fans, support of a local lower league side has become an especially important signifier of their sporting integrity and authenticity, a form of identity politics that resists an increasingly consumerist, globalised and placeless social environment (Clark, 2006; Mainwaring and Clark, 2012). Interestingly, even some younger fans of Manchester United, a global brand *par excellence*, have developed narratives of local consciousness designed to contest the widespread and hostile evaluation of the club as an entirely commercial operation devoid of genuine local roots. Such narratives define the club as part of a European elite, above the petty confines of English football and English parochialisms more widely, and depict the city itself as cosmopolitan, open and progressive. ‘Outsiders’, whose banners proclaiming them as ‘Reds’ from every conceivable part of Britain were once welcome, can be embraced but only if they commit to the new image and abandon what have become embarrassing statements of attachment from afar (Brick, 2001; King, 2003: 200–21). Being local, however imagined, remains a highly desirable condition.

Clearly, the existence of rival sides within many English cities allows football to divide rather than unite communities. While some city rivalries lack a clear geographical basis and can split families into opposing camps, as has been the case with Everton and Liverpool, others can reflect local community structures. Bristol Rovers, founded in 1883, represented the city's northern, Eastville area, while Bristol City (1897), was very much the team of Bedminster and south Bristol. Cross-city division has been particularly marked in London, which has had some ten to 12 Football League clubs for most of the period from the early 1920s. Intra-London club rivalries are certainly not drawn along strict territorial lines, although many clubs do draw from within relatively limited constituencies. In some instances, identification with a club has involved the invocation of distinctive class mentalities. Supporters of east London sides Millwall and West Ham have certainly seen their clubs as representing embattled working-class communities against more privileged elements both elsewhere in the capital and more widely, while their own intense rivalry is rooted in singular readings of how well or ineffectively their respective rival acts out this role (Robson, 2000; Mitten, 2008: 64–78). Intra-city rivalries can, nevertheless, be overridden or, indeed, lead to a wider sense of pride in place. As will be discussed shortly, until the 1960s and 1970s it was not uncommon for fans to have some affinity with a local rival, especially when it represented the city in a match of sporting importance or symbolic value. From the later twentieth century especially, the growth of one-club parochialism as a dominant form of fandom has led to intense rivalries between followers of clubs such as Manchester United and City, Sheffield United and Wednesday and, although perhaps to a lesser extent, Everton and Liverpool. Yet even in this context, a city can be seen as special and worthy of citizenship precisely because it offers a distinctive fixture that few others can match. In exceptional circumstances, such rivalries have still engendered profound displays of civic unity, and none more so than the conscious good behaviour and inter-fan mixing that accompanied the 1984 League Cup Final between Liverpool and Everton. At a moment when economic decline, high unemployment and often poorly informed press comment gave Merseyside an extraordinarily poor national image, and hooliganism did the same for football, its football fans were determined to show the city and their sporting culture in a very different light (Russell, 1997: 205).

Being regional

While affiliation to locality has proved the dominant territorial loyalty within English club football, a regional dimension has always proved significant in certain contexts and in specific periods. At the least emotionally charged level, support for a town's team by residents of its smaller satellites has helped reinforce or cement the practical role of larger communities as regional or subregional capitals. In some instances, this could lead to larger consequences: the growth of Newcastle United as a regional attraction noted earlier was undoubtedly a factor in the construction of a wider north-eastern identity. Regional sensibilities of a more than purely functional nature were most marked between about 1920 and the late 1960s. These years witnessed a far less intense local tribalism than that marking both preceding and succeeding eras, allowing for broader-based, almost polygamous patterns of spectatorship that saw some fans attend games at neighbouring rival clubs when their own side was away and positively supporting them in certain situations. These may have existed in embryo before 1914 but grew more common from the immediate post-war period, prompting the speculation that the more extreme forms of inter-club rivalry – the 'very obnoxious' partisanship as one commentator termed it in the 1880s – moderated within a more considerate environment that followed the cessation of the First World War; the existence of a mature working-class culture that placed a

premium on good manners, mutual respect and collectivism can only have aided such developments (McKibbin, 1998: 164–205; Lewis, 2001: 163; Mellor, 2003: 209–22). A study of Lancashire rivalries suggests that the press's pre-match derby coverage was generally calmer than previously the case in the interwar period and, for all the heightened atmosphere at such games, a lighter sensibility was observable (Nuttall, 2005: 92–106). When in 1937, Halifax Town met neighbours Bradford City for the first time in nine years, a brass band played 'Auld Lang Syne', at that stage still a potent and widely acknowledged musical symbol of friendship and good intention (*Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian*, 9 October 1937).

Attachment to one specific team remained the norm but support could now be expressed for a family of clubs representing a particular county or subregion. In 1928, for example, a Liverpool sports paper celebrated not merely the success of Everton, League champions in the 1927–8 season, but a number of Lancashire's teams across several sports. 'Hail Lancashire! Never have honours descended upon the county with quite such plenitude ... A gradely place to live in any time, but the Red Rose blooms wondrous well just now' (*Liverpool Football Echo*, 5 May 1928). Well into the 1940s and 1950s, it was common for the local press to claim a common front among fans when one club represented a region in a national context and oral testimony supports such an interpretation. A Lancashire-based fan recalled in the 1990s how when 'Blackpool played Newcastle in the Cup Final [in 1951] we wanted Blackpool to win 'cause they were from Lancashire, and Burnley [in 1947], we wanted Burnley to win because they were in Lancashire' (Mellor, 1999: 36). As late as 1968, Manchester United's victory in the European Cup Final could be celebrated as a national triumph to be enjoyed by fans of all clubs, a wider manifestation of this inclusive tendency (King, 2003: 4).

By this stage, however, a new generation of fans was rapidly rejecting such sentiments in favour of a sometimes virulent loyalty to one club. While the new mood clearly paralleled the growth of football hooliganism from the early 1960s and drew upon the atmosphere it generated, both phenomena may have been rooted in the same set of social and cultural changes that weakened bonds of mutual respect and shared interest within (largely) working-class culture. Possible influences here include a decline in a belief in displays of respectability and tolerance, perhaps tied to the reduced role of organised religion, and the decline of 'traditional' industries and the shared, occupational cultures that accompanied them (Mellor, 2003: 223–78). Regionalist supporter cultures have never entirely died, but younger generations certainly find it hard to believe that fans of Manchester United and Liverpool (arguably nursing the modern game's most poisonous contemporary rivalry), Preston North End and Blackpool, Burnley and Blackburn, Newcastle and Sunderland, Portsmouth and Southampton or any of the other charged pairings that mark the English game, might once have wished each other well.

One form of regional sentiment that survived throughout the period was a powerfully expressed sense of 'northern' identity. The English North has no formal existence beyond a set of often conflicting and centrally imposed administrative boundaries, a mindset rather than a defined entity and one most powerfully expressed in an area from the Scottish border to Lancashire and Yorkshire, although sometimes found considerably further south (Russell, 2004: 14–44). While 'Northernness' was probably most often spoken with a local accent, shaped by experiences within specific places, a clear and largely agreed body of northern sporting attitudes made common cause over a large area. Not the least important was the notion that northern footballers were physically harder and tougher than their southern opponents, a conceit rooted in wider ideas concerning the industrial North as the place where 'real' physical work was done and 'genuine' wealth created. Holt has talked of 'a self-conscious cult of northern aggression' among some northern players and fans in the first half of the twentieth century and there can be no doubt that the ability to give and take physical punishment was much prized (Holt, 1996:

154). Those Englishmen, especially southerners, whose behaviour suggested deviance from such norms, were derided. Manchester United supporters reputedly presented a bunch of daffodils to Londoner, Bobby Moore, before an FA Cup semi-final against his West Ham United side in 1964, a pointed reference to what some viewed as a rather languid style of play capped by blonde good looks and a lucrative contract for a hair-grooming product (*Daily Mirror*, 26 February 1993). Considerable significance has also been attached to a belief that northerners both understand and appreciate the game to a greater extent than fans in other regions and exhibit greater passion for it; during the World Cup in 1966, Joe Richards, President of the Football League and proud Yorkshireman, complained about the ‘aloof’ atmosphere at London’s Wembley Stadium and asked for the national side to receive ‘less of this infamous Wembley cold-shoulder’ (Russell, 1997: 68–9; *Yorkshire Post*, 6 July 1966).

Probably the most important ingredient of northern identity was its profound anti-metropolitan flavour. The Football Association had been established in London in 1863 and many northern clubs (and, indeed, provincial teams more widely) resented the city’s centrality to the game at a time when football as a popular sport was so obviously underdeveloped there. One Lancashire-based sporting paper, focusing on a then common bone of contention, argued that the ‘farce of playing the final tie for the English Cup in London year after year, and handing over something like £200 to the Surrey Cricket Club, is plain to the eyes of everyone but those of cockney sweldom’ (*Football Field*, 18 October 1884). Hostility to the FA and thus, by proxy, to London, was expressed with especial intensity during the battle over the legalisation of professionalism in 1884 to 1885, although it must be noted that the outraged ‘North’ at this time equated mainly to Lancashire, the largely pro-professional county appropriating the larger and more potent label at a time when other northern football centres still favoured the amateurism that the FA initially defended. Shared viewpoints increasingly emerged, however, regularly surfacing in debates over the selection of the national team, an institution of ever growing importance from the 1930s. Claims of favouritism towards southern-based players were frequently made in the northern press and certain individuals deemed to exhibit elements of metropolitan pretension or arrogance were likely to be criticised; Fulham forward, Johnny Haynes, an England player from 1955 to 1962 and captain for some of that time, was a common target among some Manchester-based journalists (Russell, 2004: 252–4).

Club football has also always been capable of exhibiting intense levels of rivalry between the North and London and the South; games between leading London and northern teams tend to rank closely behind only local derbies in terms of the levels of place-related sentiment that they generate. The most extreme example occurred during the 1930s when an outstandingly successful Arsenal side came to symbolise for some northerners a more general economic division within the nation. Wealthy and able to buy players from across Britain, the club’s rise seemed to replicate southern economic dominance over the north and the process of southward migration in search of employment. Such an analysis grossly simplified both the sporting and economic situation but had just enough purchase to generate a powerful myth (Russell: 116–17). Chelsea has been viewed in something of a similar light in recent years, although probably more as the result of the club’s extreme wealth since its takeover by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich in 2003, than its geographical location. From the 1990s, a northern club, Manchester United, has been the key focus of dislike, its global reach rendering it in this context essentially placeless, ‘at a rhetorical level, everybody’s “local rivals”’ (Brick, 2001: 15).

The northern English world-view was certainly not the region’s sole preserve and the cluster of attitudes discussed above may merely represent the standard cultural response of subordinate to dominant cultures. Nicholas Phelps has identified high levels of aggressive masculinity

surrounding the Portsmouth team of the 1940s and 1950s. Anxious to point up the fissures in a ‘southern’ identity that has been inadequately considered by scholars, he suggests that Portsmouth’s style could be read as a direct challenge to London, the proud working-class naval city setting its physical hardness against the capital city that had long been accused of patronising it (Phelps, 2001). Nevertheless, a widely accepted body of ideas about ‘northern-ness’, both within and without the region, has proved a powerful source of succour for the region.

Both local and regional sentiment could be supplanted by aspirations to the national. Although selection of the national side has always been a source of controversy, most fans of most clubs have tended to unite behind it. The FA Cup, although a site of much local and regional symbolism, has to some extent always served as a national occasion. The use of Wembley Stadium as venue for the final from 1923 much increased the sense of the Final as national event, with northern teams in particular enjoying the opportunity to insert their communities into the metropolitan spotlight (Hill, 1996: 87–93). Formal attempts to create a national fan community that could rise above sectional interest have been made, ranging from the moderate National Federation of Football Supporters’ Clubs, founded in 1926 to 1927, to more radical bodies such as the Football Supporters’ Association (1985), established to deal with the problems of hooliganism, pricing, fan image and the many other issues faced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, truly embrace displays of fan collectivism have been rare, spontaneous and invariably the product of tragedy, with the profound response to the Hillsborough disaster of 1989 the ultimate case (Russell, 2006: 10–11). Exceptional events, however, are precisely that and football has always been structured in ways in which allegiance to highly specific subnational territories has been of critical importance.

Football’s relative importance in the overall process through which local and regional attachments have been constructed must remain a topic for future consideration. These evolve almost instinctively through endless encounters with landscape, language, memory, kinship and friendship networks and a variety of social and cultural bodies and institutions. Football clubs have been a highly important part of this matrix, but only a part. Those in actual physical attendance have always represented a small minority even of the nation’s young male population and, although the ‘mass’ audience has been far bigger, football has only spoken for something resembling whole communities at moments of triumph. Moreover, football-based sentiments and identities can be dissolved or reconfigured in other cultural contexts; the intensity of the football rivalry between Manchester and Liverpool, for example, has not generally been replicated in the field of popular music where interrelationships have been far more open and cooperative (Warner, 2011). However, for its followers, the game has been, and continues to be, of absolutely fundamental importance as a mechanism for exploring, expressing and structuring a variety of local and regional mentalities, some clearly rooted in pre-existing lived communities on the ground, others at least partially originating within the context of sport. In one sense at least, football fans have invariably known their place.

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