

More than a game: rugby and association football in
Ireland, 1921-1990

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Declaration

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Contents

Abbreviations.....	v
List of figures.....	vi
List of tables.....	vii
List of maps.....	viii
Abstract.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Province, partition and politics: rugby in Ulster and the IRFU Northern Branch in a divided Ireland.	16
Introduction.....	16
1.1: Province? Ulster, the IRFU Northern Branch and rugby in the north of Ireland.....	17
1.2: Partition, periphery and rugby in Ulster.....	28
1.3: Politics: Ulster Unionism, Irish Nationalism, and the IRFU Ulster Branch in a divided Ireland.	46
Conclusion.....	66
Chapter 2: Home Rule and a Home Nation: the partition of Irish football, 1921-78.....	70
Introduction.....	70
2.1: Context: A football association for Ireland, 1880-1921.....	72
2.2: Conflict: The cold war in Irish football, 1921-78.	80
2.3: Collaboration: Unofficial football in Ireland, 1914-55.	98
Conclusion.....	116
Chapter 3: ‘Old traditions die hard’: rugby and society in post-partition Ireland.	121
Introduction.....	121
3.1: Club affiliations: The geography of rugby in Ireland, 1880-1988.	122
3.2: Rugby and urbanisation in Ireland.	126
3.3: Rugby’s social base and its development.....	142

3.4: Rugby in Ireland and economic trends.....	161
3.5: Rugby in Ireland, television and international engagement.....	176
Conclusion.....	182
Chapter 4: A game for the masses? Football and society in post-partition Ireland.	186
Introduction	186
4.1: Club affiliations and cup entries: measures of the health of the game.	187
4.2: Football and urbanisation in Ireland.	194
4.3: Football’s social base and its development.....	221
4.4: Football in Ireland and economic trends.	245
4.5: Football in Ireland, television and international engagement.	262
Conclusion.....	269
Chapter 5: Football spectator violence in Ireland, 1921-90.....	274
Introduction	274
5.1: Violence that originated in sectarian/political conflict	283
5.2: Violence that originated in sporting action	293
5.3: Spectator violence, the built environment and the policing of football matches.....	299
Conclusion.....	308
Conclusion	310
Appendices.....	319
1. Representative fixtures staged by the IRFU Ulster Branch, 1941-5.....	319
2. ‘Unofficial Championship of Ireland’ fixtures 1925-55.	320
3. Workplace football teams in Ireland, 1921-51.....	321
Bibliography	328
Primary sources	328
Secondary sources	335

Abbreviations

AGM-Annual General Meeting
BBC-British Broadcasting Corporation
EEC-European Economic Community
ESFA-English Schools Football Association
FAI-Football Association of Ireland
FAW-Football Association of Wales
FAIFS-Football Association of the Irish Free State
FIFA- *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*
GAA-Gaelic Athletic Association
GDP-Gross Domestic Product
GNP-Gross National Product
IFA- Irish Football Association
IRB-International Rugby Board
IRFU- Irish Rugby Football Union
IUFU-Irish Universities Football Union
ISFA-Irish Schools Football Association
LFA-Leinster Football Association
MFA-Munster Football Association
NISFA- North of Ireland Schools Football Association
NUI-National University of Ireland
PRONI-Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
QUB-Queens University Belfast
RCSI-Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
RFU-Rugby Football Union [England]
RTE- Raidió Teilifís Éireann
SFA- Scottish Football Association
SFAI-Schoolboys Football Association of Ireland
SIFB-Schools International Football Board
TCD-Trinity College Dublin
UCD-University College Dublin
UCG-University College Galway
UCDA-University College Dublin Archives

List of figures

Fig. 1: Northern/Ulster branch affiliated clubs from outside Northern Ireland.	30
Fig. 2: IRFU club affiliation by province, 1951-88.	125
Fig.3: Chart plotting the number of provincial rugby club affiliations in Ireland (bar), and the number of male professional occupations by province (line), 1930-80.	154
Fig.4: IRFU affiliated schools by province, 1968-88.	157
Fig.5: IRFU affiliated clubs by province, 1971-87.	157
Fig. 6: IRFU provincial club affiliation, 1951-9.	170
Fig. 7: IRFU affiliated clubs located in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), 1951-61.	172
Fig. 8: IRFU affiliated clubs by province, 1964-80 (ROI only).	175
Fig. 9: Two-way linear prediction showing the relationship between television ownership and IRFU provincial club affiliation in the Republic of Ireland, 1962-76.	180
Fig. 10: Irish Football Association affiliated clubs, 1881-1910.	188
Fig. 11: Irish Football Association affiliated clubs, 1922-41.	190
Fig. 12: Football Association of Ireland club membership, 1964-88.	191
Fig. 13: Junior cup entries by association, 1924-73.	193
Fig. 14: Schoolboy teams affiliated to the FAI, 1966-88.	242
Fig. 15: Club affiliation to FAI provincial subdivisions, 1966-88.	242
Fig. 16: FAI junior affiliation, 1945-58.	252
Fig. 17: Republic of Ireland affiliated football clubs, 1964-80.	259
Fig. 18: Republic of Ireland GDP per capita, 1964-80.	260
Fig. 19: Two-way linear prediction showing the relationship between television ownership and FAI club affiliation in the Republic of Ireland, 1965-76.	265
Fig. 20: Number of incidents of spectator violence in Ireland, by decade.	281

List of tables

Table 1: Urban/provincial spread of Ulster Branch affiliated junior rugby clubs 1925-85.	43
Table 2: Geographic spread of affiliated rugby clubs and schools in Ulster, 1930-90.	43
Table 3: Venues for Irish rugby union internationals 1922-54.....	60
Table 4: IRFU clubs by province, 1879/80.....	123
Table 5: IRFU provincial and total club affiliation 1908-11.....	124
Table 6: Ulster Branch affiliated schools 1950-85, by type of school.....	147
Table 7: IRFU school affiliations by province (Republic of Ireland), 1968-88.	148
Table 8: Irish provincial population change, 1951-61.....	169
Table 9: IFA affiliated clubs by Divisional Association, 1912-22.....	189
Table 10: Senior club football in Ireland, 1921/2 season.	196
Table 11: Senior league football expansion (1945-8) and population density (1951).....	207
Table 12: Irish Football Association regional affiliations, 1931-37.....	248
Table 13: FAIFS and provincial club affiliations, 1932-7.....	249
Table 14: Senior clubs involved in matches where spectator violence occurred, 1921-90.	284
Table 15: Incidents of spectator violence in Ireland, 1921-90, by type of violence.	293
Table 16: Incidents of spectator violence in Ireland, 1912-87, by level of competition.	299

List of maps

Map 1: The development of a rugby administration in Ireland, 1874-98.....	20
Map 2: IRFU provinces and Northern Ireland border 1920-2.	24
Map 3: Ulster Branch IRFU liminal space area, 1925-90.	36
Map 4: The ‘Bann divide’ within the province of Ulster.....	45
Map 5: IFA map of divisions, 1911.....	74
Map 6: Location of Belfast's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.	128
Map 7: Location of Dublin's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.	130
Map 8: Location of Cork's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.....	132
Map 9: Location of Limerick's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.....	132
Map 10: Location of Connacht's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50 (Galwy City within red boundary).....	134
Map 11: Location of senior cup rugby clubs (island of Ireland), 1950-70.	135
Map 12: Location of IRFU provincial junior cup entries, 1975-90.....	139
Map 13: Location of Irish League and League of Ireland participating clubs, 1921-37.	200
Map 14: Population density (1936/7), and Junior Cup Football Density (1936- 8).	201
Map 15: Senior league football expansion, 1945-8.	206
Map 16: Population density (1951), and Junior Cup Football Density (1950).	208
Map 17: Population Density (1971), and Junior Cup Football Density (1973-4).	214
Map 18: Senior league football expansion, 1985-90.	220
Map 19: Location of workplace football teams – island of Ireland.	226
Map 20: Location of workplace football teams – Belfast.....	227
Map 21: Location of workplace football teams – Dublin.	228
Map 22: Incidents of spectator violence by county, 1921-90 (locations in green).	282

Abstract

Conor Murray

More than a game: Rugby and association football in Ireland, 1921-1990.

This is the first integrated study of rugby and association football in Ireland on an all-island basis and builds on important individual regional studies of those games over the past decade.

In its first strand this study adds significantly to the study of the administrative identity and development of the relevant governing bodies, 1922-90, with a particular focus on their response to partition and how those bodies in Ulster/Northern Ireland identified themselves and their jurisdiction. It considers how those northern bodies interacted with their counterparts in the area that became the Republic of Ireland; in the case of the Irish Football Association, in particular, this was influenced by their continued attachment to the other football associations in the United Kingdom.

In its second strand this study measures and maps the prevalence of rugby and football clubs in Ireland between 1922 and 1990, considering this to be the most viable measurement of the health of the games across space and time. Having mapped the temporal and spatial trends in club affiliations and sporting activity, This study considers the wider political, social, economic and cultural factors affecting those temporal and spatial trends and utilises ArcGIS mapping software in presenting those relationships between sport and society to the reader.

In its third and final strand this study breaks new ground in the study of sport-related violence in Ireland, albeit it is an area in which only football has a significant, if until-now underexplored, history of that phenomenon at its games across Ireland, north and south. It sheds a light on the complex interactions between an often-neglected component of Irish sporting life, the spectator, with that game.

Combined, the story of the administrative, club and spectator bases to rugby and football suggests that, in both parts of post-partition, they represent more than a game.

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Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the football codes of soccer and rugby in Ireland, north and south, between 1921 and 1990. Outside of the Gaelic Athletic Association, these are (and have been) the most popular sports (in terms of both participants and spectators) in Ireland. Despite their importance, there is much that we do not know about these games and their relationship to politics, society and culture in the post-partition era.

To paraphrase Isaiah Berlin, this thesis is proudly the work of a historian fox, who has come to know many small things, while also aspiring to be that of a historian hedgehog,¹ cohering as it does around a single question – what was the fate of the modern British football codes in post-partition Ireland? In seeking to answer that overall question, this thesis has set out to undertake three key tasks.

First, it explores the effects, both short and long term, of partition upon the development of both games. The received story of rugby in Ireland has tended to emphasise how the game maintained unity despite the border. This thesis acknowledges that achievement, and considers how an all-island rugby culture was maintained, but it also asks if and how the border affected the development of the game, in particular in the province of Ulster? On the face of it, the effect of the border upon association football is more immediately manifest. The game came to be divided into two governing bodies defined by that border, though, arguably, the north-south division in soccer preceded the creation of the border. That split has received earlier attention, and it is further considered here, but just as the impression of unity that rugby has conveyed is nuanced in this thesis, so too the impression of schism that has dominate our view of soccer is nuanced. The cross-border relationships that existed, and which have largely been ignored, are explored.

Second, the thesis sets out measure and map the prevalence of soccer and rugby in Ireland between 1922 and 1990. This task, which has not been

¹ Henry Hardy (ed.), *Isiah Berlin: The hedgehog and the fox* (Princeton, 1953), p. 1.

undertaken previously, is fundamental to any empirical assessment of how the games prospered. More than that, having traced the patterns in the expansion or contraction of clubs associated with these sports in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the thesis goes on to analyse social, economic, cultural, geographic and gender factors that affected the dispersal and adoption of the sports. In other words, it asks why the games prospered or struggled across time. If section one necessitated an all-island approach to these sports, then this section is greatly enhanced by being the first all-island attempt to consider the development of both of these football codes, bringing into relief questions about how much, and what kind of, context mattered to the growth of these sports. In this regard, it is influenced by the success of Mike Cronin's all-island approach to comparing the GAA and soccer. While Cronin's primary concern was the relationship of sport and nationalism to Irish identity, this thesis, and this section in particular, is focused on examining the socio-economic contexts in which the games developed.²

The all-island approach is again a great advantage in the third section of this thesis, which considers the issue of spectator violence at football. The context of sectarian and political conflict that plagued Northern Ireland from its inception is a central theme in the historiography of football violence there, and thus serves as a useful starting point to this study. However, at least two other themes emerge in the course of that study, those concerning violence as a response to sporting action, and violence in the context of the built environment and security presence where games took place. Crucially, both of those themes help us to understand the roots of spectator violence, north and south, in the decades since the 1920s. Again, here this thesis, while acknowledging the importance of national (and religious) identity to football culture, asks us to pay closer attention to other social and cultural factors at play.

In the introduction to their appraisal of modern Irish historiography, we are reminded by D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day of a Russian saying that 'the past is always changing, but the present stays the same'. They argue that

² Mike Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, soccer and Irish identity since 1884* (Dublin, 1999).

this ‘could be applied to Ireland, where the political disagreements of the north, couched in the language of nationalism versus Unionism, are in danger of reassuring that the present in Ulster always stays the same’.³ This study has employed empirical methods extensively in seeking seeks to push beyond a tendency to view sport in Northern Ireland predominantly through the lens of its history of sectarian and political conflict, an approach that often defines Northern Ireland as a place apart.⁴ For an example of this, see William Murphy’s contribution to recent *Cambridge Social History of Ireland*.⁵

When sport in either part of Ireland is considered alongside sport on the other side of the political border one will, of course, notice distinguishing features. Too often, however, historians have missed or ignored the opportunity to compare, and one of the consequences of this has been to exaggerate the differences. The border matters but it has been allowed to determine our approach for too long. This study represents a significant advancement in this regard, albeit it uses that seminal event as the starting point of its analysis. In doing so, it allows for comparisons to be made, when the evidence has allowed, both within and between the two sporting nations that emerged from the partition of Ireland by 1922.

In exploring one sport that has been partitioned in its administration (football), and one which has remained unified (rugby), this study also significantly nuances our understanding of the role of the border in the history of two of the most popular sports in Ireland. Its approach has, on occasion, flipped the constitutional and/or administrative template on its head, to explore how rugby developed upon the lines of political partition, or how football developed in the context of social, cultural and economic developments that affected the whole island of Ireland.

Given that the Irish historiography has afforded little attention to the subject of spectator violence in Irish sport, this study’s exploration of that

³ D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day, ‘Introduction’, in Boyce and O’Day (eds), *The making of modern Irish history: revisionism and revisionist controversy* (Abingdon, 1996), p. 12.

⁴ Such as that evident in the work of Dervla Murphy, *A place apart: Northern Ireland in the 1970s* (London, 1978).

⁵ William Murphy, ‘Associational life, leisure and identity since 1740’ in Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge social history of Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2017), pp 383-402.

subject has been heavily informed by the sociological study of sport in Northern Ireland.⁶ The wider context of sectarian and political conflict in that country has informed much of that scholarship.⁷ It serves as a starting point in this study, but is not the only theme to emerge in the course of that exploration.

Further, the empirical approach employed by Neal Garnham⁸ and Liam O'Callaghan⁹ in relation to football and rugby respectively, has influenced this study which has brought their focus into the post-partition era, in the case of Garnham, and to the other provinces of Ireland, in the case of O'Callaghan. And so, defined by an all-island focus and by an empirical approach informed by sociology, this thesis sets out on its journey to explore the 'British' football codes in Ireland post-partition.

As it emerged, the published academic work on the history of sport in Ireland was dominated by two areas. The first of those concentrated on the history of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) between 1884-1922, and the second concerned a period (or process) that we sometimes call 'the sporting revolution' (c.1860-1914). If both of these emphases were understandable in their own way, then the attention they received arguably became disproportionate.

The political significance of the Gaelic Athletic Association was the subject of pioneering and early work in the field of Irish sport history, beginning with W.F. Mandle.¹⁰ This was taken up by Mike Cronin, whose work on the GAA and nationalism formed a strand of a broader consideration of sport and politics in Ireland.¹¹ Subsequent work, by a range of scholars, has sought to alter the conversation about the GAA, either by nuancing the claims

⁶ John Sugden and Alan Bairner, *Sport, sectarianism and society in a divided Ireland: Sport, politics and culture* (Leicester, 1993).

⁷ Alan Bairner and Peter Shirlow, 'When leisure turns to fear: Fear, mobility and ethno-sectarianism in Belfast', *Leisure studies*, 22:3 (2003), pp.203-21; Jonathan Magee, 'Football supporters, rivalry and Protestant fragmentation in Northern Ireland', in Alan Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish: Histories, identities, issues* (Dublin, 2005), pp.172-88.

⁸ Neal Garnham, *Association football and society in pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004).

⁹ Liam O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster: A social and cultural history* (Cork, 2011).

¹⁰ W.F. Mandle, 'The I.R.B. and the beginnings of the G.A.A.', *Irish Historical Studies*, 20:80 (1977), pp 418-38; W.F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association & Nationalist Politics, 1884-1924* (Dublin, 1987).

¹¹ Mike Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland.*; Mike Cronin, 'Projecting the nation through sport and culture', *Journal of contemporary history*, 38:3 (2003), pp 395-411; Mike Cronin, *The blueshirts and Irish politics* (Dublin, 1997).

made about the GAA and nationalism or by shifting the focus to the social and cultural significance of the association.¹² Despite initiatives such as the GAA Oral History Project, and books such as *The GAA: a people's history*, the development of the association after the state formation period has yet to receive the same attention.¹³

Tom Hunt's exploration of the sporting revolution in County Westmeath, when, in Ireland as elsewhere, modern sport became a popular phenomenon,¹⁴ is typical of those that occupy the second of those areas of focus within the current historiography. Other notable contributions from the middle of the first decade of this century include Neal Garnham's examination of the emergence of association football,¹⁵ and Brian Griffin's engagement with the emergence of cycling,¹⁶ In addition to these important monographs, a growing body of articles has addressed important themes relating to that era. Examples include further work on the origins of association football,¹⁷ examinations of the influence of elite education and the related question of athleticism as an ideology,¹⁸ work on the role of newspapers and journalists in

¹² William Murphy, 'The GAA and the Irish revolution, 1913-1923' in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds), *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 61-76; Andrew McGuire and David Hassan, 'Cultural Nationalism, Gaelic Sunday and the Gaelic Athletic Association in early twentieth century Ireland', *International journal of the history of sport*, 29:6 (2012), pp 912-23. Neal Garnham, 'Accounting for the early success of the Gaelic Athletic Association', *Irish Historical Studies*, 34:133 (2004), pp 65-78; Richard McElligott, 'Contesting the Fields of Play: the Gaelic Athletic Association and the battle for popular sport in Ireland, 1890-1906' in *Sport in Society*, 19:1 (2016) pp 3-23; Paul Rouse, *The hurlers: The first All-Ireland Championship and the making of modern hurling* (London, 2018).

¹³ Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A people's history* (Cork, 2009).

¹⁴ Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: The case of County Westmeath* (Cork, 2007).

¹⁵ Garnham, *Association football*.

¹⁶ Brian Griffin, *Cycling in Victorian Ireland* (Cheltenham, 2007).

¹⁷ Paul Gunning, 'Association football in the Shamrock Shire's Hy Brasil: The 'Socker code in Connacht, 1879-1906' in *Soccer & Society*, 18:5-6 (2017), pp 608-30; Martin Moore, 'The origins of association football in Ireland, 1875-1880: a reappraisal', *Sport in History*, 37:4 (2017), pp 505-28; Julien Clenet, 'Association football in Dublin in the late nineteenth century: an overview', *Soccer & society*, 22:8 (2021), pp 805-19.

¹⁸ Gerry P.T. Finn, 'Trinity Mysteries: University, Elite Schooling and Sport in Ireland', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27:13 (2010), pp 2255-87; Mike Cronin, 'Trinity mysteries': Responding to a chaotic reading of Irish history', *International journal of the history of sport*, 28:18 (2011), pp 2753-60; Brendan Power, 'The functions of association football in the Boys Brigade in Ireland, 1888-1914', in William Murphy and Leanne Lane (eds), *Leisure and the Irish*, pp 41-58; Colm Hickey, 'The evolution of athleticism in elite Irish schools 1878-1914, beyond the Finn/Cronin debate', *International journal of the history of sport*, 30:12 (2013), pp 1394-1417.

promoting the sporting revolution,¹⁹ and assessments of the influence of class and gender in terms of access to the sport.²⁰

Recent developments have seen the field broaden considerably. The work of James Kelly, in particular, but also scholars such as Pat Bracken, Maighr ad N  Murchadha, Sean Reid and Brian Griffin has drawn attention to sporting activity prior to the ‘sporting revolution’.²¹ Meanwhile, important work produced during the second decade of the twenty-first century by Liam O’Callaghan, David Toms, Conor Curran and Cormac Moore has considerably enhanced our understanding of rugby and soccer. This work also extending the historiography’s reach into the mid-twentieth century, though the work has often taken a regional or ‘case study’ approach.²² These academic studies concerning sport in Ireland have addressed a sufficient variety of sporting topics in sufficient breadth and depth to make possible the publication of Paul Rouse’s excellent survey text²³ and survey articles in the recent *Cambridge history of Ireland*.²⁴

Despite all of this work then, rigorous all-island studies that examine the development of football and rugby after partition do not exist. There exists

¹⁹ Paul Rouse, ‘Newspapers, journalists and the early years of the Gaelic Athletic Association’, in Kevin Rafter (ed.), *Irish journalism before independence: More a disease than a profession* (Manchester, 2011), pp 149-59; Sean Crosson, ‘Sport and the media in Ireland: An introduction’, *Media history*, 17:2 (2011), pp 109-16; Paul Rouse, ‘Sport and Ireland in 1881’ in Alan Bairner(ed.), *Sport and the Irish: Histories, identities, issues* (Dublin, 2005); Paul Rouse, ‘Journalists and the making of the Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-1887’, *Media History*, 17:2 (2011), pp 117-32.

²⁰ Tom Hunt, ‘The GAA: social structure and associated clubs’, in Cronin, Murphy and Rouse (eds), *The Gaelic Athletic Association*, pp 183-202; Roisin Higgins, ‘“The Hallmark of Pluperfect Respectability”: The Early Development of Golf in Irish Society’, * ire-Ireland* 48:1&2 (2013), pp 15-31; Brian Griffin, ‘Cycling and Gender in Victorian Ireland’, *Eire-Ireland*, 41:1&2 (2006), pp 213-41; R ona Nic Cong ail, ‘Looking on for centuries from the sideline”: Gaelic feminism and the rise of Camogie’ in * ire-Ireland* 48:1&2 (2013), pp 168-90.

²¹ James Kelly, *Sport in Ireland: 1600-1840* (Dublin, 2014); Maighr ad N  Murchadha, ‘Two hundred men at tennis sport in north Dublin 1600-1760’, *Dublin historical record*, 61:1 (2008), pp 87-106; Murphy, ‘Associational life, leisure and identity since 1740’, pp 383-402; Sean Reid, ‘Identity and cricket in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century’, *Sport in Society*, 15:2 (2012), pp 147-64; Pat Bracken, *The growth and development of sport in County Tipperary 1840-1880* (Cork, 2018); Brian Griffin, ‘The more the merrier, say we’: Sport in Ireland during the Great Famine’, *Irish economic and social history*, 45:1 (2018), pp 90-114.

²² O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*; David Toms, *Soccer in Munster: a social history, 1877-1937* (Cork, 2015); Conor Curran, *The development of sport in Donegal 1880-1935* (Cork, 2015).

²³ Paul Rouse, *Sport and Ireland: A history* (Oxford, 2015).

²⁴ James Kelly, ‘Sport and recreation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, in James Kelly (ed.), *Cambridge history of Ireland, vol. 3 1730-1880* (Cambridge, 2020), pp.489-516; Paul Rouse, ‘Popular culture in Ireland, 1880-2016’, in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Cambridge history of Ireland, vol 4 1880 to the present* (Cambridge, 2020), pp 577-603.

for Ireland nothing to compare to Matthew Taylor's history of British football or Tony Collins's social history of English rugby union²⁵. It is the ambitious contention of this thesis that there is value to be derived from examining the histories of both of these games together in the case of Ireland. As we shall see, aspects of their shared and distinctive developmental trajectories are thrown into relief when we look at the games side-by-side.

The chapters that follow have been assembled according the three strands of inquiry. The first strand contains chapters one and two and, broadly speaking, relates to the administrative response of both rugby and football in Ireland to the political partition of the island after 1922. The second strand contains chapters three and four and, broadly, speaking, provides a measure of the health of the games and asks how they relate to wider political, social, economic and cultural trends. Finally, strand three contains chapter five which considered the issue of spectator violence and how it relates to rugby and association football in post-partition Ireland.

Chapter one asks how the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) negotiated the political partition of Ireland despite the fact that this rupture dissected one of its subdivisions? The practical realities caused by the border that divided Ireland could not be ignored, and the chapter details how the game developed in Ulster between 1922 and 1990. Matters relating to the existence within Ulster of a cross-border identity were those that, in addition to their potency within the divided society that was Northern Ireland, had consequences for Ulster's relationship with its southern provincial counterparts who comprised the IRFU. Consequently, the chapter asks how the Ulster Branch negotiated those sensitive issues within its jurisdiction?

With two Irelands in international football representing the Irish Football Association (IFA) and Football Association of Ireland (FAI), chapter two first asks how a cold war between the two associations, that lasted over half a century, was brought to a durable if unsatisfactory conclusion in 1978. Further, the chapter asks if we examine the clubs, schools and universities affiliated to those associations, can we identify activities and attitudes that differed from or were even at odds with the stance taken by their rule-bound

²⁵ Matthew Taylor, *The association game: A history of British football* (Abingdon, 2007); Tony Collins, *A social history of English rugby union* (Abingdon, 2009).

associations. In particular, the chapter examines whether, within at least three levels of the game, north-south collaboration occurred between 1921-55.

Chapter three presents a quantitative dataset from which a clear picture can be drawn of the health of rugby based upon the number of clubs affiliated to the IRFU for the period between 1922 and 1990. From that statistical base, the chapter explores which wider social, economic and cultural factors affected the affiliation trends that are evident. For instance, how important was schools' rugby in Ireland and was this affected by the changing face of education? How robust was the social base of the game, and how did this relate to wider economic trends? How did the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games interact with the health of rugby?

Chapter four also presents a quantitative dataset which permits the measurement of the health of football by clubs affiliated to both the IFA and FAI, providing a similarly broad coverage of the period between 1922-90. It presents the first comprehensive mapping of the prevalence of junior football in both parts of Ireland, which allows us to address the question as to how closely linked the health of the game was to urbanisation. It also considers the extent and importance of workplace-based football in Ireland between 1921-51, the development of women's football in Ireland and, as in chapter, it asks how the game's social base interacted with wider economic trends?

Chapter five addresses the issue of spectator violence at association football matches in Ireland, which is described, categorised and assessed with a focus on the period 1921-90. The chapter asks, what was the nature of such spectator violence? If considered at all, previously there has been a tendency to think about spectator violence in the case of Belfast and in the context of the sectarian and political divisions of that city. This consideration asks us to think about other aspects of such violence.

This thesis finds that whilst rugby may have remained under the control of an all-island body which devolved regional control to four provincial bodies, the game would not always be insulated from the practical reality of partition, despite what some of the existing historiography might suggest. Maintaining an all-island identity was not easy, while the evidence of Ulster shows that managing a game across borders and across communities proved difficult in practice. It will become clear to the reader how the development of club rugby in Ulster was first hindered by disruption caused by the political border within

that province, second by the existence of liminal space for the game on both the northern and southern sides of that border, and third the apparent regional disparity in the game's development within Northern Ireland itself demarcated by areas east and west of the River Bann.

This thesis considers the matter of who could legitimately represent Ireland in football, an issue undoubtedly clouded by the fact that game's governance was partitioned at a moment when the nature of the political partition of the island did not seem fixed. That the effective limits of governance and jurisdiction settled upon by the IFA and FAI corresponded to the shape of political partition has led some historical accounts incorrectly to attribute that schism directly to political matters. Nonetheless, it will become clear to the reader how, underneath the dispute occupying that top tier of the game, significant interaction occurred at the same time between football in Ireland, north and south, in the realms of schools, university and club football. Thus, whilst the administrative ties that bound football in Ireland had been coming apart from as early as 1911 and, post-1921, two incompatible claims to be the sole legitimate representative of Ireland reached a stalemate, the foundation for a resolution to the dispute had been laid at the lower levels of the game and, in 1978, two Ireland's would become none.

Beyond the administrative level, the thesis has mapped the provincial/regional prevalence of both rugby and football clubs in the post-partition era, and considers that development in the context of Irish urbanisation. Developments occurring within the social base of each game, such as rugby's response to educational reform or the prevalence of workplace football teams, are detailed extensively for the first time. The impact that the role of television, from its humble origins in the Republic of Ireland in 1961 which has been skilfully detailed by Robert Savage,²⁶ had on rugby and football in Ireland is for the first time explored in this study.

The conduct of the spectator, a well-documented area within the sociological study of hooliganism, has for the first time been considered in an Irish context. It pushes beyond the obvious commentary on violence rooted in

²⁶ Robert J. Savage, *Irish television: The political and social origins* (Santa Barbara, 1996); Robert J. Savage, 'Broadcasting on the island of Ireland', *Cambridge history of Ireland, vol. iv* (Cambridge, 2017), pp 553-76.

sectarian or political divisions to identify other relevant types of spectator violence in a thematic study of football spectator violence between 1921 and 1990.

The partition of Ireland, instituted and confirmed, first in law and then in practice, between 1920 and 1922, had contrasting impacts on sporting pastimes on the island. Gaelic games, perhaps the most popular sporting association, continued to be organised on an all-Ireland basis in the post-partition era. This is a study of the two other most popular sporting pastimes prior to political partition, rugby and association football. While both were castigated by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) as ‘foreign’ games,²⁷ they had been embraced by considerable numbers in Ireland since the 1870s. In their most obvious guise, they charted very different paths in the post-partition era. There remained a single international representative team for rugby in Ireland after 1922, whereas in football two international teams representing two governing bodies have endured since the partition of Irish football governance during 1921. The first strand of this study, containing chapters one and two, is concerned primarily with the administrative response of rugby and association football to the partition of Ireland and its aftermath. Previously, this kind of exploration has been pursued with respect to athletics²⁸ and cycling.²⁹ In his account of the latter, Kevin Howard has written that the most fundamental question for Irish teams competing in the international arena since has been ‘what is the national territory?’³⁰

With a greater focus than has previously been afforded to Ulster, chapter one addresses, for the first time, rugby in Ireland in respect of how it was affected by partition. At least one critical issue, the obvious possibility for wider political ruptures to have affected the administration of that game in

²⁷ 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’, *International journal of the history of sport*, 10:3 (1993), pp 333-60; Cormac Moore, *The GAA vs Douglas Hyde: The removal of Ireland’s first president as GAA patron* (Cork, 2012).

²⁸ Pádraig Griffin, *The politics of Irish athletics, 1850-1990* (Ballinamore, 1990).

²⁹ Kevin Howard, ‘Territorial politics and Irish cycling’, Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways, working paper 21, <https://www.qub.ac.uk/researchcentres/CentreforInternationalBordersResearch/Publications/WorkingPapers/MappingFrontiersworkingpapers/Fileupload.175422.en.pdf> [accessed 29 Dec. 2021].

³⁰ Kevin Howard, ‘Competitive sports: the territorial politics of Irish cycling’, in John Coakley and Liam O’Dowd (eds), *Crossing the Border: New Relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland* (Dublin, 2007), p. 227.

Ireland, is one that many previous journalistic chroniclers of that game in Ireland have been reluctant to engage.³¹

Chapter two nuances the story of the administrative response to partition in Irish football. Cormac Moore has convincingly argued that this was a sporting administrative rupture that, although occurring during 1921, had roots that preceded the confirming of the political partition of Ireland. If, in the words of Howard, soccer ‘can be understood as expressing forms of *boundary reinforcing* twenty-six county and six-county nationalism,’³² then this thesis shows that cross boundary activity was more widespread than has often been acknowledged.

Chapters three and four corroborates Paul Rouse’s claim that, ‘in this new sporting world ... love of sport, in itself, did not adequately explain why certain people played certain games in certain places’.³³ If that claim has been fleshed out in recent regional studies of rugby and association football (concerning both Munster³⁴ and County Donegal)³⁵ then this thesis advances that work considerably through its temporal and spatial study of the patterns of participation in rugby and association football – identifying, explaining and comparing the prevalence of clubs across Ireland across the period 1922-90.

Paul Rouse has also written of the ‘great and obvious absence...[of]... an all-Ireland study of the game (football) and all that it means, ranging across political, social and cultural history’.³⁶ Equally, aside from O’Callaghan’s study of Munster, such an observation might be made regarding the absence of an all-Ireland study of rugby. It becomes clear throughout that where rugby and football players both lived and worked affected the patterns of participation outlined throughout. Particularly in the case of rugby, chapter three explores the social base of the game in Ireland, a matter too often inadequately explained in the past. Received wisdom regarding the history of rugby in

³¹ Sean Diffley, *The men in green: The story of Irish rugby* (London, 1973); Edmund Van Esbeck, *One Hundred Years of Irish Rugby* (Dublin, 1974); Edmund Van Esbeck, *The Story of Irish Rugby* (London, 1986).

³² Howard, ‘Competitive sports’, p. 228.

³³ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 242.

³⁴ O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, Toms, *Soccer in Munster*.

³⁵ Curran, *The development of sport*.

³⁶ Paul Rouse, (Review of) ‘Irish soccer migrants: a social and cultural history’, *Sport in history*, 41:1 (2021), pp 153-4.

Ireland,³⁷ sometimes simplistic rather than wise, substituted for sustained or rigorous analysis. The context of Irish urbanisation and wider economic trends, it will become clear to the reader in chapters three and four, affected the health of both games and this should become a vital component to our understanding of the social base of both games.

Association football's development has previously been explored by Neal Garnham in respect of the pre-partition period,³⁸ while Cronin and Moore have paid attention to the politics of football after partition. Chapter four contains the first sustained quantitative study of Ireland and has established patterns and trends in football's development. Upon that statistical base, chapter four goes some way to unpacking some of the cultural and socio-economic factors affecting the game's development, north and south, during the post-partition era. In this regard, it expands on the work of Mark Tynan which concerned football in the south in the inter-war years.³⁹ The first comprehensive study of workplace football in Ireland, a subject that has been mostly ignored by historians, with the exception perhaps of David Toms, is a significant addition to the historiography provided for the reader in chapter four.

Chapter five addresses a significant gap in the Irish historiography. The subject of sporting violence is one that, in the Irish context, relatively little has been written about.⁴⁰ Even less has been written about sport and spectator violence in Ireland, despite a proliferation of sociological interest in that phenomenon across a wide range of sports and international case studies. The chapter advances our understanding of that issue beyond the obvious commentary on violence rooted in sectarian or political divisions to identify other relevant types of spectator violence.

Across its three strands, the thesis makes a contribution not only to sport history, but to our understanding of associational culture, popular culture,

³⁷ Diffley, *The men in green*; Van Esbeck, *One Hundred Years*; Van Esbeck, *The Story of Irish Rugby*.

³⁸ Garnham, *Association football and society*.

³⁹ Mark Tynan, 'Association football and Irish society during the inter-war period, 1918-1939' (NUI Maynooth, PhD Thesis, 2013).

⁴⁰ Notable exceptions include the work of James Kelly and Neal Garnham in relation to violence against animals, see Kelly, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 212; and Neal Garnham, 'The survival of popular blood sports in Victorian Ulster', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, culture, history, literature* vol. 107C (2007), pp 107-26.

and mentalities in post-partition Ireland, telling us much not only about Irish society and how it evolved, but what these games meant to their administrators, players and spectators.

Despite the different foci of the strands of this thesis introduced above, all five chapters are grounded in a robust primary source base which has been mined in pursuit of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

First, all chapters draw upon the administrative records of the relevant sporting governing bodies, the IRFU, IFA and FAI. The records of clubs affiliated to these bodies, normally but not always contained in the annual reports presented at AGM's, form the critical quantitative base to much of the analysis of this study. In strand one (chapters one and two), that data informs the considerations of partition as it relates to both rugby and football. This is especially evident in the sections of chapter one that bring into relief the patterns of participation in rugby for Ulster, while considering the relationship of these to the border.

In strand two (chapters three and four), the affiliation data provides the core of the statistical base presented for the reader. Being able to provide a consistent measure of the health of rugby and football across space and time, adds to our knowledge and opens up a series of questions worth exploring. In both strands one and two, the annual financial statements and the minutes of individual council and subcommittee meetings of those governing bodies inform much of the qualitative analysis while, on occasion providing further quantitative evidence, supplementing the club affiliation data.

As is noted at various points throughout, it is possible that, on some occasions, the national governing bodies presented in their annual reports to members a state of affairs that, at least to some extent, misrepresented the reality. The utilisation of the archival records of regional or provincial subdivisions of those governing bodies offers some mitigation by providing alternative perspectives. In the case of rugby those are the administrative records of the IRFU Northern/Ulster Branch, and in the case of football those are the administrative records of the Leinster and Connacht Football Associations, the former being a founding member of the FAI. In addition, the administrative records of individual clubs, especially in the case of Ulster/Northern Ireland, both corroborate and challenge the narrative presented by the national or provincial governing bodies. Those are the records of the North of

Ireland [rugby] Football Club and Linfield [association] Football and Athletic Club, both of which are located in Belfast. Those club archives contain committee minutes, annual reports, cash books and financial statements that illustrate how wider political, social and economic factors could impact upon individual clubs.

Second, newspaper archives - particularly the *Irish Newspaper Archive*, the *British Newspaper Archive*, and the *Irish Times Digital Archive* - have been consulted extensively. In strand one, they serve to elucidate the isolation of rugby in the areas of Ulster where the game was peripheral in comparison with the greater Belfast area. The newspaper coverage of the partition of Irish football witnessed the Belfast and Dublin sporting press largely toe the line of the Belfast-based IFA and Dublin-based FAI respectively. While acknowledging the existence of editorial bias that may have coloured their coverage of the events discussed throughout, it is from those sources that evidence for the previously undocumented existence of unofficial all-Ireland championship fixtures in football has been gleaned. In strand two of the thesis, newspaper sources add qualitative texture to the statistical base, detailing the patterns of participation in both rugby and football. The experience of those games at a local or district level gleaned from newspaper sources often differed to the national picture presented in the archival records of the governing bodies. For instance, the database of workplace football teams and the patterns of spectator violence at football in Ireland, and the analysis of each presented here, would have been impossible without local newspaper coverage.

Third, across the entire study, state records pertaining to both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland serve to elucidate aspects of the fortunes of the sports analysed, particularly but not only when national or local government took a direct interest in the games. Examples include evidence as to the scarcity of playing fields in Belfast in the 1950s and a government investigation into the obvious inadequacy of key stadia in Dublin in the 1960s. Explaining and contextualising the sometimes-diverging development of the games, north and south, and the wider political, social and economic contexts affecting that development, drew upon direct and contextual evidence from national and local government records in both jurisdictions, such as the statistical publications of the Census of Ireland and the Census of Northern Ireland, and both the Northern Ireland parliament and Dáil Éireann.

That source base informs the mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches deployed the five chapters that follow. Combined, such an approach allows for sporting developments to be presented to the reader in the context of wider political, social, cultural and economic trends. In doing so, it helps us to think about what mattered to the development of these particular sports, while it also helps us to think about why, and to what extent, sport mattered in post-partition Ireland.

Chapter 1: Province, partition and politics: rugby in Ulster and the IRFU Northern Branch in a divided Ireland.

Introduction

This chapter sets out to examine the governance of rugby union in Ireland and, in particular, the relationship between the northern and southern administration of the game in the decades since 1922. Regrettably, some of the earlier simplistic chronicles of rugby in Ireland – in particular, those written by journalists close to the game’s governing body, the IRFU – have lacked any sustained rigour. A kind of consensus emerged, which emphasised inter-provincial and eventually cross-border cohesion, portraying a harmony in rugby that transcended the divisions of wider society. This consensus sometimes involved omitting or eliding key events that disrupted that impression of harmony. In recent years, the work of Liam O’Callaghan, in particular,¹ has not only provided a more nuanced approach, but has established a template for analysis that this study seeks to build upon. O’Callaghan has focused on Munster and this chapter advances our consideration of matters of administration and identity in Irish rugby by focusing on rugby in Ulster, a heretofore strangely neglected subject. It does so in relation to three areas: province, partition and politics.

In its first section, this chapter charts how a governing body utilising a provincial template emerged in the late nineteenth century and accounts for how these provincial demarcations survived the political partition of Ireland that did not align with those provincial boundaries. Immediately, that puts the spotlight onto the IRFU’s northern affiliate – theoretically Ulster, but a body that for eight years clung to their traditional name, that of the Northern Branch. Significantly, that name allowed the branch to maintain a distance from the political concept of Ulster, which had underpinned the demand for the partition of Ireland. A renaming as the IRFU Ulster Branch was eventually enforced by

¹ Liam O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*.

the IRFU in Dublin in 1930. Section one concludes with a consideration of these developments. The province of Ulster is the primary focus of the rest of the chapter.

In its second section, the chapter details the development of, or rather the lack of, rugby activity in the three border counties of Ulster that did not find themselves within the new political entity of Northern Ireland, a ‘state’ that was often erroneously referred to as Ulster. This section considers the extent to which the game of rugby was geographically isolated in areas of Ulster that were *beyond* the Northern Ireland border. In addition, the section details a liminal space *along* the border but inside Northern Ireland in which the game similarly struggled to gain a foothold. Lastly, linked to this, the section examines the game’s geographic peripherality *within* Northern Ireland, examining a divide demarcated by the natural frontier of the River Bann.

In section three, the chapter considers how the Ulster Branch negotiated the seemingly incompatible identities that had under-pinned the partition of Ireland were in the decades after 1922. This section charts these developments first in relation to the years between 1922 and 1930, those in which the Branch held on to its traditional Northern label. Second, it considers how the Branch managed its dual identities in a national emergency – as it was for Northern Ireland – during the Second World War. Third, it explores the post-war era (1946-59), which included a major crisis about symbols, forcing the Ulster Branch to face down criticism from its southern counterparts in the IRFU. Fourth, and finally, it considers the era of the Northern Ireland troubles, focusing on the years 1970-81, but in particular it explores the grave crisis that engulfed Irish rugby in early 1972.

1.1: Province? Ulster, the IRFU Northern Branch and rugby in the north of Ireland.

Rugby activity in Belfast can be dated to as January 1869 when the Belfast press reported on a fixture between the North of Ireland Football Club and

Queen's College at the Ormeau Cricket Ground, the home of the former.² The establishment of an Irish Football Union (IFU) in Dublin in December 1874³ marked the emergence of the first administrative body for the game in Ireland. That was quickly followed by the establishment of a Northern Football Union (NFU) in Belfast in January 1875.⁴ However, it is important to note that collaboration between rugby in Leinster and Ulster occurred prior to 1874, such as when Dublin University played against the 'hardy northerns' of Ballycastle (County Antrim), in November 1872.⁵ Ireland's first international fixture, in which the team was a joint selection of the two Irish unions, was a 7-0 loss to England at the Kennington Oval in London on 15 February 1875.⁶

The gradual emergence of a single governing body for rugby union in Ireland, and the stories associated with that, form an important strand within the existing historiography. The co-operation that occurred between 1872 and 1875 suggests the north-south relationship was considerably more cordial than the existing historiography occasionally implies.⁷ After 1875, the selection of an international team to represent Ireland was grounded in an annual interprovincial match between representative teams of the two unions; Leinster represented the IFU and Ulster represented the NFU and the international team was selected from the best performers. The earliest record of this interprovincial fixture was Ulster's defeat of Leinster at Belfast in November

² *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 Jan. 1869; Printed rules and bye-laws of North of Ireland Cricket and Football Club, 1919 (PRONI, Records of North of Ireland Cricket and Rugby Club, D4286/C/1).

³ Edmund Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, pp 21-31; 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. 6; John Nauright, *Sports around the world: History, culture and practice* [4 vols.] (Santa Barbara, 2012), p. 180; Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 131; Jacques McCarthy, 'International football: Ireland' in Rev. Francis Marshall (ed.), *Football, the rugby union game* (London, 1892), p. 234; Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A modern history* (Oxford, 1989), p. 245; O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 25-7; Alan Bairner, *Sport, nationalism and globalisation: European and north American perspectives* (Albany, 2001), p. 27.

⁴ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, p. 24; Garnham, *The origins and development*, p. 6; O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 25; Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 131.

⁵ *Irish Times and daily advertiser*, 28 Nov. 1872.

⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 16 Feb. 1875.

⁷ For example, Jason Tuck, 'Making sense of emerald commotion: Rugby Union, national identity and Ireland', *Identities: Global studies in culture and power*, 10:4 (2003), pp 495-515.

1875.⁸ In February 1877 Belfast hosted its first international game when Ireland lost to Scotland at Ormeau.⁹

Subsequently, building on rugby activity in Cork and then in Limerick,¹⁰ a Munster side took to the interprovincial field for the first time when they were defeated by Leinster at Dublin in March 1877.¹¹ Indeed, it would be a weekend of interprovincial fixtures in Dublin in January 1879 – when Ulster first defeated Munster, on Friday, 17 January and then Leinster on Saturday, 18 January¹² – that would consolidate that early growth and underpin the inauguration of the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) in 1879 as sole governing body for the game in Ireland. At a banquet dinner that followed, toasts to ‘The Queen’, ‘The Ulster XV’ and ‘The Leinster and Munster XVs’ were heard, and, for the very first time, also to ‘The Irish Rugby Football Union’ (IRFU).¹³ Whilst rugby activity in Connacht is evident in 1879,¹⁴ the earliest record of a Connacht inter-provincial fixture was their loss to Munster, by eight points to nil, in Limerick in January 1898;¹⁵ two weeks later, Connacht was represented at the IRFU AGM.¹⁶

Consequently, by 1898 and after twenty-four years, the four provinces of Ireland had recognised administrative structures for rugby, located in the key urban centres what would remain the heartlands of the game over the next century (see chapter three).

⁸ *Irish Times*, 25 Nov. 1875; Garnham, *The origins and development*, p. 6.

⁹ *Irish Times*, 20 Feb. 1877.

¹⁰ O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 26-7.

¹¹ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, p. 35; *Irish Times*, 26 Mar. 1877.

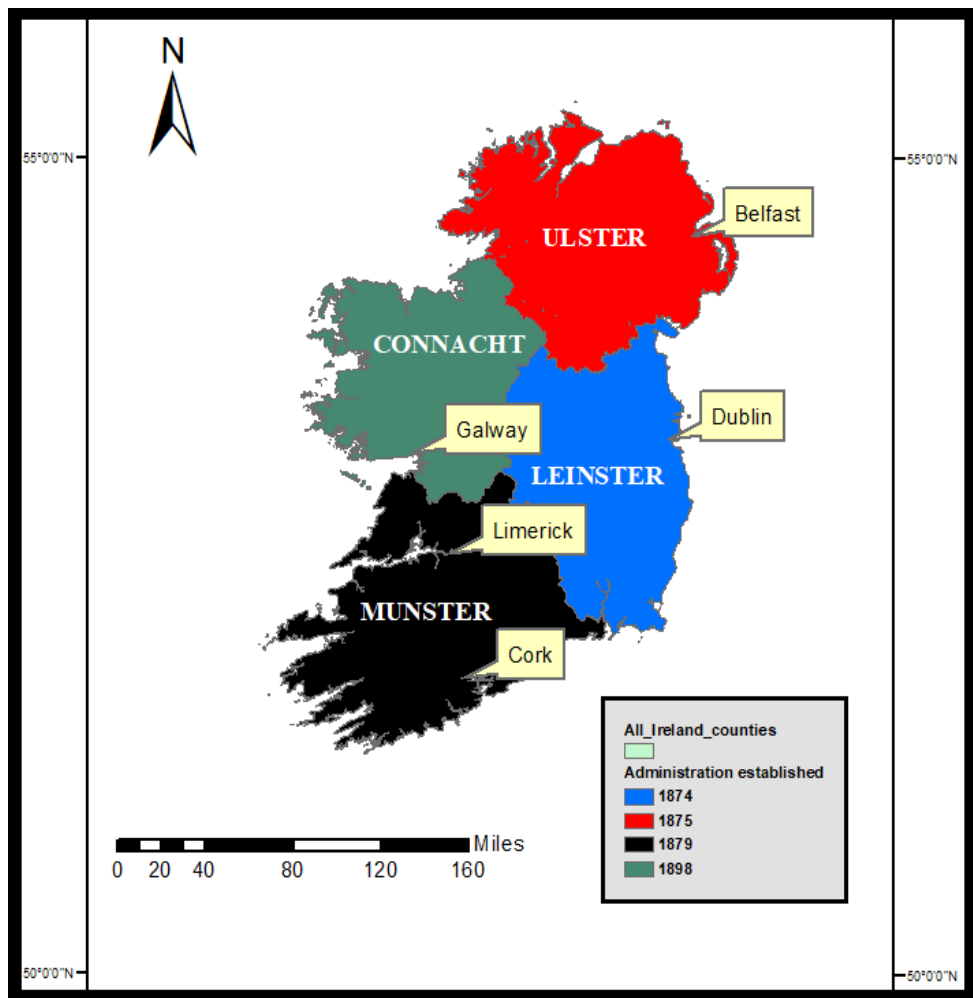
¹² *Irish Times*, 20 Jan. 1879.

¹³ Diffley, *The men in green*, p. 45.

¹⁴ Three of the IRFU’s eighty-eight clubs in its first season (1879/80) were located in Connacht; Garnham, *The origins and development*, p. 41.

¹⁵ *Evening Echo*, 10 Jan. 1898.

¹⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 24 Jan. 1898.



Map 1: The development of a rugby administration in Ireland, 1874-98.¹⁷

From early on, nomenclature proved a complication when it came to rugby in Ulster. In many ways, some of the post-partition issues that are the focus of the sections that follow, are foreshadowed by the manner in which the *Freeman's Journal* described the selection of an Ulster team for the interprovincial contest versus Leinster in 1878: 'the following are the gentlemen chosen by the Northern Football Union of Ireland committee to represent Ulster'.¹⁸ The merger that formed the IRFU in January 1879 saw the existing Belfast-based administration become the governing body, at least in theory, for the nine-county province of Ulster. Nonetheless, that IRFU provincial branch would describe itself as the 'Northern Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union' for the next fifty years. Even as they did so, there were

¹⁷ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, pp 21-4; O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 38-45; *Cork Examiner*, 24 Jan. 1898.

¹⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Mar. 1878.

others who described them as the Ulster Branch. The extant archival records of the Northern Branch date from 1886,¹⁹ but evidence of interchangeable naming exists prior to that. The Dublin-based *Freeman's Journal* recorded a meeting of the IRFU 'Ulster Branch' at the Linen Hall Hotel, Belfast, in December 1881,²⁰ yet in January 1884 the Belfast press reported meetings of the IRFU 'Northern Branch'.²¹ That lack of clarity continued into the early twentieth century. For example, in 1904 the Belfast press recorded a meeting of the IRFU 'Northern Branch',²² whereas in 1906 a local County Down newspaper referred to a meeting of the IRFU 'Ulster Branch'.²³

An analysis of annual meetings of the IRFU Northern Branch throughout the Irish revolutionary era (1912-23) reveals little explicit mention of the wider political context. When politics emerged these tended to be unionist and imperial. An admittedly rare example of this was the decision of Queen's University in January 1914 to cancel all its fixtures under the auspices of the Northern Branch, explaining that they did this 'after the admirable precedent set a few weeks ago by the North of Ireland Club'. The decision was, they explained 'the result of the action of several members of the club who had tendered their resignation in order that they may be free to devote Saturday afternoons to the important work of drilling in connection with the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).'²⁴ The UVF had been established in January 1913 to coordinate paramilitary activities associated with Unionist opposition to home rule for Ireland.²⁵

Following the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, the Northern Branch moved to suspend all competitive fixtures for that season with the exception of schools' fixtures in mid-September.²⁶ Soon after, 'in connection with Sir Edward Carson's appeal to Ulstermen', the Northern Branch was amongst twelve sporting organisations that met in Belfast:

¹⁹ Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1886-9 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/1).

²⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Dec. 1881.

²¹ *Northern Whig*, 15 Jan. 1884; *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 Jan. 1884.

²² *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 30 Sept. 1904.

²³ *North Down Herald and County Down Independent*, 2 Feb. 1906.

²⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Jan. 1914.

²⁵ *Ballymena Observer*, 31 Jan. 1913.

²⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 Sept 1914.

At this meeting it was decided to take steps for the formation of a sports battalion to be recruited from the sporting bodies of Ulster. This battalion when formed will be attached to the Ulster Division and will be under the same terms of enlistment.²⁷

The Belfast press reported that Northern Branch president G.G. McCrea sent a circular in connection with Carson's appeal that 'urged upon the officials of the various clubs the necessity of doing all they can to assist the project and suggests the desirability of making a canvass of the members'.²⁸

In September 1914, a meeting of the IRFU in Dublin passed a resolution 'that all football fixtures for this season be abandoned, save schoolboy fixtures',²⁹ although O'Callaghan has written that, as late as December [1914], [club] matches in Dublin, Cork and Limerick were still being played'.³⁰ In October, it was reported that many of Ulster's senior club rugby players:

are now either at the [Western] front or are preparing to go there, and with the gaps caused by their departure it would have been impossible for any of the more important clubs to get together a representative team, even if they wished to continue to carry on operations as usual.³¹

Perhaps as a result of these circumstances, a team representing Belfast selected by the Northern Branch took on a military team of those based at Ballykinlar Camp, at Ormeau in Belfast in December 1914.³² It is likely that, with no other fixtures viable, this was a means of providing some morale boost for those who had not volunteered and been sent to the frontline. With schools rugby the only level of the game in Ulster permitted to continue during the war, the gate money from a friendly game at Ormeau in January 1915 between Campbell College and Foyle College, was reported as 'being devoted to the war fund in connection with the Northern Branch'.³³ Upon the death in battle of Lieutenant R.A. Lloyd, an old boy of Ulster's Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, and 'a rugby player of phenomenal

²⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Sept. 1914.

²⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 24 Sept. 1914.

²⁹ *Dublin Daily Express*, 16 Sept. 1914.

³⁰ Liam O'Callaghan, 'Irish rugby and the First World War', *Sport in society*, 19:1 (2016), p. 97.

³¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 Oct. 1914.

³² *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 Dec. 1914.

³³ *Northern Whig*, 28 Jan. 1915.

brilliance', it was claimed that 'few things have been more noteworthy in this time of crisis than the splendid response made by rugby men to the call of duty'.³⁴ Indeed, whilst the war continued, a meeting of the Northern Branch in October 1915 confirmed that competitive rugby in Ulster remained suspended apart from the schools rugby for another season and, 'owing to there not being any business to transact, it was decided not to hold any annual meeting this year'.³⁵ In March 1916, notably, 'the long interregnum in the Northern rugby world' was described as having begun at the end of 1913 – 'first, on account of the political crisis, subsequently on account of the war'.³⁶

Whilst the war ended in November 1918, competitive rugby in Ulster would not resume until the 1919/20 season.³⁷ The 'political crisis' that preceded the war, upon its conclusion, gave way to the War of Independence. Despite that, not even the looming imposition of political partition, instituted and confirmed between 1920 and 1922, prevented the Northern Branch AGM of 1920 from reporting 'the past season (1919/20) [having been] one of the most successful ever experienced by the Branch'.³⁸ Political partition, which dissected the historical province of Ulster, did appear to threaten the settled organisational structures of Irish rugby first adopted in 1879.

The immediate response from rugby was, however, one of inaction, insofar as it appears the game carried on as before, arguably an attempt 'to place the playing of rugby outside politics'.³⁹ Given the wider revolutionary context, it might be surprising to learn that according to the *Belfast News-Letter*, the IRFU annual report for 1921 stated that members had been 'pleased with the success with which the inter-provincials went off last year'.⁴⁰ In those games played in January 1921, Ulster defeated Leinster⁴¹ and Munster⁴² at Lansdowne Road whilst Munster defeated Leinster in Cork.⁴³ The continuance of inter-provincial contests is not in itself remarkable; hockey inter-provincials

³⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 May 1915.

³⁵ *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Oct. 1915.

³⁶ *Northern Whig*, 20 Mar. 1916.

³⁷ *Northern Whig*, 19 Feb. 1919.

³⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 25 Sept. 1920.

³⁹ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 269.

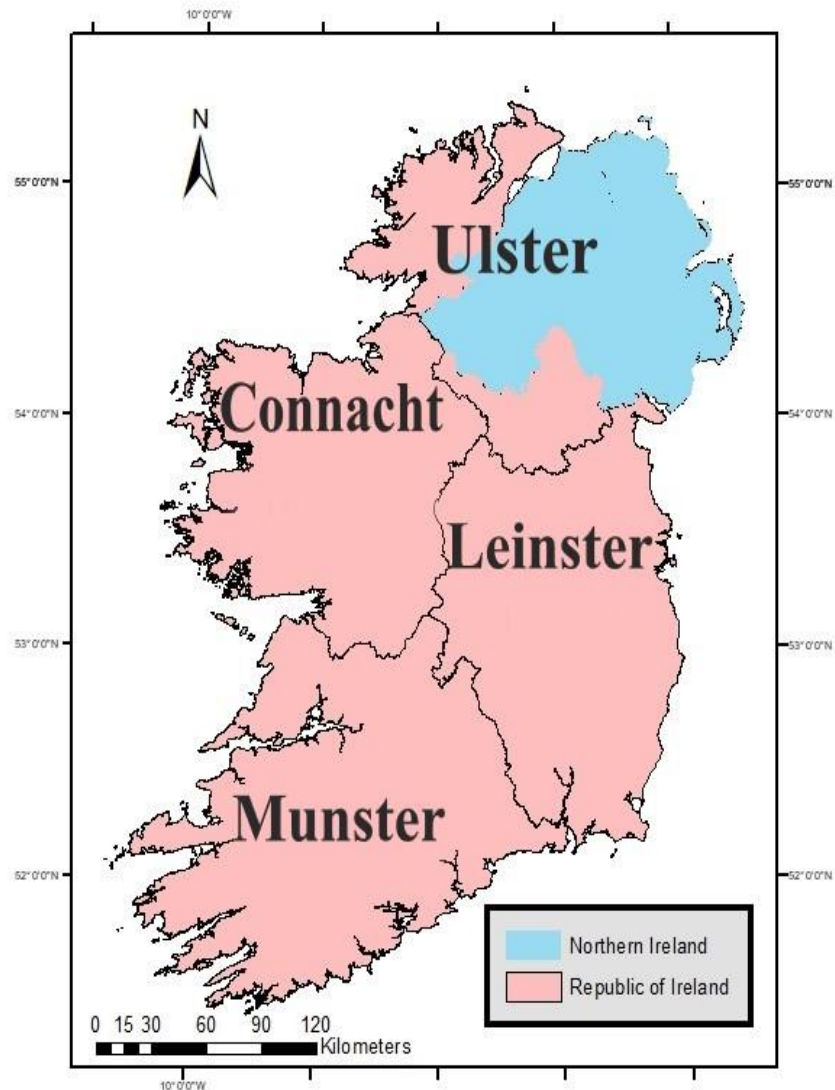
⁴⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Sept 1921.

⁴¹ *Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 1921.

⁴² *Irish Times*, 24 Jan. 1921.

⁴³ *Irish Times*, 17 Jan. 1921.

also continued during the Irish revolutionary era.⁴⁴ However, it is noteworthy. For rugby, the inter-provincial contests of 1879 had underpinned the establishment of the IRFU, while their successful continuance in 1921, arguably, did much to sustain both that organisation's traditional provincial structure and collaboration at a moment of potential crisis.



Map 2: IRFU provinces and Northern Ireland border 1920-2.

⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 2 Feb. 1914 & 16 Jan. 1922.

What's in a name? The Northern Branch becomes the Ulster Branch

In the years immediately after partition, the provincial branch based in Belfast continued to refer to itself as the 'Northern Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union'. That was in spite of the fact that the IRFU bye-laws had read in 1923:

that a Branch of the Union shall be formed in each of the following provinces, viz: Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connaught; not less than five clubs to constitute a Branch.⁴⁵

Yet when the Northern Branch committee met on 3 January 1922 to choose the team members for the first interprovincial since the Anglo-Irish Treaty was concluded a month previously, it do so for its representative side, Ulster.⁴⁶ As the military was 'in temporary occupation' of the Balmoral Showgrounds – the normal venue for 'big rugby fixtures in Belfast' – this fixture, versus Leinster on 14 January 1922, took place at Windsor Park, resulting in a victory for Ulster by eleven points to three.⁴⁷

A branch located 'in' each province rather than one named 'for' each province had provided sufficient wiggle room for a different interpretation of the 1923 bye-laws between the administrative subdivisions of the IRFU. The bye-laws for Northern Branch cup competitions passed at that bodies 1923 AGM illustrate the ambiguity in its interpretation, rather than revealing any motive associated with the political partition of the island that been confirmed in the previous years:

1. The cup shall be called the "Ulster Schools Challenge Cup".
2. The competition for the cup shall be governed by the Northern Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union.
3. The cup shall be open for competition annually to all schools' clubs in Ulster belonging to the Northern Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1922-5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/6).

⁴⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 4 Jan. 1922.

⁴⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 Jan. 1922.

⁴⁸ Minutes of Northern Branch AGM, 30 April 1923, Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1922-5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/6).

The northern and southern press continued to reflect the lack of an accurate or consistent description of either the Belfast-based administration or its representative side. For instance, between 1923 and 1927, the northern⁴⁹ and southern⁵⁰ press coverage of that body's administrative functions still referred to the Northern Branch, yet the same outlets reported on interprovincial fixtures involving Ulster.⁵¹ In 1930, a special IRFU council meeting in early May was held to consider a motion 'that the existing Bye-Laws of the Irish Rugby Football Union be rescinded, and that the laws as set forth in the draft sent herewith be adopted as the laws of the Union'. However, the specific bye-law in question as it now read represented no substantive change how a Branch was to be constituted:

A Branch of the Union shall be formed in each of the provinces of Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connaught; not less than five clubs to constitute a Branch.⁵²

That it had taken rugby in Ulster fifty-five years to arrive at a point where it was represented by an Ulster Branch is curious, and it might at first glance suggest that the IRFU recognised that their northern affiliate was somewhat different to its three southern counterparts, however the reasons as to why the Belfast-based administrative body chose to describe itself as the Northern Branch over a long period are unclear.

There do appear at least three possible explanations. First, it may be that including the word Northern in their branch title after the merger that founded the IRFU in 1879, was a matter of signalling continuity with the former Northern Football Union (1875-9). That ongoing symbolic connection was epitomised by H.C. Kelly, the first president of the NFU who was still in attendance at Northern Branch AGMs forty-one years later (1927/8).⁵³

Second, the Belfast-based administration had been allocated the historical Irish province of Ulster following the merger that formed the IRFU

⁴⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 30 Aug. 1923 & 6 Mar. 1924.

⁵⁰ *Irish Independent*, 21 Feb. 1924, 27 Apr. 1927, & 23 Sept. 1927.

⁵¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Jan. 1924; *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 Dec. 1924; *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 Dec. 1926.

⁵² IRFU committee minutes, 17 April 1930. Minute book of the IRFU, 1927-31 (IRFU archives, M005).

⁵³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 22 Sept. 1927.

in January 1879.⁵⁴ In practice, however, its operational reach was more limited, a challenge unquestionably posed by the political border imposed between 1920 and 1922. Describing itself as the Northern Branch may have been a recognition of this.

Third, we might consider that, to some extent, Northern and Ulster were interchangeable and recognised as such although, arguably, Northern had been usefully imprecise in the years prior to partition. Beyond rugby, the deliberate construction of an Ulster that was separate to the rest of the claimed homogenous national territory of Ireland,⁵⁵ was a political project that developed in response to the introduction of the first Home Rule Bill by the Liberal British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone in 1886.⁵⁶ If the Belfast-based provincial unit of the IRFU had adopted the title Ulster then, it might have come to be seen as tied to that project.

Despite delving into the archival evidence, it has not been possible to identify clearly the impetus for the eventual change of the Branch name in 1930. We can only speculate that the Ulsterman, Tommy Greeves, who was the IRFU president in that season,⁵⁷ had some role to play in the Union's decision to issue revised bye-laws. The IRFU's Belfast affiliate retained its Northern Branch name and logo until mid-October 1930,⁵⁸ when a special general meeting later that month unanimously and conclusively resolved that:

The name of this Branch shall be "The Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union", and its headquarters shall be in Belfast, where all general and committee meetings shall be held.⁵⁹

It is possible that the name Northern, which previously had been usefully imprecise, was now politically problematic as it might have indicated ties between the Branch and the political project that was Northern Ireland. As

⁵⁴ Garnham, *The origins and development*, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Frederick Hertz, *Nationality in history and politics: A psychology and sociology of national sentiment and nationalism* (London, 1951), pp 150-1.

⁵⁶ James Loughlin, 'Creating 'A social and geographical fact': Regional identity and the Ulster question 1880s-1920s', *Past & Present*, 195 (May, 2007), p. 159.

⁵⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 30 Oct. 1929.

⁵⁸ Ulster Branch committee minutes, 18 Oct. 1930, Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the IRFU, 1930-4 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/9).

⁵⁹ Ulster Branch committee minutes, 24 Oct. 1930, Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the IRFU, 1930-4 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/9).

we know, the Branch's territory extended beyond that entity, and the last ever AGM of the Northern Branch in September 1930 noted that 'the game is becoming more popular in the province, and is spreading into places where it never existed before'.⁶⁰ Although there is no clear evidence that the name change was confirmed to extend the Branch's operational reach beyond the confines of Northern Ireland, we will now turn our attention to an assessment of whether that growth in the game's popularity included areas beyond the political border where the game had previously failed to gain a foothold.

1.2: Partition, periphery and rugby in Ulster.

If the name of the Branch was a symbolic matter, then partition appeared, at least, to raise very pragmatic issues. Ulster was the only IRFU province to find its traditional territory directly impacted by the political partition of Ireland. Moreover, initially, the operational challenges for rugby in Ulster appear to have been immense given that there was considerable violence along the border and the new state of Northern Ireland (particularly Belfast) was in 'the grip of almost uncontrollable violence between March and June 1922'.⁶¹ It is then noteworthy that Ulster's clubs successfully fulfilled competitive fixtures against southern opposition during these months. One example saw the Instonians club from Belfast defeat Munster's Cork Constitution in a Bateman Cup tie held at Lansdowne Road, Dublin, in April 1923.⁶²

In February 1924 the IRFU Northern Branch hosted Ireland's international versus England at its Ravenhill ground in Belfast.⁶³ It was an important statement of commitment to cross-border unity when 'the IRFU decided to equip a ground for rugby in Ulster and began development at . . . Ravenhill' during the previous season (1922/23).⁶⁴ Combined, these examples indicate that rugby in Ireland had, to some extent, adapted quickly to the new post-partition reality, and that its traditional provincial template remained

⁶⁰ *Northern Whig*, 20 Sept. 1930.

⁶¹ T.G. Fraser, *Ireland in conflict 1922-1998* (London, 2000), p. 5.

⁶² *Irish Times*, 21 April 1923.

⁶³ *Irish Times*, 8 Feb. 1924.

⁶⁴ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1922/3, Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1922-5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/6).

viable. At the very least, it appeared that in 1924 Belfast's traditional place within the game in Ireland, one the city had held since the 1870s, was secure.

A place apart: rugby in Ulster and the Northern Ireland border

It is significant, however, that in 1925 only one of the Northern Branch's thirty-three affiliated clubs was located outside the new six-county political unit of Northern Ireland. This suggests that the Branch's jurisdiction then effectively remained within the area that was Northern Ireland. This section, therefore, asks if references to 'the north of Ireland', when discussing rugby, reflected a territorial reality which was more limited than Ulster. Second, it inquires if the Northern Branch, later the Ulster Branch, regarded inculcating and managing a cross-border game as an essential function. What follows is an account of the game's development, or lack of it, in the Ulster counties of Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal that existed beyond the Northern Ireland border. These three counties (hereafter referred to as the "southern border counties") were those from the traditional nine-county province of Ulster that found themselves within the Irish Free State's jurisdiction after the political partition of the island between 1920 and 1922.

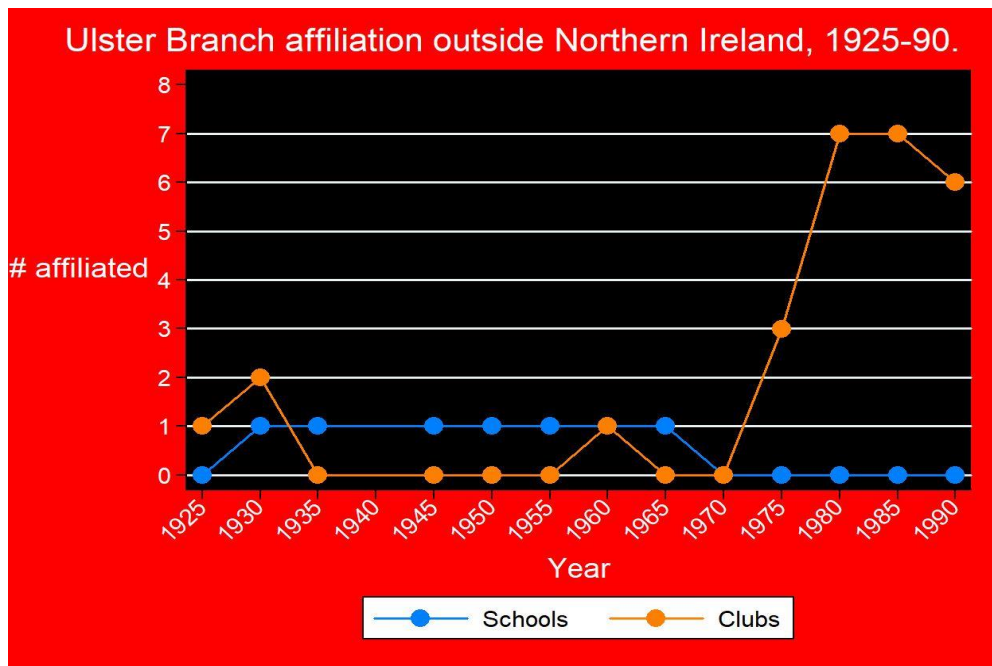


Fig. 1: Northern/Ulster branch affiliated clubs from outside Northern Ireland.⁶⁵

The data indicates that rugby in the southern border counties of Ulster was in a perilous state for almost the first half century of the border’s existence. The high point of that era, although it is a significant stretch to refer to it as such, was in 1930 when a total of two clubs and one school from those counties were affiliated to the Ulster Branch based in Belfast. By 1970, the low point had been reached, when there was no rugby affiliation of any kind, neither schools nor clubs, from this area beyond the Northern Ireland border. Thereafter, schools’ affiliation remained at zero, although club affiliations did at least begin an upward trajectory, rising to seven located in the southern border counties of Ulster between 1980 and 1985.

Newspaper sources indicate that Carrickmacross FC from County Monaghan was the first active rugby club to affiliate from the southern border counties. Prior to the partition of Ireland, interestingly, that activity took the form of irregular fixtures between Carrickmacross and clubs based in Leinster. This began as early as 1898, when the club was reported to have played against Great Northern Railway Dundalk.⁶⁶ Following partition, archival affiliation records indicate that the club was the first from that area to have formally

⁶⁵ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1924/5-1990/1 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/8-67).

⁶⁶ *Anglo Celt*, 17 Dec. 1898.

affiliated to the Northern Branch, in 1924.⁶⁷ Despite this affiliation, the informal links with clubs based in Leinster endured, and after their affiliation to the Ulster Branch had lapsed in 1930, Carrickmacross would again take part in friendly fixtures against clubs in Leinster (Navan) in 1932.⁶⁸

Similarly, Monaghan FC, founded in November 1928,⁶⁹ began a brief affiliation with the Ulster Branch in 1929.⁷⁰ Prior to that, Monaghan's friendly versus Armagh in January 1929 had been described as 'one of the first rugby matches ever played in the town'.⁷¹ Once again, that affiliation was to prove brief and Monaghan had also fallen back on irregular friendly fixtures against Leinster opposition (Dundalk) by early 1933.⁷²

Record of unaffiliated club rugby activity in County Cavan can be found in 1925 when 'the newly formed Cavan club played its first match', versus Carrickmacross.⁷³ In 1926, a 'County Cavan' rugby club were narrowly defeated in a friendly fixture. Again this was against a club based in Leinster (Malahide).⁷⁴ By 1928, an unaffiliated Cootehill Rugby Club from County Cavan contested a friendly fixture against Leinster opposition (Meath).⁷⁵ This was followed by a fixture versus the similarly unaffiliated Monaghan FC in March 1929.⁷⁶ It is evident that the Ulster Branch was aware of the existence of such unaffiliated clubs by April 1930, when their committee minutes noted that:

Cootehill intimated that as a club they had dissolved and a new rugby club known as County Cavan Rugby Football Club, had been formed. On the motion of Mr J. Gillespie (Collegians), seconded by Major Purdon (Queens) the new club was affiliated to the branch.⁷⁷

⁶⁷ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1924/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/8).

⁶⁸ *Drogheda Independent*, 26 Nov. 1932.

⁶⁹ *Sunday Independent*, 18 Nov. 1928; *Fermanagh Herald*, 24 Nov. 1928.

⁷⁰ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1929/30 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/13).

⁷¹ *Dundalk Democrat*, 12 Jan. 1929.

⁷² *Dundalk Democrat*, 25 Mar. 1933.

⁷³ *Anglo Celt*, 24 Oct. 1925.

⁷⁴ *Evening Herald*, 18 Mar. 1926.

⁷⁵ *Drogheda Independent*, 20 Oct. 1928.

⁷⁶ *Anglo Celt*, 16 Mar. 1929.

⁷⁷ Ulster Branch committee minutes, 18 Apr. 1930. Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the IRFU, 1928-30 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/8).

County Cavan's affiliation appears to have lapsed by the mid-1930s but there were signs of life in 1937. Then, the press reported on a meeting to (re)form 'County Cavan RFC' in August of that year with Arthur Maxwell, 11th Baron Farnham, as the club's inaugural president.⁷⁸ Notably, the reformed club again looked to Leinster for unofficial fixtures, including defeats in both home⁷⁹ and away⁸⁰ fixtures versus Dundalk in December 1937. In 1938, County Cavan Rugby Club (later known as simply Cavan FC), affiliated to the IRFU Ulster Branch, competing in its Junior Cup⁸¹ and Provincial Towns Cup⁸² competitions.

Newspaper sources indicate that Cavan Royal School FC provided the first rugby activity at any level emanating from the counties of Cavan, Monaghan or Donegal, when it participated in unofficial and irregular friendly fixtures as early as 1894.⁸³ The school was playing similar fixtures in 1926.⁸⁴ Cavan was one of five Royal Schools in Ulster and was established by King James I in 1608. Interestingly, its three sister schools located within what later became Northern Ireland – Armagh, Dungannon and Portora – had competed in the Ulster Schools Cup since the first ever edition in 1876,⁸⁵ whereas a fifth sister club, Raphoe Royal School in County Donegal, has never done so.⁸⁶ If Cavan was late to the rugby party, then partition likely posed both additional obstacles to participation. Nonetheless, the former did take its bow in official rugby activity, which in schools rugby meant competing for the Ulster Schools Cup, in 1929/30.⁸⁷ Cavan Royal School would be the only outlet for rugby activity in the southern border counties of Ulster during the Second World War (1939-45), when they played out a draw with Banbridge Academy in the Ulster Schools Cup preliminary round in January 1945.⁸⁸

⁷⁸ *Meath Chronicle*, 14 Aug. 1937.

⁷⁹ *Dundalk Democrat*, 11 Dec. 1937.

⁸⁰ *Dundalk Democrat*, 4 Dec. 1937.

⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 21 Oct. 1938.

⁸² *Irish Independent*, 30 Nov. 1938.

⁸³ *Anglo Celt*, 10 Mar. 1894.

⁸⁴ *Ulster Herald*, 6 Nov. 1926.

⁸⁵ Royal School Armagh defeated Royal Belfast Academical Institution in the first final, *Freeman's Journal*, 29 Feb. 1876.

⁸⁶ <https://www.royalschoolcavan.ie/history-of-the-royal-school/the-1608-royal-schools/> [accessed 4 Feb. 2021].

⁸⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 24 Oct. 1929.

⁸⁸ *Anglo Celt*, 20 Jan. 1945.

A post-war revival of Cavan FC would once again be a staged phenomenon, marked first by informal development, growing until affiliation with the Ulster Branch was justified. The first record of unofficial activity following the war suggests a familiar route, as once more Cavan FC travelled to Navan for a friendly in 1954.⁸⁹ We can assume this was the ‘Cavan club’ that, according to the *Anglo-Celt*, travelled to play Enniskillen in 1955,⁹⁰ and that the ‘County Cavan Rugby Football Club’ that held an AGM confirming their affiliation to the Ulster Branch in 1959,⁹¹ must surely have been Cavan FC. Despite that affiliation, the club would again seek its competition in Leinster, only one week later travelling for a friendly versus Dundalk.⁹² Cavan’s affiliation with the Ulster Branch came to an end in 1963, just months after they had contested a further friendly against Leinster opposition, Navan, in February 1963.⁹³ By the end of the 1966 season, that county’s remaining link with the Ulster Branch also ended, the Branch reporting that Cavan Royal School FC had, after thirty years, regrettably ‘dropped out’ during the season (1965/6).⁹⁴

In County Donegal, prior to the Second World War, no official rugby under the auspices of the provincial Branch is apparent. Between 1925 and 1933, local newspapers reported on irregular and unofficial rugby activity involving teams from Ballyshannon, Milford and Letterkenny. For example, in 1926 Ballyshannon travelled to Fermanagh where they defeated Enniskillen by twenty-one points to three,⁹⁵ and Milford made the trip to County Tyrone where they defeated Strabane by thirty-five points to nil.⁹⁶ If they did not affiliate to the Ulster Branch, Donegal clubs, it seems, looked across the border more frequently for opposition than the clubs of Monaghan and Cavan. A fixture between the Donegal rugby clubs did occur when Letterkenny travelled

⁸⁹ *Meath Chronicle*, 3 Apr. 1954.

⁹⁰ *Anglo Celt*, 29 Jan. 1955.

⁹¹ *Anglo Celt*, 19 Sept. 1959; the 1959/60 Ulster Branch annual report referred to the club as Cavan FC; Cavan took on Armagh in the 1960/1 Ulster Junior Cup, *Anglo Celt*, 29 Oct. 1960.

⁹² *Drogheda Independent*, 3 Oct. 1959.

⁹³ *Anglo Celt*, 9 Feb. 1963.

⁹⁴ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1965/6 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/42).

⁹⁵ *Donegal Democrat*, 21 Mar. 1926; Enniskillen had previously visited and defeated Ballyshannon, *Donegal Democrat*, 21 Oct. 1925.

⁹⁶ *Donegal News*, 15 Oct. 1926; a repeat fixture was reported in *Donegal News*, 15 Oct. 1932.

to Milford in what was reported to have been the first rugby match played in that district in 1932,⁹⁷ a journey they again made in the following year.⁹⁸

As in Monaghan and Cavan, fledgling Donegal rugby clubs forged relationships with clubs from other provinces in order to generate friendly fixtures. This was perhaps even more evident given their distance from Ulster rugby's north-eastern heartlands. A rugby team from Ballyshannon, for example, travelled to contest fixtures against Sligo Grammar School between 1925 and 1928.⁹⁹ Emphasising some of the difficulties faced in remote parts of the province, in 1930 a combined Ballyshannon-Bundoran team wore tennis shoes 'owing to a shortage of football boots' when they contested a friendly against a visiting team of the Dublin University Officer Training Corps.¹⁰⁰

From a low-point in 1966 when none of the Ulster Branch's affiliated schools or clubs were located in the southern border counties of Ulster, an overdue but welcome growth in club affiliation from that area did at least occur between 1973 and 1979. This began when Donegal Town and Letterkenny Rugby Clubs were founded and reformed respectively in early 1973 and they soon contested a friendly fixture.¹⁰¹ County Donegal's first two affiliated rugby clubs were followed by the latest reincarnation of a 'newly [re]formed' Cavan FC¹⁰² which affiliated to the Ulster Branch in the 1974/5 season.¹⁰³ A revival of Monaghan FC began with unofficial friendly fixtures vs. Cavan in 1975.¹⁰⁴ By 1978, both Monaghan and Virginia FC from County Cavan had found their way to Ulster Branch affiliation and official competition.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Inishowen Rugby Club, founded in Carndonagh, County Donegal in 1972,¹⁰⁶ engaged in several years of irregular friendly fixtures before affiliating with the

⁹⁷ *Strabane Chronicle*, 9 Apr. 1932.

⁹⁸ *Donegal News*, 30 Sept. 1933.

⁹⁹ *Donegal Democrat*, 6 Feb. 1925, 12 Mar. 1926, 24 Nov. 1928, & 15 Dec. 1928.

¹⁰⁰ *Donegal Democrat*, 12 July 1930.

¹⁰¹ *Donegal Democrat*, 23 Mar. 1973; Donegal Town's first home game vs. Sligo had occurred a fortnight earlier, *Donegal Democrat*, 9 Mar. 1973.

¹⁰² *Anglo Celt*, 19 Apr. 1974.

¹⁰³ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1974/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/51).

¹⁰⁴ *Anglo Celt*, 3 Jan 1975 & 14 Feb. 1975.

¹⁰⁵ *Anglo Celt*, 6 Oct. 1978.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.inishowenrugby.ie/history/> [accessed 5 Feb. 2020].

Ulster Branch in 1979/80,¹⁰⁷ where they were joined by Ballyshannon Rugby Club,¹⁰⁸ also of County Donegal.

It is possible that the Ulster Branch's adoption of revised by-laws at its 1977 AGM, both reflected and affirmed these developments, consolidating the affiliations from counties Cavan and Monaghan between 1973 and 1977 and encouraging those from County Donegal between 1977 and 1979. It stated that:

The object of the Branch shall be ... to promote, foster, develop and administer the game of amateur rugby union football in the province of Ulster.¹⁰⁹

Conor Curran has written that rugby struggled to gain a foothold in County Donegal due to the infrequent nature of matches and the competition from other football codes.¹¹⁰ To a considerable extent this was true not only of County Donegal, but also of counties Cavan and Monaghan for at least four decades following the partition of Ireland. Between 1922 and 1965, only counties Cavan and Monaghan had any teams affiliated to the provincial branch based in Belfast. Yet the 1970s seem to mark a turning-point. In county Donegal, according to the local press,

1979 sees the end of a decade which started with no rugby being played in the county and finished with four teams accounting very well for themselves in their respective league sections in Ulster competition.¹¹¹

Whilst the 1970s witnessed a long overdue rise in affiliation from those counties, and in particular from County Donegal, growth was slow. A new high point in affiliations from southern border counties was reached in 1984/5, but these still amounted to only 5 per cent¹¹² of total Ulster Branch affiliation (seven of sixty-four affiliated clubs and zero of 140 affiliated schools). The comparatively low level of rugby activity in Ulster *beyond* the Northern Ireland border, at the very least suggests that partition constrained the administrative

¹⁰⁷ *Anglo Celt*, 11 Oct. 1980; Annual report and statements of accounts, 1979/80 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/56).

¹⁰⁸ *Donegal Democrat*, 21 Sept. 1979; Annual report and statements of accounts, 1979/80 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/56).

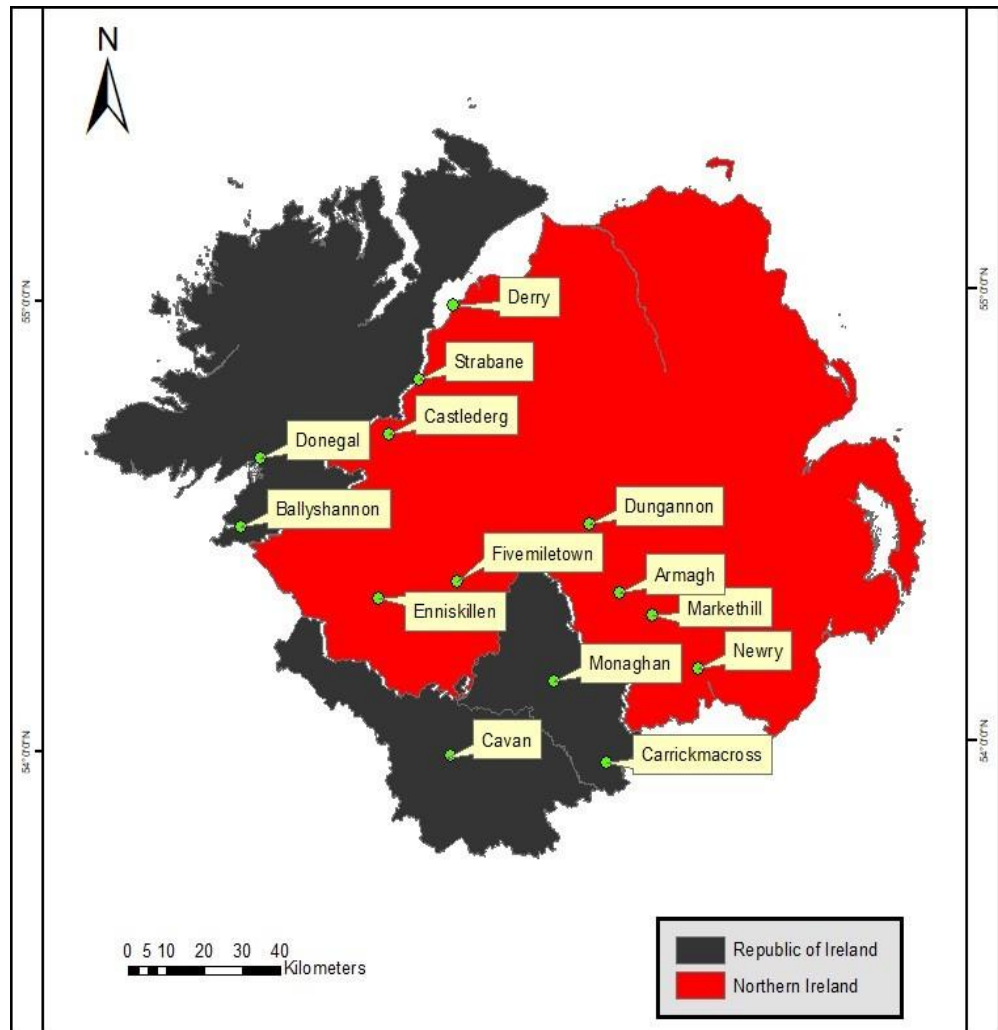
¹⁰⁹ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1976/7 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/53).

¹¹⁰ Conor Curran, *Sport in Donegal: A history* (Cork, 2010), pp 48-9.

¹¹¹ *Donegal News*, 12 Jan. 1980.

¹¹² Annual report and statements of accounts, 1984/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/61).

reach of the Ulster Branch, based in Belfast, and more on this follows. For now, however, an investigation into the Ulster Branch archival affiliation data, reveals the existence of a zone north of, and along, the same border in which rugby also struggled. Taken together these northern and southern borderlands might be conceived of as a liminal space, the geographical extent of which is presented below (map 3).



Map 3: Ulster Branch IRFU liminal space area, 1925-90.¹¹³

Between 1925 and 1990 a mere fifteen outposts of the game in Ulster existed in the area between the towns and villages marked in green and the political border, on both its northern and southern sides. Constituting a liminal space for rugby in Ulster, that area extended no more than fifteen miles

¹¹³ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1924/5-1990/1 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/8-67).

(approximately twenty-four kilometres) inside either side of a political border that is 499 kilometres in length.¹¹⁴ In that time, a total of only seventeen schools and thirteen clubs located in this border region appear in the Northern/Ulster Branch affiliation records. Of those, sixteen schools and eight clubs were on the Northern Ireland side of the political border, whilst one school and five clubs were on the Irish Free State (later Republic of Ireland) side of it.

It is intriguing that an area proximate to the border that dissected the province of Ulster would prove inhospitable to the game of rugby. In addition to their lack of numerical strength, those outposts were, in terms of their geography, sparsely populated and lacking the greater interconnectivity of the more urbanised areas in the east of the province. These factors certainly mattered when we consider the low level of rugby activity in the border areas, although any interruption caused by the border was likely to exacerbate the difficulties associated with what was already a limited cross-border inter-school and inter-club activity within Ulster.

Undeniably, the border did pose significant practical difficulties that affected everyday life in both its northern and southern hinterland. For example, a regional newspaper reported in 1924 that ‘there are many strange anomalies along the Ulster border’:

Across two stone bridges that span ten feet of river [in Pettigo, County Fermanagh] Sergeant Donegal, of the Civic Guard, and Sergeant Fermanagh of Ulster Specials exchange courtesies on the bridge where uniformed officers of the Free State customs await the arrival of contraband.¹¹⁵

In the same year, the account of a trip made by Agnes O’Farrelly, ‘the well-known writer and teacher who is lecturer in the Irish language in the National University’, from Clones, County Monaghan to the north of County Donegal, was published in the *Derry Journal*:

¹¹⁴ Ordinance Survey of Northern Ireland, 1999, cited in K.J. Rankin, ‘The creation and consolidation of the Irish border’, paper presented at Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways workshop, Queen’s University Belfast, no.2, 2005, p. 2, <https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforInternationalBordersResearch/Publications/WorkingPapers/MappingFrontiers/workingpapers/Filetoupload.175395.en.pdf>

¹¹⁵ *Mid-Ulster Mail*, 17 May 1924.

All this trouble and expense I realised was the direct outcome of the ill-fated border line. If it weighed so heavily on me on my chance journey, what must its effect be on the daily lives of the local people for whom it is “the devil an’ all”?¹¹⁶

In the absence of clear evidence to the contrary, it would appear that it was civil society, rather than rugby’s administrators, who led when it came to making arrangement for the game to overcome difficulty associated with the border. This example from 1933 is illustrative:

To facilitate Northern Ireland motorists who intend to journey by road to Dublin for the international rugby match between Ireland and Scotland on Saturday, 1st prox, special arrangements have been made by the Automobile Association and the Royal Irish Automobile Club have made arrangements with the Customs authorities on both sides of the frontier whereby the Customs Houses will remain open beyond the usual Customs hours.¹¹⁷

Difficulties were enhanced, and their mitigation was more problematic, during times of crisis. For example, the *Kerry News* reported in 1940 that the Northern Ireland government had sealed the border, and that ‘the order restricts entry into Northern Ireland to persons who can satisfy the police “that their presence is for the transaction of legitimate business of importance to the national interest of the United Kingdom”’.¹¹⁸ In 1942, Northern Ireland MPs at Westminster were reported to ‘have been persistent in urging that the precautions for preventing undesirable persons from entering Northern Ireland from Éire should be made more effective’. The remarks of Professor [Sir Douglas Lloyd] Savory, the MP for Queen’s University of Belfast, however, appear to suggest that cross-border travel was still possible:

Once a man has got over the border into Northern Ireland the Ulster police can call upon him to produce his identity card, and they can arrest him, but they have no power to prevent a person in a train from crossing the border from Éire into Northern Ireland.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ *Derry Journal*, 22 Aug. 1924.

¹¹⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 30 Mar. 1933; similar notices appeared later on the occasion of the same or similar fixtures, *North Down Herald and County Down Independent*, 10 Feb. 1934; *Northern Whig*, 6 Feb. 1936; *Belfast News-Letter*, 25 Feb. 1937; and *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 Feb. 1939.

¹¹⁸ *Kerry News*, 24 June 1940.

¹¹⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 June 1942.

The existence of the political border, to some extent, contributed to the conditions in which rugby struggled to establish a foothold in much of Ulster. Rugby in this liminal space (in both jurisdictions) was isolated geographically from the Belfast-based administration of the game in Ulster. For the southern border counties this was exacerbated by their location in a different political jurisdiction. At first glance it is tempting to suggest that this area, seemingly outside the operational reach of a Belfast-based provincial Branch, was peripheral merely because it lay outside the political confines of Northern Ireland¹²⁰ and, moreover, Peter Leary has contended that the additional and unavoidable imposition of a customs border in 1923, ‘combined with the overlapping and interlocking nature of the road network and the border’,¹²¹ caused perhaps the greatest disruption to everyday life for those needing to cross that political and economic frontier.

There appears little *direct* engagement with the border issue that can be gleaned from the IRFU and Ulster Branch archival records. We might consider this to have been an extension of the administrative response to partition, which was to largely ignore it. The sporting press, on occasion, showered the game with effusive praise that, whilst undoubtedly serving the concerted effort over many decades to portray the game as apolitical, is not corroborated by the analysis of the sections that follow:

Every one who lives in Ireland or knows it will recognise that we have an outstanding example of the kindly tolerant feeling engendered by the hard knocks and good humour of rugby football. Rugby football knows no border, green flag or orange lily, all are equal on the field of play. Where politicians and patriots have often failed, football has won. North and south have come together. The Campbells [College, Belfast] are coming [to Dublin], and will be greeted with neither fear nor enmity.¹²²

If the everyday life of economic interaction was hampered by the existence of that border, then the implications of crossing it did not entirely stymie cross-border rugby activity. However, the manner in which rugby clubs

¹²⁰ Catherine Nash and Bryonie Reid, *Partitioned lives: The Irish borderlands* (Abingdon, 2016), p. 17.

¹²¹ Peter Leary, *Unapproved routes: Histories of the Irish border 1922-72* (Oxford, 2016), p. 173.

¹²² *Sport*, 17 Dec. 1927.

in Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, frequently turned south, rather than north, when in search of games suggested it had *some* practical impact on rugby.

Beyond the political border, and the cultural divide it represented between, at least theoretically, a politically Unionist north and Irish Nationalist south, we should acknowledge one of the most controversial matters in the history of Irish sport that could have further isolated rugby in the border region.¹²³ That was, between the early twentieth century and 1971, the GAA decreed that anyone who played, promoted or attended ‘foreign games’, or those who attended entertainments run by clubs of those games, was prohibited from membership of the GAA or liable for suspension of up to two years, respectively.¹²⁴ The qualitative evidence of meetings of Ulster county and provincial GAA board indicates that ‘The ban’, as it was known, was a live issue in the border counties of Ulster in the decade or so following partition.¹²⁵ Indeed, evidence associated with the introduction of the ban to camogie in 1934, suggests that Ulster GAA officials were its most vigorous advocates, suggesting that a sense of siege on their part led them to more heavily police their own community.¹²⁶

The effect that the ban on foreign games (and its removal) may have had on rugby club affiliations across all four provinces of Ireland, in the years immediately prior to and following its ending in 1971 is explored in chapter three. This section has demonstrated how rugby in the area of Ulster beyond and along the Northern Ireland border was less well developed than in eastern areas of the province closer to the urban centre of Belfast. To some extent, we could consider rugby in the border region to also have been an area ‘at the limits of governmentality’.¹²⁷ Given the common perception that rugby in Ulster was a Protestant game,¹²⁸ and that the affiliation data presented here indicates that game was overwhelmingly to be found within Northern Ireland itself, we should not exaggerate impact of ‘the ban’ in the absence of evidence

¹²³ See Cormac Moore, *The GAA vs Douglas Hyde: The removal of Ireland’s first president as GAA patron* (Cork, 2012).

¹²⁴ Brendan Mac Lua, *The steadfast rule: A history of the GAA ban* (Dublin, 1967), p. 105.

¹²⁵ For example, the Monaghan GAA annual meeting of 1924, *Anglo Celt*, 1 Mar. 1924.

¹²⁶ Minutes of Congress, 24 Feb. 1934, (Croke Park Archive, Minutes of the Camogie Association, 1932-1947).

¹²⁷ Leary, *Unapproved routes*, p. 164.

¹²⁸ Michael McKernan (ed.), *Northern Ireland yearbook 2005* (Belfast, 2004), p. 455.

beyond the extreme rhetoric often found at GAA annual meetings. That acknowledged, the existence of the GAA ban on both sides of the border undoubtedly attached, to some extent, a social and cultural stigma to rugby.

Periphery: Rugby in Ulster and the 'Bann divide'

The border provides one way of thinking about the question of rugby in Ulster and peripherality, but it is not the only way. It is essential to examine other options as we seek to delineate the core from the periphery. How important was Belfast, the urban centre of rugby in Ulster, to the overall rate of club affiliation to that Branch during the post-partition era? Can we delineate other regions within Northern Ireland (beyond the borderlands discussed above) that were peripheral to the middle-class and suburban heartland of rugby in Ulster that centred upon the greater Belfast region?

Rising in the Mourne mountains in County Down and flowing into the Atlantic Ocean between Portstewart and Castlerock in County Londonderry, the River Bann, at 129 kilometres in length dissects Northern Ireland into eastern and western halves.¹²⁹ As map 4 below illustrates, when viewed within the entire historical province of Ulster, around two thirds of that province's land area lies to the west of the River Bann. Following a detailed analysis of the Branch's archival affiliation data, it becomes clear that between 1922 and 1990, rugby in Ulster was most commonly located in provincial towns and that, more often than not, those were towns located east of the River Bann.

IRFU affiliation data will come under a sustained analysis later, underpinning a consideration of the 'health of the game' in Ireland as a whole (chapter three). Ulster Branch affiliation data alone, however, strongly suggests that Belfast was by far the most prominent location of Ulster's rugby clubs during the middle decades of the twentieth century, just as that city had been the nucleus of the NFU in the years after it was established in January 1875.

¹²⁹ The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland: Adapted to the New Poor-law, Franchise, Municipal and Ecclesiastical Arrangements, and Compiled with a Special Reference to the Lines of Railroad and Canal Communication, as Existing in 1814-45, Vol. 1 (Dublin, 1846), p. 216.

During the 1924/5 season,¹³⁰ fifteen of the Branch's thirty-three clubs (45 per cent) were located in Belfast while during the 1934/5 season, seventeen of the Branch's forty-two clubs (40 per cent) were located in that city.¹³¹ At the conclusion of the Second World War, in 1944/5, Belfast accounted for fourteen of the Branch's twenty-seven affiliated clubs (52 per cent) although club competition was still suspended at that time.¹³²

Thereafter, the proportion of Ulster Branch clubs located in Belfast gradually declined: in 1964/5 twenty-seven of fifty-five clubs (49 per cent);¹³³ in 1984/5 twenty-four of sixty-four clubs (38 per cent);¹³⁴ and in 1990 twenty-seven of seventy-three clubs (37 per cent).¹³⁵ Although its share of the affiliated clubs in Ulster was in decline, in 1972 Belfast still dominated senior rugby, with nine of the Branch's thirteen senior clubs located there. Interestingly, eleven of those senior clubs were situated east of the River Bann.¹³⁶ To what extent did the River Bann pose a 'frontier'¹³⁷ – conceptually distinct from the political border – in the development of rugby at all levels in Ulster? And if so, how might we explain this?

Given the ongoing concentration of senior rugby in Belfast, it is to the realms of junior and schools rugby that we must look if we are to tease out in more detail the geographic patterns of rugby in Ulster during the period under review (see tables 1 and 2 below).

¹³⁰ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1924/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/8).

¹³¹ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1934/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/18).

¹³² Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1945/6 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/17).

¹³³ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1964/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/41).

¹³⁴ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1984/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/61).

¹³⁵ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1989/90 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/67).

¹³⁶ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1971/2 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/48).

¹³⁷ Andrea Mura, 'National finitude and the paranoid style of the one', *Contemporary political theory*, 15 (2016), p. 73.

Year	Total clubs Ulster	Junior clubs Ulster	Junior clubs Belfast	Junior clubs provincial
1925	32	20	6	14
1935	42	30	7	23
1945	27	19	7	12
1955	47	36	8	28
1965	49	35	9	26
1975	56	34	7	27
1985	64	42	10	32

Table 1: Urban/provincial spread of Ulster Branch affiliated junior rugby clubs 1925-85.¹³⁸

Year	Schools west of Bann	Schools east of Bann	Clubs west of Bann	Clubs east of Bann
1930	7	12	8	29
1950	9	25	12	35
1970	11	38	14	45
1990	11	29	23	50

Table 2: Geographic spread of affiliated rugby clubs and schools in Ulster, 1930-90.¹³⁹

In combination, Tables 1 and 2 tell an interesting story regarding the grassroots of rugby in Ulster. Table 1 demonstrates that with the exception of the war years, between the mid-1930s and the mid-1980s there were more than

¹³⁸ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1924/5 – 1984/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/8-61).

¹³⁹ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1930/1 – 1990/1 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/14-67).

three times the number of junior clubs in provincial areas of Ulster, as compared to junior clubs in Belfast. This was not, however, a story of uniform growth in provincial grass roots rugby. If we employ the River Bann as a dividing line for affiliated clubs at all levels, we learn that by 1950 there was almost three times the number of clubs located east of that river (thirty-five), compared to clubs located west of the river (twelve). In 1970, for example, there was more than three times the number of affiliated schools located east of that river (thirty-eight), as those located to the west of the river (eleven). By 1990 some narrowing of the gap had occurred but rugby west of the Bann still lagged behind.

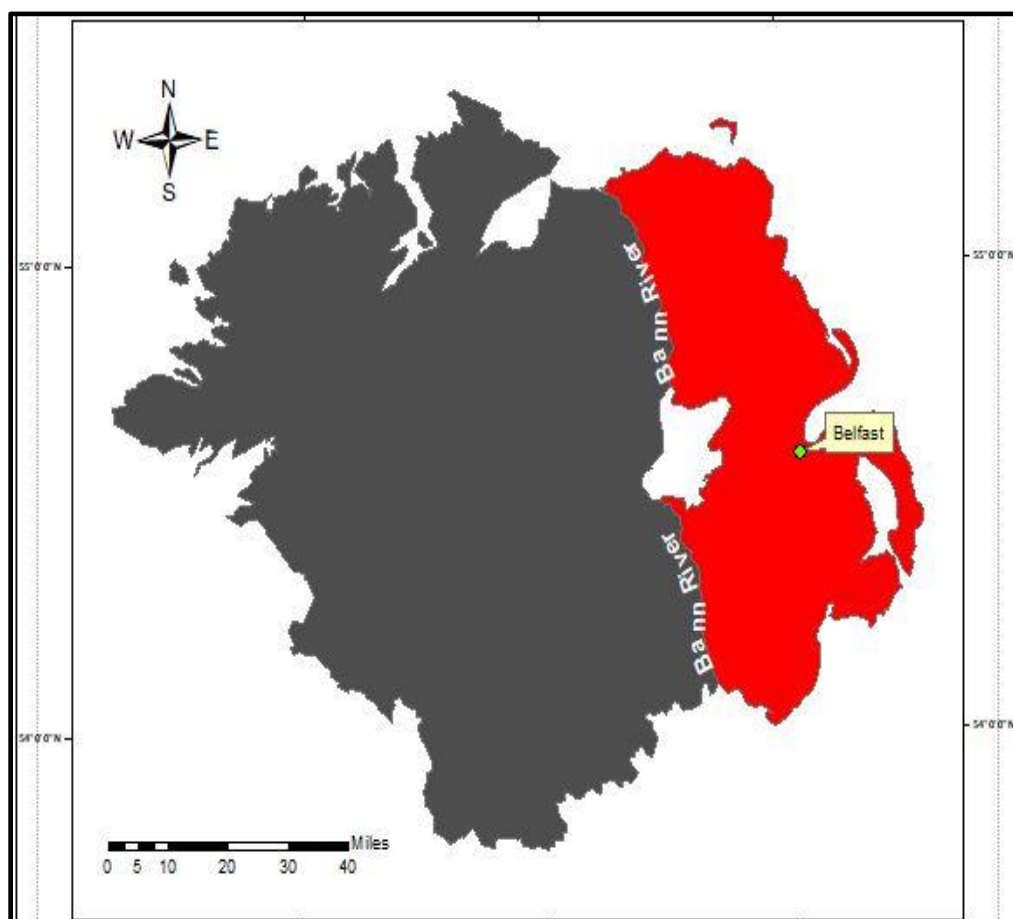
An east/west divide had briefly existed within the administration of rugby in Ulster during the 1870s and 1880s. Armagh FC was a provincial rugby club in Ulster situated west of the River Bann and its history reveals:

In 1875 there were two governing bodies of the game in Ulster. There was the Northern Union, based in Belfast and catering for clubs in the city and immediate area. Outside of Belfast the game was governed by the Provincial Towns' Union. Among the clubs that made up the latter union were City of Derry, Dungannon, Bessbrook, Dundalk, Loughgall and Stewartstown. These were now joined by Armagh.¹⁴⁰

The Provincial Towns' Union was a short-lived administration, however, as its 1884 AGM saw it agree to amalgamate with the IRFU.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Seamus S. Duffy, *Try and try again: A centenary history of City of Armagh Rugby Football Club* (Armagh, 1976), p. 9.

¹⁴¹ *Dundalk Herald*, 22 Nov. 1884.



Map 4: The 'Bann divide' within the province of Ulster.¹⁴²

It is possible to connect rugby's Bann divide in Ulster to one inescapable geographical fact, and to one demographic trend that can be gleaned from the last census of Ireland to be completed prior to the island's political partition (1911). These are that around 59.8per cent of the land area of Ulster is found west of the River Bann (8454.34 km²), whereas around 50.4per cent of the population of Ulster in 1911 was located east of the River Bann (797,094 persons). Consequently, this meant that, prior to partition, the area west of Bann had a population density of 92.8 persons per km², whereas the east of Bann area had a population density of 140.3 persons per km². Population density and other demographic indicators of the health of the game are explored in chapter three. Beyond population density, Ulster east of the Bann was 71.8per cent Protestant and 24.5per cent Catholic, whereas Ulster west of the Bann was 53.6per cent Catholic and 44.4per cent Protestant.¹⁴³

¹⁴² The River Bann as an economic divide within Northern Ireland was reported by *Cork Examiner*, 6 Jan. 1984.

¹⁴³ Area, houses and population, Ulster, Census of Ireland, 1911.

The population of that area of Northern Ireland, proximate to the political border, was dominated by those from the minority Catholic community. According to David Hassan, in that area ‘the most popular cultural pastime is sport, specifically Gaelic football, hurling and camogie’.¹⁴⁴ Hassan’s identification of this general affinity with Irish nationalism and Gaelic games within what we might refer to as a “northern border county” area, is significant.

It was not just that Ulster’s southern border counties were geographically peripheral to Ulster rugby’s heartland because of their place on the far side of the political border. Instead, they constituted the most distant element of an Ulster rugby periphery that encompassed much of the territory in southern and western Northern Ireland, a space along the border but north of it. The Ulster rugby periphery existed in a space on both sides of the border, in which it faced not only a strong, but also a hostile, sporting competitor in the GAA that appealed to the cultural and political identity of the majority of the population of that borderland area. Put simply, ban or no ban, rugby faced an uphill battle to establish itself in what was GAA country.

1.3: Politics: Ulster Unionism, Irish Nationalism, and the IRFU Ulster Branch in a divided Ireland.

When Ireland’s rugby community, and its governing bodies, reacted to the political partition of the island by maintaining both an all-Ireland body and a cross-border provincial body, the management of a cross-border game became an unavoidable task for the IRFU and, in theory, for the Ulster Branch. In the case of the Ulster Branch in particular, this, at least potentially, involved catering to a playing population that was deeply divided in its political, social, cultural and religious identities, embedded in the apparently incompatible ideologies of Ulster Unionism and Irish nationalism that had underpinned partition.¹⁴⁵ The area that would become Northern Ireland had a majority (65.6

¹⁴⁴ David Hassan, ‘Sport, identity and the people of the Irish border lands’, *New Hibernia Review*, 10:2 (2006), p. 26.

¹⁴⁵ Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume I: Colonialism* (Oxford, 2019), p. 374.

per cent in 1911)¹⁴⁶ of inhabitants who were Protestant (and mostly Unionist). By the next census, held in 1926, the population of what had by then become Northern Ireland was 62.2 per cent Protestant,¹⁴⁷ whereas the three county section of the Northern Branch within the Irish Free State, as measured by the 1926 census held in that state, was 81.8 per cent Catholic (mostly nationalist).¹⁴⁸

As we have seen, however, the effective jurisdiction of the Ulster Branch was, for much of the post-partition period, encompassed within the political unit of Northern Ireland. The implications of that, given that Northern Ireland's Prime Minister, James Craig, contended in 1934 that 'all I boast is that we are a Protestant parliament and a Protestant state',¹⁴⁹ are arguably manifest in the existing historiographical consensus regarding the characterisation of rugby there. In Richard Holt's words, 'in the north very few Catholics are involved and the leading clubs wider Unionist social network'.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Michael McKernan has written that rugby's base in Northern Ireland was 'predominantly, but by no means exclusively, a Protestant and middle-class game'.¹⁵¹

The 'by no means exclusively' is an important qualification that begs the following questions. What was the identity created by the Ulster Branch of Irish rugby? Did that match the politics of the 'Unionist social network' from which most of the players and administrators were drawn? If so, did this set Ulster apart from the rugby elsewhere on the island? How did the negotiation of these questions affect the management of the game? This section will address these questions focusing, first, on the years immediately after partition, second, on the difficulties associated with the Second World War, third, on a period when tensions around partition were high during the mid-1950s, and

¹⁴⁶ John Coakley, 'Northern Ireland and the British dimension', in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher (eds), *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 4th ed. (London, 2005), p. 385.

¹⁴⁷ Religious professions, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1926, *li*.

¹⁴⁸ Volume 3-Religion and birthplaces, Census of Ireland, 1926, table 01A.

¹⁴⁹ *First session of the fourth parliament of Northern Ireland, 24 George V, House of Commons, volume 16* (1933,34), 24 Apr. 1934; A.C. Hepburn, *The conflict of nationality in modern Ireland* (London, 1980), p. 165.

¹⁵⁰ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 245.

¹⁵¹ Michael McKernan (ed.), *Northern Ireland yearbook 2005* (Belfast, 2004), p. 455.

fourth, on the communal destruction associated with the Northern Ireland conflict.

1922-30

During the 1920s the Northern Branch showed every sign of being thoroughly integrated into the rugby administration and culture of the island as a whole, through the IRFU. The successful undertaking of the Branch's administrative functions and inter-provincial fixture obligations indicated it was still a vital component of rugby in Ireland. Notable markers of its integration were the staging of six Irish international matches in Belfast between 1922 and 1930 (three versus France, two versus Wales and one versus England),¹⁵² the attendance of five Northern Branch voting delegates at IRFU AGMs, and the inclusion of two northern representatives on the 'Irish five', a selection committee for the international team.¹⁵³ According to Liam O'Callaghan's count, six of the sixteen presidents elected during the Irish Free State years were Ulster protestants.¹⁵⁴

Prior to the political partition of Ireland, Rugby Union throughout Ireland, Britain and its empire had presented an apparently unified front in the cause of the First World War. The 'Pals' Company' of the 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, which had its origins in rugby, is a comparatively well-known Irish example of this phenomenon.¹⁵⁵ Many of these men lost their lives at Gallipoli, while Jane Leonard recounts the 1917 suicide of a former Irish international rugby player, Jasper Brett, who was suffering from shell shock having served at Gallipoli and Salonika.¹⁵⁶ Kevin Blackburn has written that, in the aftermath of the war, especially during the interwar period, sport was an important part of the Anzac Day commemoration of the Australian and New Zealand armies'

¹⁵² Irish Rugby Football Union, Team History Archive, <https://www.irishrugby.ie/irfu/history/archived-team-history/> [accessed 7 Nov. 2021].

¹⁵³ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, Appendices.

¹⁵⁴ O'Callaghan, 'Rugby football and identity politics', p. 158.

¹⁵⁵ David Fitzpatrick, 'The Logic of Collective Sacrifice: Ireland and the British Army, 1914-1918', *The Historical Journal*, 38:4 (1995), pp 1029-30; Jane Leonard, 'Survivors' in John Horne (ed.) *Our War: Ireland and the Great War* (Dublin, 2008), p. 213.

¹⁵⁶ Garnham, *The origins and development*, p. 24.

sacrifice during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915.¹⁵⁷ In Ulster, First World War sacrifice became an important part of the identity of some Ulster rugby clubs, with the centenary history of Armagh RFC contending that during the First World War ‘the cold hand of death had touched nearly every club’.¹⁵⁸

Paul Rouse has argued that a sense of recent shared loss may have been one of the factors that held rugby together in Ireland. If it was, then this feeling was cultivated through shared commemorative practice as rugby in Ireland presented a unified front through memorialising the First World War, despite the political partition of the country.¹⁵⁹ In 1922 the Wanderers Football Club in Dublin unveiled a memorial at Lansdowne Road to their 221 members who served in the British army during that conflict, of whom thirty-three had been killed. Addressing the assembled crowd, club president J.R. Cresswell sought to fuse rugby to an Irish and imperial identity:

Our members voluntarily discarded the rugby jersey for the soldier’s tunic, and more than maintained the tradition of the club, and showed that being a good imperial citizen was not inconsistent with being a good Irishman.¹⁶⁰

In the same year, the Bateman Cup was played for the first time. It was thereafter contested annually, until the outbreak of the Second World War, by the four provincial cup winners. The cup memorialised two sons of the donor, Godfrey Bateman – Reginald and Arthur – who were killed in the war.¹⁶¹

In 1922, the extent to which Irish identity was compatible with an ongoing association to the British Empire was a highly contested matter. The Irish Free State, born in that year, was constructed to embody such an identity, though many nationalists regarded this as a flawed compromise. Rugby seemed more comfortable than most with the idea of an Ireland in the Empire. Indeed, Liam O’Callaghan has rather bluntly argued of this period that rugby ‘as represented by the IRFU’s upper echelons ultimately remained a relic of the old regime and was still firmly bound culturally to Britain’.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Kevin Blackburn, *War, sport and the Anzac tradition* (New York, 2016), p. 40.

¹⁵⁸ Duffy, *Try and try again*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁹ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 269.

¹⁶⁰ *Irish Times*, 18 Sept. 1922.

¹⁶¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 29 Apr. 2016.

¹⁶² O’Callaghan, ‘Rugby football and identity politics’, p. 162.

This is manifest in a commemoration culture that persisted well into the 1920s. In 1923, Lansdowne Football Club unveiled a memorial ‘to the members who fell during the European War’¹⁶³ at Lansdowne Road, while a ‘National War memorial’ to commemorate all Irish rugby players who fell during the Great War was unveiled at Lansdowne Road in March 1925.¹⁶⁴ Less surprising is the erection of a similar memorial by the Northern Branch at their headquarters at Ravenhill in Belfast in January 1926 ‘in memory of those Irish rugby footballers who fell during the European [First World] war’.¹⁶⁵ It was unveiled under the Union Jack by Antrim native and stalwart of the Northern Branch Fred Strain, but it was in his capacity as IRFU president that he spoke at the event:¹⁶⁶

the dark days of 1914 . . . from every corner of the empire, men of every class and creed poured into the recruiting stations . . . [and] no section came forward more readily or more promptly than rugby footballers. . . The game of rugby was stopped, but the spirit survived, and the essentials of courage, pluck, true sportsmanship, and above all absolute unselfishness proved to have provided the best training for those who came forward in the far bigger game of life and death as it was played at the front.¹⁶⁷

Indeed, the unveiling of a war memorial in Belfast in 1926 mirrored the precedent set by rugby in Dublin between 1922 and 1925. Furthermore, the *Irish Times* reported that the Ravenhill unveiling had been ‘in the presence of a large crowd in which all parts of Ireland were represented’.¹⁶⁸ Whilst the Union Jack continued to fly at the IRFU’s premises in Belfast, given that it was part of the United Kingdom, the same was not true in Dublin when Irish international fixtures were played there. Rather, in 1925 the IRFU designed its own flag for that purpose,¹⁶⁹ one that featured the arms of the four provinces of Ireland.¹⁷⁰ The IRFU would resist ‘a vocal campaign from rugby clubs, particularly in Munster and Connacht’, for the tricolour to be flown at

¹⁶³ *Irish Independent*, 27 Oct. 1923.

¹⁶⁴ *Irish Times*, 7 Mar. 1925.

¹⁶⁵ *Weekly Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 1926.

¹⁶⁶ O’Callaghan, ‘Rugby football and identity politics’, p. 159.

¹⁶⁷ *Irish Times*, 23 Jan. 1926.

¹⁶⁸ *Irish Times*, 23 Jan. 1926.

¹⁶⁹ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 270.

¹⁷⁰ Van Esbeck, *The Story of Irish Rugby*, pp 97-8.

Lansdowne Road until it was imposed on them by the Free State government in 1932.¹⁷¹

This combination of imperial identity-politics and commemorative practice can again be observed in the ceremonies surrounding an exhibition game that took place between an Ulster XV and New South Wales in Belfast in November 1927. The Northern Branch committee minutes contained an invitation to a banquet dinner that was held following the game in Belfast. The first item on the agenda for the festivities was a toast to ‘The King’.¹⁷²

That Ulster, through its representative rugby team, should in 1927 simultaneously emphasise its connection to the Empire and the monarch is significant but perhaps unsurprising. Not only were the six Ulster counties that constituted Northern Ireland still within the United Kingdom, the three southern border counties of Ulster were part of an Irish Free State that had the same ‘dominion status’ (with the monarch as the head of state) as Australia, from whence the New South Wales team came. During 1917, the Australian Prime Minister W.M. Hughes stated in a speech that ‘every fit man of military age in New South Wales worthy of the name of sportsman will have enrolled in the A.I.F.’ (Australian Imperial Force).¹⁷³ One of the ceremonial duties undertaken by the visiting side a decade later was the laying of a wreath at the Ravenhill war memorial.¹⁷⁴

In 1930, New Zealand Prime Minister G.W. Forbes, speaking to the press after the seventh Imperial Conference of the Prime Ministers of the Dominions in London, forged what was at least a metaphorical link between rugby and the politics encapsulated by the British Empire conference:

Our big game in New Zealand is rugby football, and at times we send across to your country an All Blacks team ... You want to think of the motherland and dominions in the light of a rugby team. You will not get anywhere unless you all adopt the team spirit.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ O’Callaghan, ‘Rugby football and identity politics’, p. 164.

¹⁷² Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1925-8 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/7).

¹⁷³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 July 1917.

¹⁷⁴ *The Scotsman*, 18 Nov. 1927.

¹⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, 27 Oct. 1930.

Notably, it would be the IRFU as a whole, rather than simply its Northern/Ulster Branch headquartered in the United Kingdom, that would engage in the most overt pro-British/imperial activity of the interwar period. The first ‘Imperial rugby conference’ took place in December 1924 in London, and the IRFU attended as one of the so-called ‘Home Unions’ of Great Britain and Ireland.¹⁷⁶ This conference was the culmination of at least two decades of discussions within rugby from all corners of the British Empire, ‘regarding the establishment of an Imperial Council or Board’,¹⁷⁷ and a second such conference would be held in London in November 1926.¹⁷⁸

In association football, the ‘International Board’, comprising the FAs of Britain and [Northern] Ireland, were the custodians of the laws of that game. In rugby union, its International Board, comprising the Rugby Unions of Britain and Ireland, delegated responsibility for the laws of the game to an Imperial Rugby Conference that was to meet at intervals of not more than three years after 1927.¹⁷⁹ This was seemingly in an attempt to prevent a split within its ranks due to the perceived dominance of the (English) Rugby Union.¹⁸⁰

The security of an all-Ireland rugby unity grounded in a shared emphasis on Empire should not, however, be taken for granted. O’Callaghan has delineated the ways in which rugby in the south was constantly criticised for its comfort with the rituals and symbols of Empire.¹⁸¹ At the same time, the separatist ideology that underpinned Northern Ireland also manifested itself on occasion. A telling example can be found in the fixture booklet of Instonians RFC, attached to the Northern Branch committee minutes of the 1928-29 season. It contained a section devoted to ‘Home Fixtures with “foreign” clubs 1928-29’, and included in this category games against Cork Constitution, Bective Rangers and Dublin University.¹⁸² That a senior rugby club based in

¹⁷⁶ Dec. 1924 stated as the first Imperial Rugby Conference; see *Evening Herald*, 2 Oct. 1925 and 29 Apr. 1938.

¹⁷⁷ Examples include: Letter from the New South Wales Rugby Board to the South African Rugby Football Board, 16 Oct. 1907 (University of Stellenbosch, South African Rugby Board (SARB) Archive, Collection 1, Box 1: 19 Sept. 1904 - 1 May 1912).

¹⁷⁸ *Gloucester Citizen*, 13 Nov. 1926.

¹⁷⁹ *Irish Times*, 19 Mar. 1927.

¹⁸⁰ *Dundee Courier*, 2 Apr. 1927.

¹⁸¹ O’Callaghan, ‘Rugby football and identity politics’, p. 157; 163.

¹⁸² Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1928-30 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/8).

Belfast would label as foreign clubs from the Irish Free State despite their being members of the same all-island rugby union, is significant. Not only does it suggest a partitionist mentality within at least one leading club of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, it raises a question about the attitudes masked behind some of the self-congratulatory praise afforded to the IRFU in insider histories that emphasised unity.¹⁸³ On the other hand, one might consider the IRFU's ongoing incorporation of the Northern/Ulster Branch, despite its having to manage the existence of such opinions, a remarkable achievement.

1939-45

As part of the United Kingdom, the IRFU Ulster Branch's heartland of Northern Ireland was based in a territory at war with Germany between 1939 and 1945,¹⁸⁴ Thus, it would not be a surprise to learn that its management of a cross-border identity came under strain during that national emergency. During the first year of the conflict in particular, considerable ideological solidarity with the British armed forces was expressed by the Ulster Branch. Beginning in 1940, the Ulster Branch AGM minutes contained 'a fitting tribute to those Ulster rugby men who had responded to the call of king and country':

A great number of Ulster Rugger Men, players and past players, answered the call and are taking part in the various fighting fronts in Air, Land and Sea. Some have already laid down their lives in the cause of freedom, and of these we say with full hearts "They played the game". Some are prisoners in Germany, and to these we express the hope they will soon be back amongst us. To those still carrying on we send our cordial greetings and best wishes.¹⁸⁵

The Branch's archival records indicate that its regular committee functions continued uninterrupted during the war years, aside from when its 1940/41 minute book was 'destroyed by enemy action 5 May 1941'; a summary 'was prepared from memory and reports from the newspapers, and

¹⁸³ Examples praising the supposed unitary nature of Irish rugby following partition include: Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, pp 90-91 and Diffley, *The men in green*. p. 14.

¹⁸⁴ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 Sept. 1939.

¹⁸⁵ Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/15).

incorporated in the minute book for the years 1941-1944'.¹⁸⁶ The damage to the Branch offices occurred during what was the third occasion in which Belfast had been bombed by the German Luftwaffe.¹⁸⁷

It is fair to say that the IRFU Ulster Branch was, by 1940, closely aligned with political Unionism with which it was ideologically united in support for the British war effort. Ulster was the only province in Ireland in which wartime club rugby was fully suspended, in addition to international fixtures.¹⁸⁸ The lack of regular interaction at that time, rendered the potential disgruntlement of clubs or schools from south of the border moot, but it also removed the main sources of revenue for the Branch. The playing of representative games against British Army personnel in Northern Ireland was at times the only means of maintaining rugby's morale. Rugby in Ulster was part of a wider pattern across Britain in this regard. There too the necessity for representative fixtures against military XVs, to both generate revenue and maintain morale, was evident. According to Richard Holt:

during the Second World War, however, more care was taken to maintain morale at home between Dunkirk and D-Day by organising not a full league programme but a host of representative matches – home internationals, inter-service games, as well as friendly professional fixtures.¹⁸⁹

Examples include a Services International in Aid of the Richmond Red Cross in December 1939,¹⁹⁰ and one between English and Scottish members of the armed services in April 1943.¹⁹¹ Indeed, such was the scarcity of rugby union fixtures in Great Britain during the war that, despite its bitter split during the 1890s,¹⁹² the Rugby Football Union removed 'the strictest rule of peace time rugby union football',¹⁹³ conceding that 'for the duration of the war the Rugby Football Union will allow rugby league players to take part in matches

¹⁸⁶ Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1941-4 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/15).

¹⁸⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 6 May 1941.

¹⁸⁸ Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 1941-4 (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/15).

¹⁸⁹ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 277.

¹⁹⁰ *The Scotsman*, 16 Dec. 1939.

¹⁹¹ *Liverpool Evening Express*, 10 April 1943.

¹⁹² See Tony Collins, *Rugby's great split: Class, culture and the origins of Rugby League Football* (London, 2012).

¹⁹³ *The Berwick Advertiser*, 16 Nov. 1939.

between affiliated clubs and Services teams'.¹⁹⁴ The arrangement of such fixtures was a key aim to emerge from the Ulster Branch AGM in September 1942 that recorded a £19 loss for the previous season's operations.¹⁹⁵ Four fixtures had already taken place by then, and newspaper sources indicate that at least ten such fixtures took place in Ulster – all at Ravenhill between March 1941 and February 1945 (see appendix 1)¹⁹⁶ – and on one occasion was described as the 'most important event of the rugby season on this side of the Irish Sea':¹⁹⁷

Despite their being no comparable expressions of solidarity within the archival records of association football in Northern Ireland, representative fixtures versus a British Army XI, were noted by the IFA as having taken place for the second year in succession in 1944.¹⁹⁸ An IFA representative XI had taken on a Combined Services XI at Grosvenor Park, Belfast on 24 February 1943.¹⁹⁹ Liam O'Callaghan records that, in Munster, although competition planning continued as Éire was neutral in the war, 'rugby prospects were partially affected . . . by wartime supply issues'.²⁰⁰ Moreover, fixtures versus army teams did not only take place in areas of Ireland officially at war. Munster, for instance, took on the Combined Munster Services at the Mardyke, Cork in January 1945.²⁰¹

1946-59

That the Ulster Branch's 'sub-committee meeting of post war planning' agreed that 'at the conclusion of the present national emergency an effort be made to get representative Ulster fixtures with a prominent cross-channel club or clubs',²⁰² might suggest that the game's post-war recovery was aligned

¹⁹⁴ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 13 Nov. 1939.

¹⁹⁵ *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 Sept. 1942.

¹⁹⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*: 9 Feb. 1942, 30 Mar. 1942, 9 Nov. 1942, 21 Dec. 1942, 1 Feb. 1943, 14 Feb. 1944; *Northern Whig*: 31 Mar. 1941, 1 Dec. 1941, 5 Apr. 1943, 12 Feb. 1945.

¹⁹⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 Feb. 1945.

¹⁹⁸ IFA annual report 1944/5.

¹⁹⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 22 Feb. 1943.

²⁰⁰ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 55.

²⁰¹ *Irish Press*, 9 Jan. 1945.

²⁰² Annual report and statements of accounts, 1944/5, Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1945/6 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/17).

eastwards towards Great Britain. The 1946 Ulster Branch annual report recorded there had been ‘5 H.M. Services clubs’²⁰³ affiliated during the previous season (1945/6). The allowing of Services clubs to affiliate to the Ulster Branch was perhaps a reward (of sorts) for the Services’ participation in fixtures that kept the game going in Ulster at a time of crisis. In this sense, the Ulster Branch might be considered to have been in harmony with political Ulster, twenty-seven members of Prime Minister Brookeborough’s extended family having served in the military during that war.²⁰⁴

Nonetheless, we see a renewed era of *realpolitik* for the Ulster Branch following the conclusion of the war. Admittedly, Rouse contends that ‘the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 crystalized the extent to which partition had changed the lives of those who lived north and south of the border’.²⁰⁵ Moreover, the Branch’s wartime expressions of a pro-British/Imperial identity was in alignment with a political Ulster Unionism that had done little to assuage an alienated Catholic minority who, in addition, continued to be estranged from the game of rugby in Ulster. Nonetheless, we learn from the minutes of the 1951 Ulster Branch AGM that it was at least continuing to work effectively within the IRFU’s interprovincial structure:

On taking over Mr Siggins (new president) congratulated his predecessor on the amount of sterling work he had done throughout the season particularly in welding more strongly than ever the feeling between the various (provincial) branches. He had gone out of his way to meet the various officials in the other three provinces and a very happy atmosphere existed throughout his term in office.²⁰⁶

Cormac Moore has observed that, as a result of the declaration of the Republic of Ireland in 1949 and the ‘now perceived permanency of partition’, significant problems resulted in the 1950s for ‘governing bodies attempting to administer sports without offending one political grouping or another’.²⁰⁷ Indeed, it would be during this time that a crisis concerning rugby’s identity

²⁰³ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1945/6, Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1945/6 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 1945/6 (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/17).

²⁰⁴ Brian Barton, *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* (Belfast, 1995), p. 67.

²⁰⁵ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, pp 271-2.

²⁰⁶ Ulster Branch minutes, 21 Sept. 1951.

²⁰⁷ Cormac Moore, ‘Partition and Irish sport in the 1950s’, in Paddy Dolan and John Connolly (eds), *Sport and national identities: Globalisation and conflict* (Abingdon, 2017), pp 78-9.

emerged that was amongst the most serious challenges to the post-partition harmony within rugby in Ireland, and in particular the Ulster Branch's successful management of a cross border identity since the partition of the province during 1920-2.

The controversy surrounded the events prior to Ireland's victory over France, by sixteen points to three, at Ravenhill, Belfast, on Saturday, 24 January 1953.²⁰⁸ In the days and weeks that followed, regional and national newspapers in the Republic of Ireland were flooded with objections and protests to the playing of the British national anthem, *God Save the Queen*, for the Irish team prior to the match. The only comparable incident in the history of rugby union in the United Kingdom or Ireland was when the English Rugby Union chose not to play the Welsh national anthem, *Land of my fathers*, before the England versus Wales Five Nations Championship fixture at Twickenham in 1974.²⁰⁹ Notably, O'Callaghan has contended that the Belfast anthem controversy was such that 'the uneasy accommodation of conflicting political outlooks that the IRFU has historically strived to achieve was subjected to its sternest test' in the aftermath.²¹⁰

Westmeath County Council forwarded their objection to the Irish Minister for External Affairs and to the Government of Northern Ireland.²¹¹ Ballinrobe Rugby Club described the incident as an 'insult' at a committee meeting in the days that followed.²¹² The *Connacht Tribune* reported its understanding that a meeting of the IRFU Connacht Branch resolved to ask that the IRFU ensure 'that such an insult is never again offered to an Irish team'.²¹³ Local government bodies in Galway, Trim,²¹⁴ Ballina,²¹⁵ Wexford²¹⁶ and Gorey²¹⁷ all lodged protests against the perceived insult. A protest 'against the attitude of the Irish team' for not insisting on the Irish national anthem being

²⁰⁸ *Irish Times*, 26 Jan. 1953.

²⁰⁹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 Mar. 1974; *Neath Guardian*, 22 Mar. 1974.

²¹⁰ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 173.

²¹¹ *Irish Times*, 27 Jan. 1953.

²¹² *Irish Press*, 28 Jan. 1953.

²¹³ *Connacht Tribune*, 7 Feb. 1953; see also, Display of flags and playing of national anthems at international Rugby Football matches (NAI, Department of Foreign Affairs, DFA/5/301/65).

²¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 21 Feb. 1953.

²¹⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 14 Feb. 1953

²¹⁶ *New Ross Standard*, 6. Feb 1953.

²¹⁷ *Evening Herald*, 19 Feb. 1953.

played was even passed by a meeting of the Loughrea Old Age Pensions Sub-Committee in County Galway.²¹⁸

Allegations of a perceived British ethos in the aftermath were not limited to the Ulster Branch who had staged the now controversial fixture. Indeed, a letter published in the *Irish Times*, from a contributor named ‘Kilkenny’, alleged that this incident amounted to the Dublin-based IRFU ‘pandering to the sensitivities of the Orange Lodges ... (and questioned) Does the IRFU wish to be identified with the pro-partition movement?’²¹⁹ The *Connacht Sentinel* went further in an excoriating attack on what they perceived to be the prevailing ethos within the IRFU:

Strongly entrenched in the higher administrative offices of the Irish Rugby Football Union is apparently, a clique which stands for British rule for part of the northern province of Ireland and which, we feel sure, would like to see the twenty-six counties again occupied by Britain.²²⁰

The wider context to the game highlighted the Ulster Branch’s dual identity. Its pro-British component was concerned with the upcoming coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953,²²¹ whilst the Irish nationalist component of its identity remained engaged, to some extent, by the ongoing anti-partition political agitation.²²² In the weeks prior to the Ravenhill anthem controversy, proceedings at Belfast Corporation descended into farce on the question of public expenditure to mark the coronation of a new British monarch. Belfast-born Councillor Murtagh Morgan added that ‘the members of the Unionist party, are trying to make themselves more British than the British themselves’. Cork-born Councillor T. O’Sullivan told the meeting ‘I am a Republican ... and I represent a Republican people, and I object’. Irish Labour Party councillors, including Dublin-born Mary O’Malley, told Unionist members of the corporation that ‘your loyalty should be, as ours is and has been, and always will be, to Ireland, the country that we live in, and not to any foreign power’. The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor James Norritt, chairing

²¹⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 7 Feb. 1953.

²¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 29 Jan. 1953.

²²⁰ *Connacht Sentinel*, 27 Jan. 1953.

²²¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 Jan. 1953.

²²² See also, Diarmaid Ferriter, *The border: The legacy of a century of Anglo-Irish politics* (London, 2019), pp 54-6.

the meeting, intervened on one occasion ‘to say that he cannot allow any reference to Britain as a foreign power’.²²³

In attempting to understand how this incident came to pass, rather than merely assessing the fallout arising from it, a dispute between the IRFU and its Ulster Branch between 1951 and 1952 may provide some explanation. The failure to award an international game to Belfast for the 1951/52 season was met with dismay by the Ulster Branch who sent a long letter of protest to the IRFU on 19 March 1951. In doing so, they explained their grievances, pointing to the strength of the game in schools in Ulster and their belief that an international game in Belfast would vindicate the Branch’s efforts towards growing the game. They stressed that ‘there is no parallel between the rugby situation in Ireland and that in England, Scotland and Wales. The uniqueness of the home situation demands that special care be taken to preserve it’.²²⁴ With that acknowledgement, we can have no doubt that the Ulster Branch fully understood the unique sensitivity of their provincial jurisdiction, which it had inherited from the political settlement of 1920-2.

In the year prior to the fixture, the Ulster Branch was reported to have shown solidarity with the British component of its cross-border identity, when they ‘decided that no match will be played under its jurisdiction until after the funeral of the late King George VI. The English, Scottish and Welsh Unions have already imposed similar bans’.²²⁵ This action was not taken by the IRFU, therefore a degree of autonomy to freely express elements of a pro-British identity was seemingly afforded the Ulster Branch in the early 1950s.

In response to the Ulster Branch protest regarding its hosting of international fixtures in Belfast, the IRFU explained that the financial position of the Union necessitated the staging of both home internationals in 1951/2 at Lansdowne Road due to the extra revenue that it would generate. The compromise aimed at satisfying Ulster Branch grievances, however, was that the IRFU decided to allocate the Ireland vs France game of January 1953 to

²²³ *Irish Times*, 2 Jan. 1953; *Northern Whig*, 2 Jan. 1953.

²²⁴ Letter from the Ulster Branch to the IRFU, 19 Mar. 1951, Minute book of the IRFU, 1950-1954 (IRFU archives, M009).

²²⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 9 Feb. 1952.

Belfast.²²⁶ The dispute had clearly left its mark on rugby followers in the south of Ireland, despite the compromise, however, and on the morning of the match, the *Cork Examiner* was still questioning the merits of the decision to allocate this game to Belfast:

Behind the decision to play the match in Belfast, which does not possess a vast rugby following ... may lie an anxiety on the part of our rugby administrators to please their northern brethren by giving them an international fixture.²²⁷

This was incorrect, however, as Ulster with its urban heartland of Belfast was actually the strongest of the IRFU's four provinces in 1953, as measured by the number of affiliated clubs (as will be the focus of chapter three). Furthermore, Belfast had been given international fixtures since before Irish rugby had a unified administration, the first occurring versus Scotland in February 1877.²²⁸

International opposition	No. of fixtures played in Dublin	No. of fixtures played in Belfast
England	12	1
Scotland	12	1
Wales	4	9
France	8	4
Others	7	0

Table 3: Venues for Irish rugby union internationals 1922-54.²²⁹

It would appear unlikely that the playing of the British national anthem at an Irish rugby match in Belfast, was a protest at the perceived lack of international games they were being awarded by the IRFU, as Ravenhill had hosted Ireland's Five Nations championship games versus Wales in both March 1948²³⁰ and March 1950.²³¹ Rather, as O'Callaghan has written, the

²²⁶ Letter from the IRFU to the Ulster Branch, 18 May 1951, Minute book of the IRFU, 1950-1954 (IRFU archives, M009).

²²⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 24 Jan. 1953.

²²⁸ *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 20 Feb. 1877.

²²⁹ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, appendix 12, pp 221-38.

²³⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Mar. 1948.

²³¹ *Irish Independent*, 11 Mar. 1950.

playing of the British national anthem was a custom for Irish international games played in Belfast. Prior to the 1953 game, the southern contingent of the team was threatening to ‘refuse to take to the field until after the pre-match formalities’. This crisis was narrowly avoided in a compromise brokered by Judge Davitt (a former IRFU President) whereby the players were assured they would never have to play an international at Ravenhill again.²³² However, Belfast would host a further fixture versus Scotland in Belfast in 1954,²³³ the last to be played there in the twentieth century. The next Irish international fixture played there would not be until 2007.²³⁴ This meant that, since 1922, Ireland had played fifty-eight international fixtures at home, with fifteen having been played in Belfast.

By the end of that decade, however, and with the controversy behind them, the IRFU sent their congratulations to Ulster and Irish internationals, J.W. Kyle and J.B. O’Neill, ‘both of whom had been honoured by her majesty the queen’ in 1959.²³⁵ Both Kyle and O’Neill, born and resident in Northern Ireland, were therefore eligible for recognition under the British honours system. The bestowing of an O.B.E. and C.B.E. upon Kyle and O’Neill respectively was a vindication of their services to rugby as Irish internationals. Far from demonstrating evidence of a pro-British/imperial ethos within the administration of rugby in Ireland, this incident perhaps exemplifies the IRFU’s role in managing a cross-border identity that was essential to the successful execution of provincial rugby in Ireland.

1969-81

It did not take long for the renewed sectarian conflict that engulfed Northern Ireland beginning in mid-1969,²³⁶ known as The Troubles, to affect rugby. At first, there were hints of what was to come. In January 1970, stating that ‘the IRFU have been notorious in the past for their anti-Irish snob attitudes’, the

²³² O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 173.

²³³ *Irish Times*, 27 Feb. 1954.

²³⁴ *Irish Independent*, 28 Aug. 2007.

²³⁵ IRFU committee minutes, 9 Jan. 1959, Minute book of the IRFU, 1957-1960 (IRFU archives, M011).

²³⁶ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945* (London, 2007), p. 468.

Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) threatened ‘action’ against IRFU officials if any Irish citizens were injured at an anticipated anti-apartheid demonstration on the occasion of a visit of South Africa to play Ireland at Lansdowne Road.²³⁷ A less threatening but more general hazard was that to travel. The potential for border-related difficulties was apparent from as early as February 1971 when it was suggested in the southern press that ‘right wing elements’ of the Ulster Unionist Party ‘want to clamp down and close the border altogether’.²³⁸

Ironically, when Ireland defeated France in the Five Nations Championship by fourteen points to nine in Paris on 29 January 1972, the *Irish Times* recorded how ‘united Irish rugby team rides easily over country’s divisions’. It also claimed that on the occasion of this fixture *L’équipe*, a French sporting daily, had devoted a whole page to ‘the astonishing rugby that rises above the Irish drama’.²³⁹ By the time such illusory commentary made it to press, a chain of events that began the day following that fixture, would lead to another of the gravest crises in the history of rugby in Ireland. Once again, it originated in Ulster before spreading south.

On 30 January 1972, British troops shot dead thirteen unarmed anti-internment demonstrators in Derry, Northern Ireland.²⁴⁰ Three days later, an angry mob of thousands attacked and burned the British embassy in Dublin.²⁴¹ The febrile atmosphere had first diffused into the realm of club rugby at the conclusion of that turbulent week, when the southern press alleged that the Ulster Branch had instructed at least three of their Belfast-based senior clubs – Instonians, Collegians and Malone – to withdraw from fixtures in Dublin against Bective, Palmerstown and UCD.²⁴² The *Evening Herald* suggested that this was because they (the Ulster Branch) were not agreeable to the Leinster Branch directive of a minute’s silence to be held for the victims of Bloody Sunday in Derry.²⁴³

²³⁷ *Irish Press*, 9 Jan. 1970.

²³⁸ *Evening Echo*, 11 Feb. 1971.

²³⁹ *Irish Times*, 1 Feb. 1972.

²⁴⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 31 Jan. 1972.

²⁴¹ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 3 Feb. 1972.

²⁴² *Sunday Independent*, 6 Feb. 1972.

²⁴³ *Evening Herald*, 5 Feb 1972.

Worse was to follow, however, when the embassy burning led to Scotland and Wales refusing to travel to Dublin to fulfil their Five Nations Championship fixtures in February and March 1972.²⁴⁴ It would be the IRFU administration in Dublin that bore the brunt of the fallout from the fixture cancellation in 1972, mostly in the form of perceived reputational damage, with secretary Bob Fitzgerald reported as stating ‘it is a tragic decision and one which will have far-reaching repercussions for the long-term development of the game here’.²⁴⁵

Interestingly, on this occasion, the PIRA was reported to have stated, through a spokesman, that ‘the rugby matches should go ahead. No true Irish Republican will offer any opposition to them’.²⁴⁶ Five Nations Championship fixtures returned to Dublin in February 1973 when Ireland defeated England by eighteen points to nine,²⁴⁷ that following a drawn test match with New Zealand three weeks earlier (a 10-10 draw at Lansdowne Road on 20 January 1973).²⁴⁸ Both Wales with a 9-9 draw,²⁴⁹ and then Scotland with a victory by nine points to six,²⁵⁰ returned to Dublin to fulfil Five Nations Championship fixtures in February and March 1974 respectively.

At least five rugby men, who were employed or thought to have been employed in the security forces in Northern Ireland, were killed between 1976 and 1981, owing to what the Ulster Branch described as ‘terrorist action’.²⁵¹ Oliver Eaton, a Colonel in the Territorial Army and City of Derry FC player, was killed in Belfast in July 1976.²⁵² The captain of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) team, Noel McCabe, was shot dead in an ambush on the Falls Road in Belfast in November 1976.²⁵³ Peter Hill, also of City of Derry FC and a former member of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), was shot dead in the Waterside area of Derry in February 1977.²⁵⁴ The Ulster Branch mourned

²⁴⁴ *Irish Independent*, 18 Feb. 1972; *Sunday Independent*, 5 Mar. 1972.

²⁴⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 Mar. 1972.

²⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1972.

²⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 12 Feb. 1973.

²⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 1973.

²⁴⁹ *Irish Times*, 4 Feb. 1974.

²⁵⁰ *Sunday Independent*, 3 Mar. 1974.

²⁵¹ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1976/7-1980/1 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/53-7).

²⁵² *Irish Independent*, 1 July 1976.

²⁵³ *Evening Herald*, 4 Nov. 1976.

²⁵⁴ *Irish Press*, 24 Feb. 1977.

the killing in November 1980 of Thomas Orr, of Saintfield, County Down, who played rugby for North of Ireland FC in Belfast.²⁵⁵ It was claimed that the bank official had been mistakenly identified as a reserve policeman when he was murdered by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).²⁵⁶ The Ulster Branch also mourned the death of Lindsay McDougall, a civil servant and part-time member of the RUC, who was shot dead by the INLA in Belfast in January 1981.²⁵⁷

‘The bombings of clubhouses and pavilions’ was also noted in the Ulster Branch summation of the 1976-7 season.²⁵⁸ Later, their annual report for 1980/1 reflected on ‘the destruction of the Dungannon Rugby Football pavilion²⁵⁹ and the City of Derry rugby club pavilion for the third time.²⁶⁰ Between 1970 and 1979, the indirect impact of the troubles was perhaps reflected in that the playing membership of the North of Ireland Football Club, located in Belfast, decreased by around 6 per cent and the club’s revenue generated annually from gate receipts declined by over 28 per cent in that period.²⁶¹ These difficulties were not unique to rugby at this time, however. In isolated outposts where Gaelic games appeared geographically and culturally vulnerable, the Ballycran GAC clubhouse in County Down was targeted on seven occasions between 1972 and 1993,²⁶² being burnt to the ground on three occasions. So too was St. Enda’s GAA club, situated in Glengormley, County Antrim, gutted by fire in 1972, 1973 and, in addition, members of St Enda’s and also the Bellaghy Wolfe Tones Club in County Derry, were shot dead by loyalist paramilitary groups in 1993 and during that conflict.²⁶³

The evidence presented here strongly indicates that, between 1970 and 1981, the sectarian bloodshed of Northern Ireland’s conflict, which was fought

²⁵⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 Nov. 1980.

²⁵⁶ *Irish Press*, 20 Nov. 1980.

²⁵⁷ *Evening Herald*, 15 Jan 1981.

²⁵⁸ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1976/7 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/53).

²⁵⁹ *Irish Press*, 3 Mar. 1980.

²⁶⁰ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1980/1 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/57); a previous bomb attack that destroyed City of Derry Rugby Club was reported by the *Evening Herald*, 22 Dec. 1978.

²⁶¹ Volume containing Annual Reports and Accounts of North of Ireland Cricket and Football Club, 1970-9 (PRONI, Records of North of Ireland Cricket and Rugby Club, D4286/B/47).

²⁶² Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 304.

²⁶³ Des Fahy, *How the GAA survived The Troubles* (Dublin, 2001), pp 21-2; 131.

by groups purporting to represent the two identities that the IRFU Ulster Branch had been forced to maintain in a delicate balance since 1922, was slipping beyond the control of the security forces in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Branch did navigate through the most threatening and dangerous period of its existence, but they did not escape unscathed.

Consequently, the claims made in many fawning and simplistic accounts of the history of rugby in Ireland, in relation to the game's relationship with communal violence, appear considerably wide of the mark. For example, Sean Diffley accepted that it was 'not always easy to preserve the social and sporting *bonhomie* of rugby football', but suggested that rugby has been 'disrupted much less than many would suppose' ...as... 'rugby playing Irishmen are just as nationalist or unionist, or Protestant or Catholic as their non-rugby neighbours but they eschew all sectional labels when it comes to pulling on a rugby jersey'.²⁶⁴ In his official centenary history of the game in Ireland, which was commissioned by the IRFU itself, Edmund Van Esbeck claimed that 'the friendships and good fellowship of Irish rugby men were not affected by differing loyalties and political sympathies, and this great sporting bond continues to be a bright feature in the most gloomy times'.²⁶⁵ The same author later suggested that rugby 'has succeeded admirably where successive generations of politicians have failed miserably'.²⁶⁶ In addition, it is possible that Richard Holt's contention that 'the only team sport to escape the divisive effects of political and sectarian conflict has been the game of rugby',²⁶⁷ may have been unduly influenced by those earlier flawed chronicles of rugby in Ireland.

The work of sociologists John Sugden and Alan Bairner afforded considerably more nuance to their appraisal of the social function of rugby in Ireland, an approach corroborated by the evidence presented here:

The game itself, however, is presented as wholly apolitical and the inference one might draw from the foregoing glowing reports is that a solution to the problem of Ireland could be found rather easily if all Irishmen took up the game of rugby football.

²⁶⁴ Diffley, *The men in green*, p. 14.

²⁶⁵ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, pp 90-91.

²⁶⁶ Van Esbeck, *The Story of Irish Rugby*, p. 218.

²⁶⁷ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 245.

The reality however is much less encouraging, and one suspects that rugby's friends protest a little too much when their sport's capacity to unify is questioned ... One need only examine, first, the development of Irish rugby and, second, the sport's contemporary character, particularly in Northern Ireland, to see that the game is deeply implicated in the cultural politics of division.²⁶⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex history of rugby football in Ulster, charting not only the course of its development until it eventually came under the umbrella of a recognised administrative body for the island of Ireland, the IRFU, but also how the Ulster Branch would manage its inheritance of a cross-border game and cross-border identity in a divided Ireland. It has presented an analysis of such matters across three broad areas – province, partition and politics – which were the defining issues affecting how rugby in Ulster functioned after 1922.

The first section of this chapter detailed the administrative development of rugby in Ireland. Beginning in the cities of Dublin and Belfast in 1874 and 1875 respectively, two bodies emerged. A unified body, the IRFU, claiming all-island jurisdiction, followed in 1879. By 1898, the IRFU, based at Lansdowne Road, Dublin, had developed regional subdivisions that were organised as provincial branches, representing the four traditional provinces of Ireland – Leinster, Ulster, Munster, and Connacht. That template endured through the First World War, but the political partition of Ireland between 1920 and 1922 meant that one of those provinces, Ulster, was now dissected by the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. Over the next eight years, the Belfast-based rugby administrative body of the game in Ulster persisted with its original name, the Northern Branch. That title had provided some distance between the rugby body and political Ulster, which had succeeded in carving the six-county state of Northern Ireland out of the historical province of Ulster. Having survived the turbulent early years of Northern Ireland's existence unscathed, we learn that in was in October 1930

²⁶⁸ Sugden and Bairner, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society*, p. 54.

that the Northern Branch was officially renamed the Ulster Branch, a change that was not obviously under-pinned by political sentiment.

The second section of this chapter examined what had come to be known as the IRFU Ulster Branch. It found that in the case of the three southern border counties of Ulster – Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan – rugby was geographically isolated. Distance from the game's centre in Belfast, a lack of readily available opposition within their locality, and competition from other football codes, all appear to have had a part to play in the isolation experienced by rugby clubs in that area. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that clubs located in those counties began to affiliate to the Ulster Branch in numbers that would alleviate these problems of isolation.

Notably, the section also demonstrated that rugby struggled to gain a foothold along, or proximate to, both sides of the political border. Rugby in this liminal space, north and south of the political border, was, to some extent, impacted by the practical everyday challenges associated with partition. It seems clear that fulfilling cross-border fixtures was difficult, and the few teams to emerge in the southern border counties tended to play against other southern teams, although no clear admission of this is contained in the Ulster Branch minutes. Ulster's rugby core had come to consist of both the greater Belfast area and the provincial towns located east of the River Bann. In some years during the mid-twentieth century five times the number of clubs would affiliate from that eastern half of Northern Ireland as compared to the area west of the River Bann.

The third section explored how the managing of a cross-border identity has been a crucial function of Ulster Branch since 1922. This was not a task that troubled the other provincial branches: the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, divided the Ulster branch's territory alone. The transition from a pre- to a post-partition world appear to have been relatively facile for the Ulster Branch and Irish rugby in general. On a day-to-day basis, the Ulster Branch successfully executed its administrative duties as a subdivision of the IRFU, easing immediate fears about the impact of partition. Further, a continued shared cultivation of First World War commemoration by the Ulster branch and its southern counterparts helped to maintain bonds. A representative fixture between Ulster and New South Wales in 1927 illustrates this

commemorative practice, but also an ongoing emphasis on imperial-identity politics in Ulster rugby., The latter was something the IRFU in general indulged in throughout the 1920s, evidenced by its attendance at rugby's Imperial Conference. The notable (because it was unusual) appearance of a partitionist mentality emanating from one of the Ulster Branch's most famous clubs, Instonians FC, based in Belfast, was a rare deviation from what appeared to be the Branch's position.

The interruption to regular rugby activity during the Second World War would, one might expect, have lent itself to the Branch gravitating towards the British component of its identity. Not only was there the war-time patriotism but Belfast's industries were engaged in the British war effort. However, the staging of ten representative fixtures at Ravenhill in Belfast between 1941 and 1945 between Ulster/Irish XV's and those of the [British] Army did not presage a shift in identity. These fixtures, which had parallels not only in Britain but in the south of Ireland, were to a great extent a practical means of maintaining the morale of the game during a time when regular competitions were not possible.

In January 1953, the hitherto successful management of a cross-border identity was severely tested by the events surrounding an Irish international fixture versus France at Ravenhill. Whilst the pre-match rituals associated with Irish fixtures staged in Belfast were well known, prior to kick off on the day in question several southern players threatened not to field, objecting to the British national anthem. Though the players were convinced to participate, the playing of *God Save the Queen* provoked outraged response from a wide range of civic opinion in the Republic Ireland. The result was that Belfast would never again stage a Five Nations Championship fixture after 1954, the price the IRFU paid to avoid rupture once again.

The outbreak of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland in 1969, affected Ireland's ability to compete in international rugby during the early 1970s. The Ulster Branch was more a passenger than an active participant in the chain of events that followed one of the most notorious incidents of those troubles – Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972. The violent response in Dublin to this incident, when a mob burned the British embassy there, led to Wales and Scotland refusing to travel to Dublin to fulfil Five Nations Championship fixtures. This resulted in a perceived huge reputational damage for the IRFU in

respect of their British rugby colleagues, yet normal service had resumed regarding international fixtures in Dublin by 1974 when Wales and Scotland returned. Ultimately, the chapter contends that the governance of rugby in Ireland after partition was not quite as unambiguously harmonious as some commentators have previously asserted.

Chapter 2: Home Rule and a Home Nation: the partition of Irish football, 1921-78.

Introduction

This chapter sets out to provide the reader with a perspective on developments within the governance of association football in Ireland in the decades that followed its sundering in 1921. Understandably, at a popular level, ‘the split’ has often been understood within the immediate Irish political context, leading to a widespread assumption that the partition of football flowed directly from the political partition of the island. In recent years, however, that football fracture, south from north, has become better documented in the historiography, particularly by Neal Garnham and Cormac Moore,¹ and the division is now understood as having a variety of roots. Both have pointed to long-standing differences between those who promoted association football in its two urban centres of power during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Belfast and Dublin. The conflict that accompanied that partition of Irish football would endure and would, for decades to follow, undermine relations between the two rival associations that emerged. In 1921 the loss of a large player and spectator base was a pressing and immediate concern for the IFA, though that was only the beginning. This chapter enhances the existing historiography by returning to the split but more importantly by examining that which followed. In doing so, the chapter is divided into four sections.

The first considers how the administration of Irish football developed from its origins in 1880 up to that split during 1921. It demonstrates how that model of governance did indeed come apart during, rather than as a result of, the Irish revolution, and the analysis here emphasises the First World War as a factor which rendered the sundering of the IFA in the years that followed more likely.

Second, the chapter explores the conflict of the succeeding decades. It does so, principally, by examining the fraught relationship between the two associations themselves, but also by exploring how each interacted with the bodies that contended for global governance of the game, the International

¹ Neal Garnham, *Association football and society*; Moore, *Irish soccer split*, (Cork, 2015).

Football Association Board (International Board) and the increasingly powerful *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA). As any chance to repair the split had seemingly been lost between 1921 and 1932, the chapter goes on to detail how that first post-partition decade was merely the first phase of a cold war between the two Irish associations. During that first phase the development of administrations, north and south, at the level of schools' football in Ireland is examined here for the first time. This process illustrated the effects of partition, while also gesturing toward the possibility of co-operation. A settlement to the outstanding issues underpinning the dispute between the IFA and FAI was a long time in coming, but there would be partial settlement first in the period between 1950-58 and, finally, a public and hugely symbolic acceptance by each association of the other in 1978.

Third, the chapter nuances the story of hostility and non-recognition by highlighting areas of collaboration, often below the official level, that developed during the decades in which conflict dominates our view. The chapter documents the previously unexplored series of unofficial all Ireland championship fixtures that occurred between 1925 and 1955. Building to some extent on the success of such unofficial collaboration, the crisis of the Second World War witnessed some approved collaboration between the senior clubs of both jurisdictions, while university football also seems to have been a useful, if elite, space of friendly contact.

Finally, in the conclusion, the chapter reflects on the identities of the two football nations that emerged from the partition of Irish football governance during 1921. Given all of the above, two notable aspects emerge. The first was the curious relationship of the identity of football to the wider political context of Northern Ireland. The second was how the 'independent' Irish football nation in the south remained culturally within British football's sphere of influence and continued to aspire to some level of integration within it.

Paul Rouse has written of the 'great and obvious absence...[of]... an all-Ireland study of the game (football) and all that it means, ranging across

political, social and cultural history'.² In taking on the tasks described above, this chapter, in combination with chapter four, begins to address that lacuna.

2.1: Context: A football association for Ireland, 1880-1921.

Association football in Ireland was first brought under the banner of an administrative governing body with the inception of the Irish Football Association (IFA) in November 1880.³ Almost immediately, the new body forged close links with its counterparts in Britain, sending a representative to a conference of the secretaries of the football associations of the United Kingdom in April 1881.⁴ Notably, on that occasion, the associations set a precedent by collectively imposing sanctions, though it would be another five years until the formation of the International Football Association Board (generally referred to as the International Board), which first met in 1886 and began to claim for itself powers of regulation.⁵ In 1881, according to the *Leeds Mercury*,

A unanimous vote of dissatisfaction was expressed at the conduct of Blackburn Rovers in leaving the Lancashire Association, and it was recommended that the various associations should recommend the clubs over which they had influence to refrain from making fixtures with the Rovers.⁶

Already then, the associations that administered football in the United Kingdom were acting collectively to protect their shared custodianship (or control) of the game, while displaying a willingness to use their collective power to sanction disloyalty and enforce loyalty. This is crucial when we consider what would transpire post-1921. It would inform the attitude of, and gave certain advantages to, the IFA as a permanent member of the International Board, the body that oversaw the administration of international football among the nations of Great Britain and Ireland, whilst also serving as custodians of the rules of the game and its associations.⁷ This bloc co-operated

² Paul Rouse, (Review of) 'Irish soccer migrants: a social and cultural history', *Sport in history*, 41:1 (2021), pp 153-4.

³ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 5.

⁴ *The Leeds Mercury*, 26 Apr. 1881.

⁵ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, pp 8-9.

⁶ *The Leeds Mercury*, 26 Apr. 1881.

⁷ Tynan, 'Association football and Irish society', p. 6.

on many ‘internal’ matters, including the organisation of the British Home Championship, an annual tournament to be contested by England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, which was first held in 1884.⁸ With its capacity to include and exclude, the International Board became a crucial site of influence and power.

Meanwhile, in Ireland, within a decade of the IFA’s foundation, the game had grown out from Belfast to the point where, by 1890, that city anchored the North-East subdivision of the IFA. Indeed, soon several regional outposts of the game had emerged in the north of Ireland, and these were sufficiently strong to justify further regional administrations – a North-West subdivision, based in Derry, and a Mid Ulster subdivision, based in Lurgan – both of which were fully subservient to the Belfast-based IFA. The IFA would later extend its governance of football to the south when recognising the Leinster Football Association (LFA) – centred on Dublin and founded in 1892⁹ – and the Munster Football Association (MFA) – centred on Cork and founded in 1901.¹⁰

These developments both reflected and affected the growth of the game, while the arrangements granted these regional FAs a degree of autonomy within the IFA’s overall governance structure. Notably, whilst the northern subdivisions developed because clubs coalesced around regional concentrations of the game (reflecting the path of the game’s growing popularity), the southern affiliates tended to claim territories that corresponded to traditional provincial boundaries. The further the game spread beyond Belfast the less organic we might consider the administrative consolidation of the game to have been. For instance, based in the western counties of Ulster, a Fermanagh and South Tyrone Football Association had been admitted to the IFA in 1904, a fairly isolated regional outpost concentrated around Enniskillen in County Fermanagh.¹¹ In 1910, the IFA decided not to take an active part in

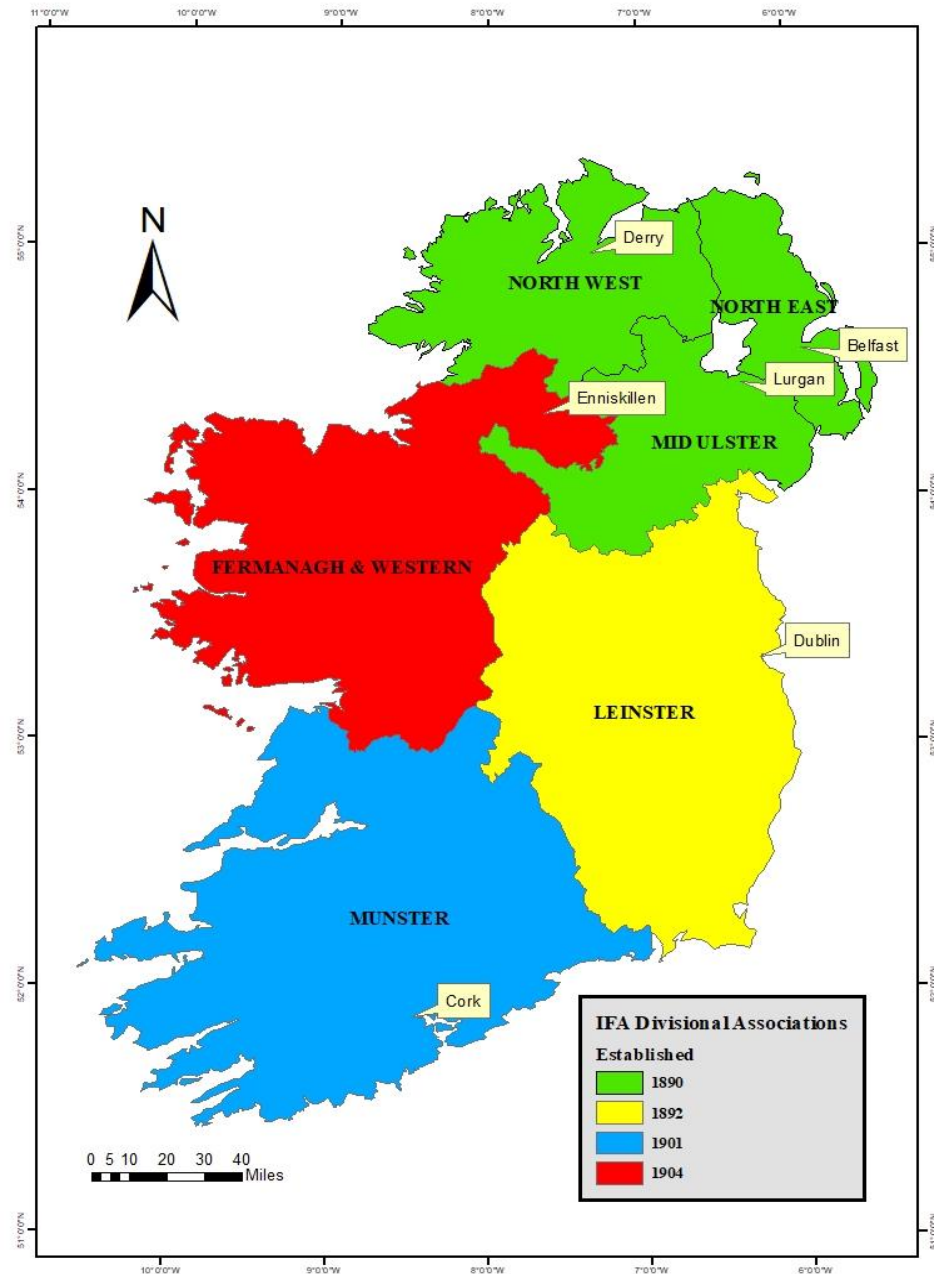
⁸ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 9.

⁹ Leinster Football Association centenary yearbook 1892-1992 (1993) (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/86); see also Clenet, ‘Association football in Dublin’, pp 805-19.

¹⁰ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, pp 14-15.

¹¹ Conor Curran, ‘The social background of Ireland’s pre-World War I association football clubs, players and administrators: The case of south and west Ulster’, *International journal of the history of sport* 33 (2016), p. 1989; Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 6.

the development of a Connacht FA.¹² When no such FA had emerged, instead, in 1911, the IFA incorporated the entire province of Connacht into what was re-titled the ‘Fermanagh & Western Divisional Association’.¹³ These structures are laid out below in Map 5.



Map 5: IFA map of divisions, 1911.¹⁴

¹² Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 31.

¹³ Memorandum and articles of association, 1911/2 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/1/2).

¹⁴ Memorandum and articles of association, 1911/2 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/1/2); Garnham, *Association football and society*, pp 5-6.

The administrative structure described above was the foundation for a strong overall affiliation of 309 clubs in 1912: 128 of those were located in the North-east; eighty in Leinster; forty in Mid Ulster; twenty-nine in the North-west; twenty in Munster and twelve in the Fermanagh & Western area.¹⁵

The First World War, however, would interrupt this story of structural development and increased participation. Notably, shortly after that war began, the IFA council delegate from Dublin's Bohemians FC, Mr Fitzsimmons, 'raised the question of the playing of football during the present war, and suggested the association take some steps and offer some suggestions as to whether it was wise to continue the game or not'.¹⁶ This ominous query came at the threshold of what proved an astonishing turnaround from the 'remarkably buoyant position' in which association football in Ireland found itself by the summer of 1914.¹⁷ Club affiliations had never been healthier, and what Garnham described as 'the zenith of Irish footballing achievement had come in the months before the outbreak of the Great War', when Ireland won the British Home Championship for the first time.¹⁸ Notably, the impact of the war witnessed club affiliations to the IFA decline by almost three-fifths if we compare 1917 to 1912 (126 as opposed to 309).¹⁹

James Wilton, a former Irish international from Derry, who won nine caps between 1888 and 1893, was elected President of the IFA council in 1913. This coincided with the Home Rule crisis that saw him act as a senior figure in the Ulster Volunteer Force. During the First World War, as Wilton rose to the rank of Captain in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and received the military cross for bravery shown during the Battle of the Somme, football under the jurisdiction of his association retreated. After the war, he would serve two terms as Mayor of Derry and be knighted by King George VI in 1937.²⁰

¹⁵ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries' names and addresses, seasons 1911/2, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/1).

¹⁶ Minutes of the IFA Council, 17 Nov. 1914, IFA Council Minute Book, 1909-28 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/1/3).

¹⁷ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 160.

¹⁸ Neal Garnham, 'Football and national identity in pre-Great War Ireland', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 28:1 (2001), p. 15.

¹⁹ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries' names and addresses', seasons 1911/2 – 1917/8, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²⁰ *Irish Times*, 9 Feb. 1946.

Reflecting the commitment of their council president, the IFA's annual reports during the war years emphasised the vital role that they believed football was playing in the war effort. In 1915 their report contended that 'the sport of association football has made a really magnificent contribution to Kitchener's new armies'.²¹ Furthermore, in 1917, when making a confident prediction of ultimate success for the United Kingdom, the IFA claimed that 'no section of the public made a finer contribution than those who follow the great game of the masses – association football'.²² During the war the IFA operated in close alignment with the other FAs on the International Board, seeking their advice following the outbreak of war. As such, the IFA council stated in November 1914 'that the Irish Football Association would co-operate with the Football Association (in England) in any further steps that might be taken'.²³ By then, the IFA had already resolved unilaterally to donate £150 to the Prince of Wales fund and £50 to the Belgian Refugees Relief Fund.²⁴

The outbreak of war compounded the flaws in the IFA's approach to developing the game in its more isolated outposts. For example, Garnham has suggested that in 1910 the Munster FA boasted as many as thirty-seven clubs affiliated to the IFA,²⁵ 'though there were reckoned to be at least another seven unaffiliated clubs in the city of Cork alone'.²⁶ Notably, the IFA intermediate cup entries of 1911 from that region comprised entirely of British Army teams, such as the East Surrey Regiment, based in Kinsale, County Cork.²⁷ David Toms alludes to strong connections between the military and football in Munster when suggesting that immediately prior to the outbreak of war, the game 'was strong in urbanised areas or in large towns, all of them with a military presence'.²⁸ A wartime collapse in affiliation in Munster, therefore, was perhaps inevitable, given the over-reliance on military teams as opposed to

²¹ IFA annual report 1915, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/2/1).

²² IFA annual report 1917, *Ibid.*

²³ Minutes of the IFA Council, 17 Nov. 1914, IFA Council Minute Book, 1909-28 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/1/3).

²⁴ *Northern Whig*, 10 Sept. 1914.

²⁵ *Cork Sportsman*, 25 Dec. 1909 and 15 Jan. 1910.

²⁶ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 44.

²⁷ Minutes of the IFA Emergency Committee, 9 Oct. 1911. IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²⁸ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 41.

civilian clubs to sustain competition there. Indeed, as early as October 1914 the IFA junior committee reported that ‘the Munster Association had temporarily decided to suspend operations’.²⁹ Later, a ‘southern’ district league, which replaced some of the regular competitions, showed continuity with elements of the pre-war composition of football in Munster, being entirely composed of military teams.³⁰

In addition, Conor Curran has suggested that in Donegal, as a result of the wartime cessation of regular football activity, ‘the GAA was able to step into a vacuum by 1919 and provide organised cups and leagues for young men who had been involved in soccer competitions but were by then restricted to participating in irregularly held friendlies.’³¹ Effectively, this meant ‘peripheral’ regions, such as Munster and Donegal, had already disappeared from IFA jurisdiction prior to 1921.

Arguably, the pre-war competitions that engaged the dominant spheres of Belfast and Dublin, as well as regional outposts of the game, had allowed the various regional FAs to remain cohesive, under the IFA umbrella. Without the sporting glue of competition and association, the loss of isolated outposts, such as Munster and Donegal, made likely by the movement of men due to the war, became a reality, while the Belfast and Dublin administrations began to drift apart.³² With the gravitational pull of the centre weakening in the context of the war, a complete collapse in club affiliations in Munster (from twenty to zero) and in the Fermanagh & Western area (from twelve to zero)³³ took place, and worse was to come.

Between 1917, when IFA club affiliations stood at 126, and 1920, when that number had increased to 288, it would appear that the game had begun a recovery.³⁴ However, whilst nine clubs had returned in the Fermanagh & Western area, there was still no affiliation from Munster which had become,

²⁹ *Northern Whig*, 22 Oct. 1914.

³⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 14 Nov. 1916.

³¹ Curran, *The development of sport in Donegal*, p. 174.

³² Tynan, ‘Association football and Irish society’, p. 41.

³³ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries’ names and addresses, seasons 1917/8, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/1).

³⁴ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries’ names and addresses’, seasons 1911/2 – 1919/20, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/1).

since 1919, the epicentre of a new conflict, the Irish War of Independence.³⁵ Toms contended that ‘the period from 1918 to 1922 was too fraught, especially in Cork, and across most of Munster, to reasonably conduct the business of organised soccer’.³⁶ Thus, both Irish society and Irish football governance were in a state of crisis during 1921.

What Cormac Moore has described as ‘The Irish Soccer Split’ occurred between March-September 1921.³⁷ Though the War of Independence was still raging when this process began, this window of time (March to September), as delineated by Moore, by implication ascribes the split to a more petty, footballing, matter: the fall-out from an uncontested Irish Cup semi-final replay. When Shelbourne played out a draw with Glenavon in Belfast in February 1921, the IFA ordered Shelbourne to return to Belfast for a replay to be played in March. This decision, the pretext for which was the violent state of the country, was described by the *Athletic News* as ‘another Irish fiasco’ as ‘Dublin was undoubtedly entitled to the replay’,³⁸ and it also seemed to confirm what Leinster delegates perceived to be a clear north-eastern bias within the IFA.³⁹ At this time, Moore has observed, ‘all committees were dominated by North-East representatives’,⁴⁰ while David Needham has commented upon a ‘notable decline’ in the number of southern players selected for international games following the First World War and prior to the split.⁴¹

In this context, the decision to order Shelbourne to travel triggered a series of events that would result in the withdrawal of Leinster from the IFA. If that administrative ‘split’ had to be identified with a single event or date, it would likely be the IFA emergency committee’s receipt of the following letter from the Leinster FA on 24 June 1921:

³⁵ Stephen Howe, ‘Killing in Cork and the historians’, *History Workshop Journal*, 77 (2014), pp 160-186.

³⁶ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p 115.

³⁷ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, pp 105-22.

³⁸ *Athletic News*, 14 Mar. 1921.

³⁹ *Irish Independent*, 18 Feb. 1921.

⁴⁰ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 102.

⁴¹ David Needham, *Ireland’s first real world cup: The story of the 1924 Ireland Olympic football team* (Dublin, 2012), p. 31.

I beg to inform you that at a meeting of the representatives of our clubs it was decided to form an association independent of the IFA Ltd.

Yours sincerely,

J.A. Ryder.⁴²

As secretary of the Leinster FA it was Jack Ryder who cast the fateful die that partitioned Irish football in June 1921.⁴³

Despite the complex situation outlined above, the tendency to link political partition – effected through the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, and confirmed in practice by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 – to the football schism, took hold early and has persisted. Contemporary IFA publications are perhaps best referred to as propaganda such was the lack of nuance in their analysis of the partition of Irish football. Rather than acknowledge their error in ordering Shelbourne back to Belfast, they insisted that the ‘peculiar and extraordinary conditions prevailing’ were responsible for the ‘internal eruptions’.⁴⁴ The IFA was not alone in its simplifications. Indeed, the passing of time brought limited nuance to a Leinster FA centenary publication, which emphasised the establishment of the Free State as a factor explaining their secession.⁴⁵ Such simplistic explanations fail to recognise that large swathes of Ireland (such as Connacht, County Donegal, and Munster) were outside the IFA’s jurisdiction prior to the birth of the Irish Free State between 1920-2 and before the specific dispute about fixtures in the spring of 1921.

When the Leinster FA’s secession came, the reality of political partition certainly mattered and its subsequent confirmation undoubtedly contributed to the copper-fastening of football’s split. So too is it impossible to understand the

⁴² Minutes of the IFA Emergency Committee, 24 June 1921, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/1).

⁴³ Cormac Moore, ‘The formation of the Football Association of Ireland’, *Soccer & society*, 22:8 (2021), pp 820-33.

⁴⁴ IFA annual report, 1921, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/2/1).

⁴⁵ Foreword by Michael Hyland, President of the Football Association of Ireland, Leinster Football Association centenary yearbook 1892-1992, 1993 (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/86).

split without the context provided by the violence of the spring of 1921. Nonetheless, it is fair to state that football in Belfast and Dublin each had separate administrative and football cultures a good deal earlier than 1921, even prior to 1914. The northern administration was older, dominant and well-connected to the wider world of British football while the southern administration was less well-developed, but energetic and resentful of perceived bias. Furthermore, the First World War, and the damage that was wrought on football in Ireland during that time, was a crucial circumstance. The Irish football world that emerged from that war was less coherent and integrated, increasing its vulnerability when further trouble came in 1921.

2.2: Conflict: The cold war in Irish football, 1921-78.

The existing historiography, and in particular the work of Cormac Moore, has detailed the relationship between the two associations in the decade that followed the split. This section builds on that historiography, complementing it with new source material not considered in earlier work. In doing so, it posits that the initial dispute between the IFA and the FAI (later known as the Football Association of the Irish Free State [FAIFS], 1923-37) between the years 1921 and 1932, was merely the first phase of a cold war within Irish football. There then followed a fourteen-year period (1932-46) of stasis, or at least minimal movement, in associational relations between north and south. The development of schools' football administrations in Ireland, beginning in 1925, was much shorter in duration, but provides an interesting example given that it shared many of its characteristics with the wrangle surrounding international football. Significantly, the analysis that follows presents new evidence that points to two further distinct phases of the Irish football split that eventually brought about a partial settlement of the outstanding issues. The first of those concerns the years between 1946 and 1958, and the second between 1960 and 1978.

1921-32

A simple separation of the Leinster FA from the IFA in Belfast did not occur, and the first phase of a cold war between the IFA and the southern body now

calling itself the FAI lasted between 1921 and 1932. This was primarily, though not exclusively, apparent in the matter of international recognition, a question which the FAI prioritised. That recognition they sought from FIFA. Founded in Paris in 1904, FIFA's initial membership of continental football associations was joined by the home nations of the International Board in 1905, meaning England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland who, as a bloc, would be one of the most influential voices within FIFA.⁴⁶ By the 1920s, just as the conflict between the two associations in Ireland began,⁴⁷ FIFA had reached, at the very least, a point of strained co-existence with the British (and Irish) hegemony in world football.

In 1922, the FAI's first attempt at obtaining international recognition at FIFA was supported by the defeated central powers of Europe, countries that the British and Irish FAs had tried to banish from FIFA in 1919. That support came in letters from the Turkish FA (25 March 1922), First Vienna Football Club in Austria (1 April 1922), and the Hungarian FA (12 April 1922).⁴⁸ However, the as yet uncertain, still contested, claims to territorial jurisdiction on the island inhibited the application. The FAI, for instance, had been brazen enough to claim jurisdiction over twenty-three clubs from the Falls and District League in Belfast, which had formed a body calling itself the Belfast and District Association (BDA), in addition to clubs from its *de facto* jurisdiction within the Irish Free State. This contributed to the scuttling of their own application. FIFA required its members to have clearly defined and recognised borders. Though rejecting the application, FIFA left the door ajar:

With regard the confused situation in Ireland ... at any time when you consider that the situation has become more clear, we shall be pleased to reconsider your application for membership.⁴⁹

With the FAI having failed to obtain recognition from FIFA, a rancorous first ever bilateral meeting between the two Irish associations was held in Dublin in February 1923. Each side argued that there should be one

⁴⁶ Tom Dunmore, *Historical dictionary of soccer* (Maryland, 2011), p. 150.

⁴⁷ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 149.

⁴⁸ Application for membership of FIFA, Feb. 1922- Dec. 1932 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/1); see also Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 150.

⁴⁹ Letter from FIFA to the FAI, 16 Oct. 1922, FAIFS foreign correspondence file, Mar. 1922-Jan. 1931 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/2).

governing body on the island and they should be it. The FAI, for instance, proposed that the IFA become the North of Ireland Football Association and accept a subordinate position to the FAI, analogous to the relationship that the Army Football Association had with the Football Association in England.⁵⁰ If the meeting was marked by disagreement, then the aftermath was marked by farce as, in the days that followed, recriminations about the conference and about how (and when) the outcomes should be made public appeared in the press. For example, the Belfast and Dublin press published the furious rebuke of IFA president Wilton to the charge of a 'breach of faith' levelled at him by those in the FAI.⁵¹

The intervention of the Irish Free State Minister for External Affairs, Desmond FitzGerald, did not prevent the failure of a second FAI application for membership of FIFA in 1923,⁵² although on this occasion FIFA did offer some further hope for progress. FIFA again indicated that it would agree to continue its relationship with the IFA and also admit the FAI, but on certain conditions.⁵³ 'If the Irish Free State possessed the political status claimed' and on the clear understanding that the 'federation would not allow the Football Association of Ireland to claim any membership within the six-county area, nor would it permit the Irish Football Association, Ltd., to encroach on the Irish Free State territory'.⁵⁴

It would be the International Board which mediated a further conference between the IFA and FAI, held in Liverpool in October 1923.⁵⁵ This conference resulted in some success. The IFA agreed to recognise the southern body in the matter of club football, and restrict its own jurisdiction over club football to Northern Ireland, but on the basis that the FAI changed its name to the FAIFS and restrict its claims of jurisdiction to that state's boundaries. This conformed largely to the compromise outlined by FIFA, though it was confined to the matter of club football. Further, the agreement did not see the FAIFS become a member of the International Board, an

⁵⁰ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, pp 140-3.

⁵¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 Feb. 1923; *Freeman's Journal*, 15 Feb. 1923.

⁵² *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 May 1923.

⁵³ *Freeman's Journal*, 26 May 1923.

⁵⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 26 May 1923.

⁵⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Oct. 1923; Moore, *Irish soccer split*, pp 158-61.

aspiration of the FAIFS. This meant that the IFA remained the sole representative of the island of Ireland on that body and used, unchallenged by fellow members of that board, the name Ireland in its competition.

The compromise (with its clarification of jurisdiction) did at least open the way for the FAIFS to enter FIFA and thus be ‘accepted into the world game’.⁵⁶ On the other hand, it allowed the IFA annual report to describe the deal as affording the southern body ‘the status of a dominion in football’.⁵⁷ This was manifest in June 1924, when the International Board reaffirmed that ‘the articles of the International Federation (FIFA) shall not affect the inter-relations of the Football Associations of the United Kingdom’.⁵⁸ In other words, the IFA could rely on the support of their existing colleagues on the International Board regarding their claim to be the representative association of football in Ireland, and in their continued use of the name Ireland in the British Home Championship. It also confirmed that the FAIFS would not be admitted as a member of the International Board.

Despite the ambiguity underpinning their tentative acceptance as an international football nation, recognition by FIFA facilitated the participation of a FAIFS team at the Paris Olympics of the summer of 1924.⁵⁹ This amounted to at best a semi-official and hastily arranged set of fixtures occurring at (and following) the 1924 Paris Olympics,⁶⁰ an opportunity that had arrived too soon for the fledgling football nation to have established some of the basics of a football identity such as a flag, anthem and jersey under which it would compete. Tadhg Carey claimed that on a night out after one of the games, the players sang *The Soldier’s Song / Amhrán na bhFiann*,⁶¹ later the official anthem of the FAI international team and the southern Irish state.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts: The story of Northern Irish football*, (Belfast, 2017), p. 47.

⁵⁷ IFA annual report 1924, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/2/1).

⁵⁸ Minutes of the IFA Council, 21 Dec. 1923, IFA Council Minute Book, 1909-28 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/1/3).

⁵⁹ Tadhg Carey, ‘Ireland’s footballers at the Paris Olympics, 1924’ in *History Ireland* 20:4 (July/August 2012), pp 22-5.

⁶⁰ Subject of Needham, *Ireland’s first real world cup*.

⁶¹ Tadhg Carey, ‘Ireland’s footballers’ pp 22-5.

However, a Dublin newspaper recorded that a different anthem was used before the 1924 games:

the air selected was “Let Erin Remember”, and the flag used the tricolour ... we had no choice in the selection of our anthem or of our playing colours, which were blue.⁶²

Subsequently, in March 1926, the FAIFS contested its first official international when the Irish Free State lost 3-0 to Italy in Turin.⁶³ The acrimony between the Irish associations contrasted sharply with the ‘bond of friendship’ said to have existed between the FAIFS and the Italian FA following a second international at Lansdowne Road, Dublin in April 1927.⁶⁴

The compromise reached in 1923 would not prove strong enough to ensure future co-operation between the Irish governing bodies as, crucially, the matter of which could lay claim to fielding the international team called ‘Ireland’ remained unresolved. The finely-balanced legitimisation of both associations in 1923 – while both maintained their claim to represent ‘Ireland’ at international level – would underpin a cold war, at least in the realm of senior international football, an arena in which both associations would effectively ignore the existence of the other for half a century. An ambiguous compromise was perhaps the best that could be reached in the mid-1920s.

The geo-politics of the mid-1920s were in some ways advantageous to the claims of the FAIFS within FIFA. Despite the objections of Britain, and reflecting a new order grounded in ideas of self-determination,⁶⁵ FIFA accepted as members a swathe of central and eastern European states.⁶⁶ These included the rumps of the Empires that had been Britain’s enemies during the war.⁶⁷ As noted earlier, these nations were sympathetic to the claims of the FAIFS and they were not alone. The secretary of the United States FA, Thomas

⁶² *Irish Independent*, 9 June 1924.

⁶³ Tynan, ‘Association football and Irish society’, ‘Appendix I’; For a press report on the game, see *Cork Examiner*, 22 Mar. 1926.

⁶⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 25 Apr. 1927.

⁶⁵ Derek Heater, *National self-determination: Woodrow Wilson and his legacy* (New York, 1994), pp 53-77.

⁶⁶ Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

⁶⁷ Edmond Taylor, *The fall of the dynasties: The collapse of the old order: 1905-1922* (New York, 1995).

W. Cahill, had written to the FAI in April 1922, offering the following qualified support:

Permit me to present my personal congratulations to you and your associates in so promptly striking out for the independent recognition with the Irish Free State in soccer and I can assure you that you will have my personal support.⁶⁸

Notwithstanding the International Board position that the IFA could continue to use the name Ireland in their international competition, we can state with confidence that FIFA's position from 1927 was that the IFA should play under the name of Northern Ireland, their effective jurisdiction since 1921. We can make this claim on account of the following motion that was put to a vote and unanimously adopted at the 1927 FIFA annual congress:

Statutes:

Art. 1. Proposal from the Football Association of the Irish Free State to insert after the words "Irish Football Association" and before the word Ireland the word "Northern". Irish Free State (Messrs MURPHY and BENNAN[sic.]) explained the proposal, based on its position.

A letter was read from the Irish Football Association protesting against the proposal.

England (PICKFORD) wishing originally to have the matter deferred one year, considered the demand quite fair.

The proposal was adopted unanimously.⁶⁹

Undeterred by a ruling that had little power to affect the inter-relations of football within the United Kingdom, in October 1927 the IFA, represented by 'Ireland', defeated England by two goals to nil at Windsor Park in the 1927/8 British Home Championship.⁷⁰ Soon after, the United Kingdom's FAs resigned from FIFA once again, on this occasion due to the permitting of 'lost' [or broken] time payments for football players at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games.⁷¹ With the IFA outside FIFA, and the FAIFS outside the International Board, tactfully ignoring rival claims was for a time possible.

⁶⁸ Letter from United States Football Association to FAI, 24 Apr. 1922. Application for membership of FIFA, Feb. 1922- Dec. 1932 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/1).

⁶⁹ Minutes of FIFA annual congress, 1927 (FIFA Documentation Centre, FIFA Congress Minutes, Helsingfors (FIN) 1927).

⁷⁰ *Dundee Courier*, 24 Oct. 1927.

⁷¹ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 22 Feb. 1928.

In 1932, the FAIFS did ask to meet the IFA in conference to discuss the ‘possible settlement of the international question’.⁷² Several key issues were agreed after ten years of disagreement. These issues included an equal share in the formation of the committee to select international teams, to play matches alternatively north and south, and an equal share in all profits generated from those matches. Indeed, the Belfast press had prematurely carried the headline ‘Dispute settled ... Free State and IFA come to terms’.⁷³ However, the late additional demand by the FAIFS for representation on the International Board, saw the talks collapse without any agreement,⁷⁴ with the IFA later reflecting in their annual report that ‘this was an impossible request’.⁷⁵ In Moore’s view, this would be ‘the closest they [IFA and FAI] would ever come to union again’,⁷⁶ although the matters agreed as described above were those necessary to field a single international team called Ireland, rather than those that would necessarily reunite the two governing bodies.

Despite their earlier criticisms of the IFA, it is clear that FAIFS intransigence in attaching such importance to the issue of representation on the International Board, scuppered a proposed settlement that would have at least witnessed the fielding of a single international team. Eleven years of direct confrontation between the IFA and FAI / FAIFS since 1921 had exhausted all domestic and international avenues towards resolving their dispute by 1932. Thereafter, a period of inertia overtook the IFA and FAI, at least in the matter of international representation, and this remained the situation till the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 when international football was suspended. In that time, however, the development of a school football administration in both parts of Ireland, which had begun in 1925 and had at least been partially concluded by 1937, did contain similar competing claims to represent ‘Ireland’, and it is to that example we now turn our attention.

⁷² *Irish Press*, 27 Jan. 1932.

⁷³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 Mar. 1932.

⁷⁴ IFA annual report 1932, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/2/1).

⁷⁵ Irish Football Association annual report and statement of accounts, 1932, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/2/1).

⁷⁶ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 202.

The administration of schools' football in Ireland, 1925-50

Garnham has written that, following the establishment of the IFA in Belfast in late 1880, 'the potential importance of involving schoolboys in the game was recognised'. In 1884 a Schools Cup competition was organised between four Belfast schools and one from Monaghan. That venture did not last but as early as 1888 the trophy had 'been reconstituted as the IFA junior cup'.⁷⁷ The existing histories of football in Ireland have paid but scant attention to this level of the game.⁷⁸ However, a deeper exploration of the available archival and newspaper records pertaining to this level of the game reveals that, during the post-partition era, its administrative development offers an intriguing perspective upon the wider animosity between the IFA and FAIFS. Interestingly, the development of schoolboy football's structures did, on occasion, mirror the administration of international football, replicating the evident divide. That acknowledged, schoolboy football also served as an example as to how fruitful interaction could be fostered.

Given that Belfast was the home of schoolboy football in 1884, it is perhaps fitting that the first administrative body concerned with schools' football anywhere on the island of Ireland was the 'North of Ireland Schools Football Association' (NISFA). Newspaper sources indicate this body existed between 1925 and 1930.⁷⁹ Its second annual meeting, held in June 1927, was chaired by Thomas Topping, principal of St Barnabas' School in Belfast. On the occasion of his death in 1937, the Belfast press would pay tribute to Topping as 'one of those instrumental in forming schools football competitions',⁸⁰ whilst a council meeting of the IFA paid tribute to a man to 'whose guidance the great success of schools football owed so much'.⁸¹

The honorary secretary of the NISFA during the 1920s, W.H. McClatchey, was a figure central to the manner in which the wider football split was presented to the public, in his guise as 'Ralph the Rover', a firebrand

⁷⁷ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 210.

⁷⁹ Record of this association found in *Belfast News-Letter*, 28 June 1929, 14 Mar. 1930.

⁸⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 Mar. 1937.

⁸¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 Mar. 1937.

football columnist in the newspaper *Ireland's Saturday Night*.⁸² His annual report on the 1926-7 season reveals that a first NISFA schoolboys international was played at Cliftonville in May 1927, resulting in a victory for Scotland over 'Ireland', by five goals to nil:⁸³

The Scottish Association had guaranteed a return match in Scotland next season, and an application had been made for admission to the international board ... Mr C. Watson (hon. treasurer) submitted his financial statement, which showed a balance in hand of £46 11s.⁸⁴

In that same year, the NISFA received an approach by 'Mr Markey, Dublin' for particulars as to the proposed affiliation of twenty-four Dublin schools in 1927,⁸⁵ however, it is clear that the terms of the Liverpool Agreement constrained the NISFA. Even if they had wished to admit twenty-four Dublin schools, they resolved to 'inform Mr Markey that the association did not intend to extend their operations outside of Northern Ireland for the present'.⁸⁶

Interestingly, it appears that the NISFA's regional development was one that extended outwards from a Belfast heartland into provincial areas of Northern Ireland. Later, chapter four will detail how club football in Northern Ireland charted a similar course between 1922 and 1937. From the provincial press we learn that two NISFA members had been appointed to form a local schools' league in Portadown, County Armagh, in November 1927,⁸⁷ and in 1929 'country schools [were] specially invited to apply for particulars and assistance to form district leagues' under the auspices of the NISFA.⁸⁸

In September 1931 a new 'Irish Schools Football Association' (ISFA) was established. All thirty-three of the affiliated schools for the 1931/2 season were located in Belfast.⁸⁹ The change of name did not presage a change of jurisdiction. The ISFA's effective jurisdiction then was not even the whole of Northern Ireland, never mind the island as a whole. The change in name

⁸² Malcolm Brodie, *100 years of Irish football* (Belfast, 1980), p. 20.

⁸³ *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 28 May 1927.

⁸⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 24 June 1927.

⁸⁵ *Northern Whig*, 2 Sept. 1927.

⁸⁶ *Northern Whig*, 13 Sept. 1927.

⁸⁷ *Portadown News*, 26 Nov. 1927.

⁸⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 Sept. 1929.

⁸⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 Sept. 1931.

instead mirrored the attempts of the IFA to continue to lay claim to the legitimate deployment of the terms ‘Irish’ and ‘Ireland’, despite the more constrained nature of its effective jurisdiction.

In October 1931, the ISFA adopted a new constitution ‘on the same lines as that of the schools’ associations across the channel and ensures that schools in the county districts shall have representation on the council’.⁹⁰ The renamed schools’ association does not appear to have had any significant characteristics that set it apart from its immediate forerunner, the NISFA. The meetings of both bodies, the old and the new, were held at the IFA’s offices in Wellington Place, Belfast, and both sought to operate within the framework of the International Board.

First inaugurated in 1904,⁹¹ the English Schools Football Association (ESFA) had asserted at its 1905 AGM that its twin aims were ‘to help the poorer brethren of the N.U.T.’ (National Union of Teachers), and to ‘assist in the development of their boys physically, mentally and morally’.⁹² Upon establishment, the ISFA comprised five regional divisions throughout Northern Ireland – Belfast, Coleraine, East Antrim, Mid Ulster and Lisburn – and outlined the following aims:

1. The mental, moral and physical development and improvement of school pupils through the medium of association football.
2. To help such charities and other charitable purposes as the Association may decide.
3. To promote and encourage the development of Schools’ Football at various levels both nationally and internationally.⁹³

That the ISFA’s first aim was lifted straight from the ESFA’s founding manifesto of a quarter-century earlier, reflected the ongoing close alignment of association football in Northern Ireland to the other football associations of the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, the fact that the ISFA operated under the IFA’s umbrella was not sufficient to gain it automatic admission to the Schools

⁹⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 Oct. 1931.

⁹¹ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 26 Sept. 1905.

⁹² *Birmingham Mail*, 17 June 1905; *North Wales Weekly News*, 23 June 1905.

⁹³ Northern Ireland Schools Football Association, <https://nisfa.co.uk/oldsite/index.php/about-us/about-us> [accessed 14 Apr. 2021].

International Football Board (SIFB) in 1932. According to the *Northern Whig* in June of that year,

Their [ISFA] Council had again applied during the season for admission to the Schools' International Football Board. Mr. T.P. Thomas, the hon. secretary of the Board and Chairman of the English Schools Football Association, had met their officers and Council to discuss the application informally ... They [ISFA] hoped in a very short time they would be admitted, the only point stressed by Mr Thomas being that of the spreading of the game to other districts.⁹⁴

The local press reported in late 1932 that the ISFA was 'catering to the rising generation by establishing branches throughout Ulster, which will in good time bring forth fruit, but in the meantime we must provide for and keep the game going'.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, a further application for admission to the SIFB in early 1933 was 'refused owing to all the [ISFA] officers not being teachers'.⁹⁶ The ISFA was finally admitted to the SIFB in October 1933, with Messrs. C.A. Abraham, R. Kirkpatrick and M. McDonnell appointed as delegates to that board.⁹⁷ Abraham would later be elected SIFB chairman in 1937.⁹⁸ Newspaper sources indicate that Abraham was the principal of Belvoir Hall National School, Belfast,⁹⁹ although the occupation of the other two delegates is unknown.

Significantly, 'the first taste of representative football' in the form of a fixture between two competing claims to the name Ireland occurred in June 1937.¹⁰⁰ On that occasion, the Irish Free State Schoolboys took on the Northern Ireland Schoolboys,¹⁰¹ the latter under the auspices of the ISFA, in a game at Shelbourne Park, Dublin, that ended in a draw (2-2).¹⁰² Notably, when describing what they held to be an 'Inter-City' (Belfast vs Dublin) schoolboys' fixture, rather than an international, the *Irish Press* also revealed the lack of a formal administration for schools football in the south at that time:

⁹⁴ *Northern Whig*, 29 June 1932.

⁹⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 Oct. 1932.

⁹⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 Jan. 1933.

⁹⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 Oct. 1933.

⁹⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 Nov. 1937.

⁹⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Nov. 1921.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Independent*, 14 June 1937.

¹⁰¹ *Evening Herald*, 9 June 1937.

¹⁰² *Irish Press*, 14 June 1937.

It was emphasised during the discussion that all arrangements for the match were in the hands of a schools' committee and that the Free State Football Association had no official connection with it. The national flag was always flown at international matches played under the auspices of that body.¹⁰³

The lack of a 'national' body charged with schoolboy football in the south may have been an advantage on this occasion. As we shall see later, informal or 'unofficial' contacts were more common, perhaps because they facilitated the side-stepping of questions of legitimacy and jurisdiction raised by more formal contacts. 'Following on from the recent match between the youthful talent of the Free State the North of Ireland', schoolboys football in the Irish Free State also gained informal recognition from football in Britain during 1937, when it was reported that St Sylvester's, champions of the Liverpool Catholic Schoolboys League, were to travel to Dublin to take on Munster Victoria, champions of the Leinster Schoolboys League, in what was described as 'a further fillip to the potentialities of football in the schools'.¹⁰⁴

It was not until the FAI AGM of 1949 that a recognisable, separate administrative body concerned with this level of the game in the Republic of Ireland emerged. It was called the 'Schoolboys Football Association of Ireland' (SFAI).¹⁰⁵ Under its auspices a first 'official' schoolboy international fixture, 'Ireland vs England', took place at Dalymount Park, Dublin, in May 1950,¹⁰⁶ England winning by three goals to two.¹⁰⁷ A month later, a schoolboy contest between the IFA's Ireland and the FAI's Ireland took place at Celtic Park, Belfast,¹⁰⁸ which resulted in a victory for the south by seven goals to one.¹⁰⁹ Progress on the administration of schoolboys football in Ireland had, at least, progressed to a point where, by 1950, an official representative team for both associations were contesting fixtures regularly. From 1946, the senior international dispute would, belatedly, see some movement towards resolving the issues that had been in stasis since 1932, and to that issue we now return.

¹⁰³ *Irish Press*, 16 June 1937.

¹⁰⁴ *Evening Herald*, 10 July 1937.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the FAI AGM, 14 June 1949, Junior committee minutes, Jan. 1949- Mar. 1954 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/31).

¹⁰⁶ *Evening Herald*, 27 May 1950.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Independent*, 30 May 1950.

¹⁰⁸ *Northern Whig*, 1 June 1950.

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Independent*, 12 June 1950.

1946-58

In the years after the Second World War the relationship of British football to FIFA changed quite dramatically. According to Moore, English FA secretary Stanley Rous ‘believed that the loss of prestige Britain had suffered through its collapsing empire could be softened by a greater role in world football’. In order to secure the re-entry of the British FAs into FIFA and thus ensure their eligibility to compete in a FIFA World Cup for the first time in 1950,¹¹⁰ Rous and the English FA were prepared to appease FIFA, signalling that both of the Irish associations should agree to ‘only choose players born in their own territories’.¹¹¹ The Belfast press quoted Rous as having told the FAI in December 1946 ‘that this season will see an end of all [selection] anomalies’.¹¹² Consequently, although perhaps inadvertently on Rous’s part, 1946 opens the second phase of the cold war between the IFA and FAI.

The FAI were prepared to move in that direction by not selecting players from Northern Ireland, especially if their reward was the recognition, prestige and income to be derived from an international match with England. Consequently, the side they selected to represent their Ireland in its first ever international against England at Dalymount Park, Dublin, in September 1946, ‘was confined to those born within the twenty-six counties’, in a game that England won by one goal to nil.¹¹³ The IFA was less inclined to compromise. Only two days earlier, the IFA’s Ireland included two players born in the south, Johnny Carey and Tom Aherne, in a side that lost to England by seven goals to two at Windsor Park.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the IFA would persist in this approach during the second half of the 1940s. Brodie described how two Everton club-mates of the post-war years, Dublin natives Tommy Eglington and Peter Farrell, ‘had [International] careers that ran parallel both for Northern Ireland and the Republic’. In essence, this meant that both played for two Irelands at the same time: ‘Eglington won six Northern Ireland caps and twenty-four for the

¹¹⁰ Tony Matthews, *England in the world cup 1950-2014* (Stroud, 2014), p. 1.

¹¹¹ Moore, *Irish soccer split.*, p. 208.

¹¹² *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 Dec. 1946.

¹¹³ *Cork Examiner*, 1 Oct. 1946.

¹¹⁴ *Evening Echo*, 30 Sept. 1946; Brodie, *100 years*, p. 155.

Republic while Farrell's figures were seven and twenty-eight respectively'.¹¹⁵ Between the end of the Second World War and the 1950 World Cup, the best result achieved by the IFA's Ireland versus England in the British Home Championship was a 2-2 draw at Goodison Park, Liverpool, in November 1947.¹¹⁶

By contrast, in 1950 the FAI appeared increasingly confident. In September 1949 their Ireland had inflicted a historic first defeat for England against a country outside of the home nations, winning by two goals to one at Goodison Park.¹¹⁷ This may have been a factor when, in January 1950, the FAI made an approach to the IFA 'to re-open negotiations on the international position on the basis of the 1932 conference'.¹¹⁸ Perhaps more importantly they hoped that the adoption of a new name by the southern state, combined with FIFA's growing prestige, had altered the calculus for the IFA.

This request, however, was refused by the IFA as, in their view, 'no new facts or suggestions have been presented'.¹¹⁹ Despite that, in March 1950, the *Irish Independent* reported that 'there is a big push on to end the present farcical situation of the two Irelands in soccer'.¹²⁰ There was no progress during 1950, but the decade would see important developments that, at least temporarily, heightened tensions. Moore has previously written that, during the 1950s, 'the gulf between the two associations widened...[during]... a decade in which sports and politics would intertwine in soccer and many other sports'.¹²¹

It is Richard Holt's contention that this 'ludicrous wrangle' took a decisive turn when in 1954 'the name Northern Ireland was imposed on the Six Counties by FIFA'¹²² and there is a good deal of truth in that. In June of that year, the FIFA Executive Committee accepted the following protest made by the FAI:

¹¹⁵ Brodie, *100 years*, p. 56.

¹¹⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 5 Nov. 1947.

¹¹⁷ *Irish Press*, 22 Sept. 1949.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of the FAI international affairs committee 11 Jan. 1950, Minute book of the international affairs committee, Mar. 1936- Nov. 1956 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/39).

¹¹⁹ Minutes of IFA Emergency Committee, 24 Jan. 1950, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1943-83 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/2).

¹²⁰ *Irish Independent*, 21 Mar. 1950.

¹²¹ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 210.

¹²² Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 244.

The "Football Association of Ireland" lodges a protest before the Executive Committee regarding the title to be given to the inter-nations game if one of the opponents is "The Football Association of Ireland" or "The Irish Football Association". It also refers to the provisions of art. 3, al. I of the FIFA Regulations ... In short, the Executive Committee is asked to decide what should be the denomination of the two "Irelands", that is to say for one "Republic of Ireland" and for the other Northern Ireland.¹²³

That the FAI embraced the name Republic of Ireland was in fact a protest directed, out of embarrassment perhaps, at the global governing body who had mistakenly referred to them as Éire during the 1953 FIFA congress, rather than any symbolic gesture arising directly from the declaration of that country on 18 April 1949. Whilst the FAI had effectively renounced their own claim to the name Ireland, the IFA secretary William Drennan rejected the decision of the FIFA executive committee:

[The IFA] have requested me to inform you that this matter is one affecting the four British Associations and in this respect would refer you to the International Board Agreement dated 14th June, 1924: -

"The Articles of the International Federation shall not affect the inter-relations of the Football Associations of the United Kingdom." ¹²⁴

To no one's surprise, their three colleagues on the International Board echoed that position, albeit crucially the British FA's introduced more flexibility than the IFA might have been willing to concede. For example, the Scottish Football Association (SFA)'s response to FIFA stated that the IFA's use of Ireland in British Home Championship fixtures was 'an age-long practice which has been so well established in the four countries'.¹²⁵ Similarly, for the Welsh Football Association of Wales (FAW), 'the designation of The Irish F.A. when playing International Matches with England, Scotland and Wales' was a domestic matter and thus 'outside the jurisdiction [of FIFA]'.¹²⁶

¹²³ Minutes of FIFA executive committee, 12 June 1954 (FIFA Documentation Centre, Meeting Minutes Executive Committee, ExCo IV-3).

¹²⁴ Irish Football Association to FIFA, 27 Oct. 1954 (FIFA Documentation Centre, Meeting Minutes Executive Committee, ExCo IV-3).

¹²⁵ Scottish Football Association to FIFA, 31 Jan. 1955 (FIFA Documentation Centre, Meeting Minutes Executive Committee, ExCo IV-3).

¹²⁶ Football Association of Wales to FIFA, 31 Jan. 1955 (FIFA Documentation Centre, Meeting Minutes Executive Committee, ExCo IV-3).

On behalf of the English FA, Rous did note that the FAI were complying with FIFA's regulations regarding selection, those that he had advocated in 1946:

For the 20 years that I have been Secretary of the Football Association and for years prior to that, The Football Association officials have tried to help in the controversy between Northern and Southern Ireland but without avail. I am glad to know that the FA of Ireland are complying with Article 3 of the Regulations of FIFA but I am afraid that in the case of matches between Northern Ireland and the three other British Associations, the Irish FA rely on the International Board Agreement dated 14th June, 1924 to support their claims in matter affecting inter-relations of the Football Associations of the United Kingdom.¹²⁷

As such, we might consider this episode to have exposed at least some nuance in the British FAs' support of the IFA – they were prepared to defend the IFA's use of Ireland in the Home Championship but not beyond. Perhaps sensing an opportunity, or just towing the party line, the Dublin press was already reporting on Scotland defeating Northern Ireland in 1956.¹²⁸ More surprisingly, the Belfast press, for so long a loyal outlet for the IFA's views on official football, appeared to have embraced the reality of the developing situation before the IFA. When reporting on the qualifying campaign for the World Cup in 1958, Belfast newspapers wrote of Northern Ireland vs Romania in October 1957¹²⁹ and Northern Ireland vs Italy in December 1957.¹³⁰

Their qualification for that tournament, held in Sweden,¹³¹ provided the moment when FIFA could meaningfully confirm what the qualification matches had suggested. The farce of two Irelands in FIFA competitions was over. During a commendable run to the quarter final of the World Cup, the Dublin press accurately recorded that 'they [the IFA] were forced to call themselves Northern Ireland as it was the only name FIFA, the international organisation, would recognise them by'.¹³² Whilst FIFA considered the matter closed, and no further correspondence on the matter is to be found in their

¹²⁷ The Football Association to FIFA, 20 Jan. 1955 (FIFA Documentation Centre, Meeting Minutes Executive Committee, ExCo IV-3).

¹²⁸ *Irish Times*, 8 Nov. 1956.

¹²⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 Oct. 1957.

¹³⁰ *Northern Whig*, 30 Nov. 1957.

¹³¹ Subject of, Evan Marshall, *Spirit of '58: The incredible untold story of Northern Ireland's greatest football team* (Belfast, 2016).

¹³² *Evening Herald*, 9 Oct. 1958.

archives after the mid-1950s, it would require another twenty-three years for the matter to fizzle out.

1960-78

It is difficult to establish when exactly it became the norm to refer to the FAI's international team as the Republic of Ireland, rather than simply Ireland. If the FAI's motion to FIFA in 1954 had indicated its willingness to do so, then press or popular practice seems to have been slower. However, the occasion of a friendly international between the FAI's international team and Chile at Dalymount Park in March 1960, witnessed the southern press at national, regional and local levels unanimously refer to the 'Republic of Ireland' as having contested the fixture.¹³³

As a result of their success in qualifying for the World Cup in 1958, the IFA entered the 1960s with a dual-designation. The IFA fielded as Northern Ireland in FIFA competition. In parallel, it fielded as Ireland in the British Home Championship. The IFA's partners in the International Board had helped to shepherd it toward this dual-designation by accepting the FIFA ruling while maintaining the IFA's right to choose the name Ireland in International Board competitions. They had done this because FIFA's influence had grown to a point, post-war, where the British FAs had determined upon readmission to that body in order to compete in their World Cup competition, which had easily surpassed the Home Championship in prestige.

The IFA's official correspondence during the 1960s reflected, to some extent, a recognition of that reality emerging from its success in 1958. Their archives reveal invitations sent by the association to Viscount Brookeborough, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, to the following games: Northern Ireland v. Poland in November 1962; Northern Ireland v. Spain in October 1963; and Northern Ireland v. Uruguay in April 1964.¹³⁴ The use of Ireland

¹³³ *Irish Independent*, 29 Mar. 1960; *Evening Herald*, 28 Mar. 1960; *Cork Examiner*, 28 Mar. 1960; *Drogheda Independent*, 5 Mar. 1960.

¹³⁴ Letter from Irish Football Association to The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland; 24 Nov. 1962, 25 Oct. 1963, & 24 Apr. 1964, 'Sport: Irish Football Association Clubs', 1947-71 (PRONI, Government of Northern Ireland, Department of the Prime Minister, PM/5/97/4).

within IFA correspondence did continue in relation to fixtures in the Home Championship. These included an invitation to Brookeborough to attend the game versus England at Windsor Park in October 1962.¹³⁵ Journalist Malcolm Brodie, later the author of the IFA's centenary history but at that time a journalist working for *Ireland's Saturday Night*, reported that 'Ireland did not deserve to be defeated by this margin (3-1) at Windsor Park, Belfast'.¹³⁶

Despite this, a reference to Ireland in the annual report of 1973 already smacked of nostalgia as, by then, British newspapers had begun to refer to Northern Ireland competing in British Home Championship fixtures. For example, this was the case when the IFA's team fielded against Scotland at Hampden Park, Glasgow, in May 1972.¹³⁷ And yet, despite the IFA themselves referring to Northern Ireland in the summary of the 1974 British Home Championship which appeared in its annual report,¹³⁸ the match programmes from British Home Championship fixtures indicate that the SFA promoted 'Scotland v. Ireland' at Hampden Park as late as in May 1978. Then, marking a shift, the same association promoted 'Scotland v. Northern Ireland' at Hampden Park in May 1979.¹³⁹ Arguably, 1978 was a turning-point, as it saw a first international fixture between the IFA and FAI's teams, then under their agreed names of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. They played out a goalless draw in a European Championship qualifier at Lansdowne Road, Dublin, in September 1978.¹⁴⁰

The long road to the resolution of this dispute over names had begun in the context of the post-war decline of British football, as represented by the International Board, and the growing influence of FIFA, manifested in the enhanced prestige of the World Cup. It was in this context that the IFA first conceded to the use of the name Northern Ireland. During the same period, the FAI shifted to naming its side the Republic of Ireland. The years from 1955 to

¹³⁵ Letter from Irish Football Association to Viscount Brookeborough, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, 17 Sept. 1962, Sport: Irish Football Association Clubs, 1947-71 (PRONI, Government of Northern Ireland, Department of the Prime Minister, PM/5/97/4).

¹³⁶ *Ireland's Saturday Night*, 20 Oct. 1962.

¹³⁷ *Reading Evening Post*, 19 May 1972.

¹³⁸ IFA annual report 1915, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/2/1).

¹³⁹ IFA Council Minute Book, 1977-85 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/1/12).

¹⁴⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 21 Sept. 1978.

1978 provided a space in which the Irish associations adapted to the reality of their necessary co-existence. By 1978 the two associations had effectively agreed that there would be no Ireland in international football. Despite that, in the course of Malcolm Brodie's centenary history of the IFA published in 1980, there remained evidence of the old battle lines:

The position today is that the Irish Football Association remains the National Association, and indeed the only Association entitled to use the title Ireland. Its territory may be reduced in size but in every other respect it remains unaltered. It carries the confidence of the other British Associations and takes its place in the British International Championship as Ireland and is the only body competent to do so.¹⁴¹

2.3: Collaboration: Unofficial football in Ireland, 1914-55.

At an official level – most importantly in those competitions governed by the articles of association of the International Board, FIFA, the IFA or the FAI – the Irish football dispute appears to have been a bleak story of conflict during the cold war, described above. However, this section will build on the hints of football collaboration that are contained in the work of Curran, Rouse and Moore. First, this section presents an analysis of a series of unofficial all-Ireland championship fixtures that occurred between 1925 and 1955. These fixtures were largely driven by the senior clubs and the sporting press of Ireland. Second, this section details how, during the crisis that was the Second World War, the warring associations sanctioned official cross-border collaboration between their urban senior clubs, perhaps encouraged by the unofficial collaboration demonstrated by their affiliated clubs. Third, and finally, this section demonstrates that the Collingwood Cup – an annual football competition between Ireland's universities that survived two world wars, partition, the split and the Troubles – successfully provided a space, albeit a narrow one, for cross-border collaboration.

¹⁴¹ Brodie, *100 years*, p. 17.

The Unofficial Championship of Ireland, 1925-55

When Belfast Celtic defeated Shamrock Rovers by four goals to one in an ‘end of season soccer challenge’ at Shelbourne Park, Dublin, on 4 May 1940, both were participating in the kind of cross-border football activity that must complicate a story of mutual non-recognition and isolationism.¹⁴² Indeed, in the build up to that game, a report in Dublin’s *Evening Herald* contained the significant claim that the clubs’ previous meeting amounted to ‘the first unofficial championship of Ireland 15 years ago or so’.¹⁴³ As that report hints, the match of 1940 was not the first such game. Indeed, Belfast Celtic and Shamrock Rovers were not the only clubs involved in such ‘unofficial championship’ matches. A deeper examination of the newspaper archives has revealed the details of a series of ‘championship’ fixtures (nine in total) between 1925 and 1955 that either had similar billing or featured the respective league champions, north and south (see appendix 2).¹⁴⁴ These games featured four different senior clubs from each side of the border, teams with origins on both sides of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland and from Cork as well as Dublin in the south.

Contrary to the claim made in the *Evening Herald* report of 1940, the first fixture, in May 1925, did not involve Belfast Celtic but the Irish League champions Glentoran.¹⁴⁵ According to Manchester’s *Athletic News*, Glentoran provided the opposition for the ‘Free State club’ – League of Ireland champions Shamrock Rovers – ‘for what was considered the championship of Ireland’. Rovers won by two goals to nil at Glentoran’s home ground, the Oval in Belfast.¹⁴⁶ Public interest in the game would appear to have been considerable, given that the manager of the Northern Counties Committee of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, James Pepper, advertised cheap

¹⁴² *Northern Whig*, 6 May 1940.

¹⁴³ *Evening Herald*, 1 May 1940.

¹⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1926; *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 May 1929; *Evening Herald*, 14 Apr. 1930; *Belfast News-Letter*, 25 Apr. 1932; *Evening Herald*, 29 Apr. 1939; *Cork Examiner*, 6 May 1940; *Irish Press*, 5 May 1941; *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 May 1955.

¹⁴⁵ The *Evening Herald* later corrected this error when recalling the ‘unofficial championship of Ireland’; 17 Nov. 1937 & 30 Jan. 1957.

¹⁴⁶ *Athletic News*, 11 May 1925.

excursion tickets to the game in Belfast from towns in counties Antrim and Londonderry, such as Larne, Ballymena and Coleraine.¹⁴⁷

An immediate repeat seemed unlikely, given that in September 1925, a conference between representatives of the football associations of the United Kingdom held in Liverpool, ‘recommended to their respective associations that during their close season their clubs must not play matches in the Irish Free State’.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, when the FAIFS wrote to the Irish Football League to request an inter-league match to be held in Dublin in March or April 1926, ‘the application was refused, the voting being 12 to 5 agst.’¹⁴⁹ Indeed, it is possible that pressure from Britain hardened on occasion the stance of the IFA and of football in Northern Ireland towards co-operation with the south. Matthew Taylor has noted how the poaching of English players by Irish League clubs beginning in 1915, and thus under IFA jurisdiction, meant that ‘the [English] Football League remained hostile to League of Ireland clubs, refusing to recognise player registrations or even to organise representative fixtures until after the Second World War’.¹⁵⁰ Fortunately, the co-operation between Irish clubs, north and south, evaded such punitive sanctions. Billed as a joint benefit match for Boxer Foley and Paddy Kavanagh,¹⁵¹ Belfast Celtic’s victory over Shelbourne by four goals to two at Shelbourne Park, Dublin, in April 1926, can be considered to have once again been a ‘championship’ match given that they were the northern and southern league champions respectively.¹⁵²

After a hiatus of a number of years, a series of games followed in the very late 1920s and early 1930s. The next in the series occurred between the same two teams met at the same venue in May 1929, this time resulting in a victory for Shelbourne by two goals to nil. It was ‘the challenge game for the unofficial league championship of Ireland,’ according to the *Belfast Newsletter*.¹⁵³ In 1930, the championship match occurred when Irish League

¹⁴⁷ *Northern Whig*, 7 May 1925.

¹⁴⁸ *Dundee Courier*, 17 Sept. 1925; Minutes of the IFA Council, 28 Sept. 1925, IFA Council Minute Book, 1909-28 (PRONI, IFA papers D4196/2/1/3).

¹⁴⁹ *Evening Herald*, 15 Oct. 1925.

¹⁵⁰ Matthew Taylor, *The Leaguers: The making of professional football in England, 1900-1939* (Liverpool, 2005), pp 206-7.

¹⁵¹ *Evening Herald*, 23 Apr. 1926.

¹⁵² *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1926.

¹⁵³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 May 1929.

champions Linfield and League of Ireland champions Bohemians played out a draw (2-2) at Dalymount Park, Dublin. On this occasion the Belfast press described the match as being for the ‘League championship of Ireland’.¹⁵⁴ Notably, that year the Dublin press described ‘fraternising between north and south’ as having been ‘unusually marked’. This included Shamrock Rovers embarkation on a ‘six county trip’ in May to play ‘exhibition games’ with first Glentoran and then Derry City on consecutive days. The *Evening Herald* wrote of Rovers that ‘they expect to win both’.¹⁵⁵ They failed. Glentoran triumphed by two goals to one,¹⁵⁶ although on the following day Rovers defeated Derry by three goals to one.¹⁵⁷

The tone of the Belfast press coverage of the 1932 championship fixture was striking. The fixture was billed as being for the benefit of Harold McCaw, an injured Linfield player who acted as a linesman for the game. The press contrasted the perceived success of north-south collaboration within club football, with the acrimony within the higher echelons of football administration. For the correspondent of the *Northern Whig*,

Whatever trouble there is in official circles in northern and southern Ireland – and it seems to be insurmountable – it was made obvious last evening that there is no bad blood between individual teams in the two areas in which the soccer camp is divided when Shamrock Rovers, the Free State League champions, turned out at Windsor Park to play Linfield, the Irish League champions.¹⁵⁸

Nevertheless, it appears the next championship fixture did not occur until April 1939. After a seven-year gap Shamrock Rovers, now ‘the Eire league champions’,¹⁵⁹ defeated Irish League champions Belfast Celtic by two goals to one at Dalymount Park. According to one Belfast newspaper, the fixture was ‘regarded as a sort of test as to which would be All-Ireland champions [and] the honour goes to the Dublin club’.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ *Northern Whig*, 15 Apr. 1930.

¹⁵⁵ *Evening Herald*, 16 May 1930.

¹⁵⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 May 1930.

¹⁵⁷ *Derry Journal*, 19 May 1930.

¹⁵⁸ *Northern Whig*, 26 Apr. 1932.

¹⁵⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 May 1939.

¹⁶⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 May 1939.

In seven of the nine championship fixtures described in the table above, the league champions of each association competed in the championship game. The first of two exceptions occurred in May 1940, when the ‘clash of champions’¹⁶¹ witnessed Irish League champions Belfast Celtic defeat FAI cup winners Shamrock Rovers by four goals to one at Shelbourne Park.¹⁶²

Cork United, having won the League of Ireland championship for the first time in 1941,¹⁶³ met Belfast Celtic at Dalymount Park in May 1941, resulting in a victory for the northern side by one goal to nil.¹⁶⁴ Celtic qualified as IFA challenge cup winners, the Irish League having been suspended in August 1940,¹⁶⁵ and the championship match was billed as being ‘in aid of the Irish Red Cross’.¹⁶⁶ Underlining the reality that these fixtures were organised beyond the remit of the associations was the fact that it took place on a Sunday. Indeed, it appears that the IFA Senior Protests and Appeals Committee was forced to suspend Celtic when learning of their exploits in Dublin. A meeting of that body in July 1941 reported that:

The association is happy at this, the earliest possible moment, to remove the [automatically incurred] suspension, but this cannot be regarded as a precedent for any subsequent breach of the article [that which prohibited Sunday play].¹⁶⁷

The ninth and final occasion of a north-south championship match was when, after a fourteen-year hiatus, Irish League champions Glenavon took on League of Ireland champions Shamrock Rovers at Dalymount Park in May 1955. Once again billed by one southern national newspaper as being for the ‘unofficial championship of Ireland’,¹⁶⁸ the match was less competitive than any of its predecessors, resulting in a victory for Rovers by five goals to one.¹⁶⁹

Presenting these fixtures as benefit matches, as was the case in 1926, 1932 and 1941, may have been a strategy to mitigate concern, or potential interference, from the governing bodies. These bodies may have been more

¹⁶¹ *Evening Herald*, 3 May 1940.

¹⁶² *Irish Press*, 6 May 1940.

¹⁶³ *Irish Independent*, 6 May 1941.

¹⁶⁴ *Irish Press*, 5 May 1941.

¹⁶⁵ *Ireland's Saturday Night*, 10 Aug. 1940.

¹⁶⁶ *Irish Independent*, 3 May 1941.

¹⁶⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 July 1941.

¹⁶⁸ *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1955.

¹⁶⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 May 1955.

likely to agree to a benefit fixture than one explicitly billed a proxy all-Ireland decider between representatives of the rival territories. The use of ‘Unofficial Championship of Ireland’ by the press probably reflected an impulse to heighten the interest of the football public and may even have reflected what that readership really felt about such benefit fixtures. Nonetheless, despite an uncertain point of origin, the staging of cross-border championship fixtures in Irish association football – even unofficial – is significant on a number of levels.

The bitter legacy of non-co-operation that followed the 1921 split has understandably dominated the narrative concerning cross-border relations in Irish football. However, the unofficial all-island championship fixtures that we know occurred between 1925 and 1955, undermines the narrative that the split between football north and south stymied all co-operation across all levels of the game. Relationships between senior clubs survived even in the era of the football ‘cold war’. In this regard, the evidence presented here adds to existing evidence of cross-border football relations. This includes an annual Bohemians and Linfield match for the Condor Cup, which began in 1923¹⁷⁰ and continued until at least 1944,¹⁷¹ although by then this fixture co-existed with more formalised north-south competition inaugurated during the Second World War (see below). In addition, Conor Curran’s study of Donegal has detailed football relations along, and across, the border.¹⁷²

Whilst Moore did note some of the fixtures described above, notably between Shamrock Rovers and Glentoran in Belfast in 1925, and that between the IFA and FAI cup winners in 1941,¹⁷³ he did not capture the full gamut of such games and, so, did not communicate their full significance. For example, his comment on the former was that ‘it was seen as a major boost to the game in the south’.¹⁷⁴ That was certainly the case, given that Shamrock Rovers was representing a new association against the more established body from which they had severed relations only four years earlier. However, once we

¹⁷⁰ Paul Rouse, *Sport & Ireland*, p. 268.

¹⁷¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Sept. 1944.

¹⁷² Curran, *The development of sport in Donegal*, pp 174-8.

¹⁷³ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 207.

¹⁷⁴ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 184.

understand that it was the first in a series of fixtures, albeit a somewhat sporadic one, we can afford that match additional significance.

Second World War

The historiography concerning football in Europe during the Second World War details the struggle to survive during a period characterised by destruction, disruption and, sometimes, persistence. It tells us how the game continued to some extent in regions occupied by Germany, such as Silesia in Poland,¹⁷⁵ and also amongst Finnish troops close to the frontline during the ‘Continuation War’ with the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944.¹⁷⁶ In Britain, some made the argument that association football, and other codes, should carry on as a means of maintaining morale at home, despite the privations of war.¹⁷⁷ This sentiment was also evident in Australia.¹⁷⁸ The situation in Ireland was not, of course, straightforward. The IFA governed football in an area that was at war, while the FAI did so in a neutral state which was affected by the war but was not a belligerent. This would seem to be a context in which divisions and differences might be exacerbated, but at certain levels of the game it encouraged discussion of enhanced cross-border co-operation. So the question emerges as to how football and football relations, north and south, were affected by that conflict?

There is no doubt that one area of football became more prominent across Ireland in this period. As more men entered the armies, and in the interest of morale, representative fixtures featuring army teams were staged. Holt has written of fixtures of these kind in the British context, and they were held in Ireland, both north and south.¹⁷⁹ For example, in the north, Ireland (IFA) took on a Combined Services XI at Grosvenor Park, Belfast on 24

¹⁷⁵ Jorge Tovar, ‘Soccer, World War II and coronavirus: a comparative analysis of how the sport shut down’, *Soccer & society*, 22:1-2 (2021), pp 66-74.

¹⁷⁶ Niels Kayser Nielsen, ‘Sport at the Front: Football in Finland During the Second World War’, *Sport in history*, 24:1 (2004), pp 63-76.

¹⁷⁷ Rafaelle Nicholson and Matthew Taylor, ‘Women, sport and the people’s war in Britain, 1939-45’, *Sport in history*, 40:4 (2020), pp 552-75.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce Kennedy, ‘“Carry on”: The response of the Victorian Football League to the challenges of World War Two’, *The international journal of the history of sport*, 31:18 (2014), pp 2388-2404.

¹⁷⁹ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 277.

February 1943,¹⁸⁰ whereas in the south, Ireland (FAI) took on 'The Army' at Dalymount Park, Dublin on 23 April 1944.¹⁸¹

The fate of other kinds of football competition was less certain. Unlike the [English] Football Association's controversial 'unpatriotic decision',¹⁸² in September 1914 to continue playing at the outbreak of the First World War, the English Football League suspended all football under its jurisdiction¹⁸³ following the British declaration of war on Germany in September 1939, a suspension the Scottish FA enacted on the following day.¹⁸⁴ Whilst some regional associations in England followed suit, for instance, 'during the period of war all association football in Wiltshire has been suspended',¹⁸⁵ it is notable that the formation of regional leagues was soon permitted so as to allow for some limited football activity.¹⁸⁶ Interestingly, the English and Scottish press both reported that Ted Robbins, secretary of the Welsh FA, had 'notified Welsh clubs that they could carry on with their usual league and cup competitions'.¹⁸⁷

In May of 1940 the IFA reported that their main source of income during the 1939-40 season had ceased, because 'as a result of the war no international matches were played'.¹⁸⁸ However, it is notable that football under the jurisdiction of the IFA continued in its regular format, at least at first, with Belfast Celtic winning the 1939/40 Irish League championship.¹⁸⁹ This too would change. Writing in 1980, Malcolm Brodie asserted that the abandonment of the Irish League in August 1940 was an action borne of 'sheer necessity' because regular league football had been proving unsuitable to wartime conditions.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 22 Feb. 1943.

¹⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 22 Apr. 1944.

¹⁸² *Preston Herald*, 9 Sept. 1914.

¹⁸³ *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 8 Sept. 1939.

¹⁸⁴ *Coatbridge Leader*, 9 Sept. 1939.

¹⁸⁵ *Wiltshire Times and Trowbridge Advertiser*, 9 Sept. 1939.

¹⁸⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 Oct. 1939.

¹⁸⁷ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 11 Sept. 1939; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 13 Sept. 1939.

¹⁸⁸ IFA annual report and accounts, 1940, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/2/2/1).

¹⁸⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Apr. 1940

¹⁹⁰ Brodie, *100 years*, p 33.

However, it was a joint statement published in the Belfast press in August 1940, that precipitated an unravelling of continued regular football competition in Northern Ireland during wartime. That city's four professional clubs – Belfast Celtic, Linfield, Glentoran and Distillery – stated ‘that they do not propose taking part in Irish League competitions during the season 1940-41’, and that it was their intention ‘to promote competitions more suitable to the present emergency’.¹⁹¹ The Linfield FC committee minutes of the preceding day record that club's view that it was ‘in the interest of all the [four] clubs’ to act in this way. They ‘were unanimously of the opinion that they should withdraw from the Irish League during the war, and that steps be taken to form a new league’.¹⁹²

A meeting of the Irish League management committee of some days later suggested that the war had become the moment when a financial friction between ‘big’ clubs and ‘small’ clubs could not be sustained. It is also clear that the unilateral action of the large clubs was resented by the smaller clubs:

Dr T.E. Hill (Distillery): had come to the conclusion that 10 strong clubs would be better than 14 weak ones ... Mr R. Barr (Belfast Celtic): if other clubs wished to come in well and good. If not, the five clubs¹⁹³ would carry on alone ... Mr R. McEndoe (Glentoran): said that year after year they had paid money to weak clubs that they needed in their own coffers ... Mr R. B. Andrews (Cliftonville) pointed out that it would be a serious matter for clubs that would be thrown on the scrap heap, and he appealed to the representatives to try to find a constitutional solution of their difficulties ... Mr W.A. Mullen (Portadown): It should be remembered that the provincial clubs had made the formation of the Irish League possible ... Mr W. McCurley (Larne): complained that the tactics adopted by the “big five” were unfair ... Mr. Musgrave (Newry): suggested that Belfast followers would rather have the variety provided by the provincial clubs than only having a few teams playing week after week.¹⁹⁴

Whilst one might argue that the big clubs were simply acting in the context of the financial constraints imposed by war, their clear (and longer

¹⁹¹ *Northern Whig*, 3 Aug. 1940.

¹⁹² Linfield FC committee minutes, 2 Aug. 1940, Minute book of Linfield FC, Apr.1934-Mar.1934 (PRONI, Records of Linfield Football & Athletic Club, D3852/1).

¹⁹³ The big four plus Derry City.

¹⁹⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Aug. 1940.

term) resentment at having to prop up smaller provincial clubs, via the league, had found an outlet and an opportunity:

The case presented by the professional clubs was that they were financially unable to carry on the League in the present circumstances and that eight or ten strong clubs would be better than thirteen or fourteen weak ones.¹⁹⁵

This venture of Belfast's 'big' clubs became known as the Northern 'regional league', giving the impression that it simply mirrored the war-time regionalisation in England in 1939. Its first season, 1940/1, would include four additional clubs – Cliftonville, Glenavon, Portadown and Derry City. Consequently, senior football in Northern Ireland in the 1940/1 season had shed six clubs that took part in the 1939/40 Irish League season: Larne, Coleraine, Ards, Bangor, Newry Town and Ballymena United.¹⁹⁶ This league would continue over the next seven seasons, up to and beyond the war's conclusion, with a somewhat erratic composition. For example, after only one season, in 1941/2, the original eight-team league had shrunk to six teams from Northern Ireland's two cities: Belfast Celtic, Distillery, Linfield, Cliftonville, Glentoran and Derry City,¹⁹⁷ although it later expanded to include Ballymena United and Coleraine in 1946.¹⁹⁸

In neutral southern Ireland¹⁹⁹ regular football had also continued, with St James' Gate winning the 1939/40 League of Ireland championship²⁰⁰ Shamrock Rovers defeated Sligo Rovers by three goals to nil in the FAI Cup final at Dalymount Park in April 1940.²⁰¹ The League of Ireland suffered no comparable wartime disruption to that experienced in Northern Ireland. In financial terms, the league season returned a profit of £60 in 1940²⁰² and £303 in 1941.²⁰³ If Dundalk's profit of £840 on the 1941/2 season²⁰⁴ is considered a barometer as to how its rivals were also faring, it would appear the financial

¹⁹⁵ *Ireland's Saturday Night*, 10 Aug. 1940.

¹⁹⁶ *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 17 Aug. 1940.

¹⁹⁷ *Derry Journal*, 5 Jan. 1942.

¹⁹⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 Dec. 1946.

¹⁹⁹ Clair Wills, *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 54.

²⁰⁰ *Irish Independent*, 29 Apr. 1940; *Irish Press*, 13 May 1940.

²⁰¹ *Irish Press*, 22 Apr. 1940.

²⁰² *Irish Times*, 11 June 1940.

²⁰³ *Irish Independent*, 9 June 1940.

²⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 17 July 1942.

health of senior football clubs during 1942 was in good order, that return being more than three times the profit made on that season by the FAI (£185).²⁰⁵ With participating clubs apparently financially secure, it is perhaps unsurprising, that the 1943 League of Ireland AGM should attribute the successful completion of their competitions, again, ‘to the zeal and enthusiasm of the clubs’.²⁰⁶

However, at the level of junior football in the south, there was a reorganisation of regular competitions perhaps in an attempt to mitigate wartime player shortages (see chapter four). The successful completion of the 1939/40 FAI Junior Cup when Drumcondra Juniors defeated Drogheda United by one goal to nil in the final of the Junior Cup at Tolka Park, Dublin, in May 1940 was soon followed by change.²⁰⁷ Fourteen counties from all corners of FAI jurisdiction responded to an FAI invitation in May 1940 to establish a junior football inter-counties cup competition. The rationale for that reorganisation of grassroots football was not included in the circular, however, if individual junior clubs were losing members to the Defence Forces (more on this in chapter four), then perhaps representative county teams were deemed more viable.²⁰⁸ Newspaper coverage of the first running of this competition is scarce, although we do at least learn that, in the first final, Louth defeated Tipperary by five goals to nil at Dalymount Park in February 1941.²⁰⁹

Having established that the war changed football north and south, albeit to varying degrees, it is noteworthy that an important consequence was a change in the enthusiasm for, and in the quality of, the interactions between senior clubs, and their leagues, north and south. Given that Conor Curran’s work has revealed persistent cross-border football activity among Donegal clubs, it should perhaps not surprise us that in 1942 junior football clubs from Inishowen, County Donegal – Carndonagh Rangers and Bunrana Celtic – crossed the border to contest the ‘Rock Cup’, held at the Brandywell, home of

²⁰⁵ *Irish Times*, 1 June 1942.

²⁰⁶ *Irish Independent*, 7 June 1943.

²⁰⁷ *Irish Independent*, 20 May 1940.

²⁰⁸ The FAI Junior Committee annual report, 1940-41, Junior Emergency Committee Minute Book, Mar. 1940-Jan.1945 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/29).

²⁰⁹ *Evening Herald*, 25 Feb. 1941; *The Nationalist (Tipperary)*, 26 Feb. 1941.

Derry City FC.²¹⁰ That same year witnessed inter-league games involving levels of the game below that of senior football, such as when the Leinster Senior League defeated the Irish intermediate league by one goal to nil at Shelbourne Park, Dublin, in April 1942.²¹¹ It was, however, at senior level that the most striking developments occurred.

The unofficial collaboration between the senior clubs north and south that had occurred since 1925, appears to have laid the foundation for a period of enhanced cross-border co-operation during the war. Crucially, the financial and operational constraints of the wartime context, provided sufficient cover to allow the warring associations to permit ‘official’ collaboration to occur. The earliest example of this is found in what the Belfast press described as an ‘Inter-city’ match between Belfast and Dublin at Dalymount Park in September 1939.²¹² Ending in a draw [1-1] and generating a £220 gate’,²¹³ the fixture was billed as a ‘match that was for the benefit of [the injured player] Moloney’.²¹⁴

Both financial pressures and the interest of the football public were likely factors in the revival of senior inter-league fixtures in March 1940. The first contest resulted in a victory for the League of Ireland by two goals to nil at Dalymount Park, a game that was witnessed by 28,000 spectators.²¹⁵ Two inter-league fixtures occurred in 1941. In the first, the Northern Regional League triumphed by eight goals to three at Dalymount Park on St Patrick’s Day, before an increased crowd of 36,000 spectators.²¹⁶ In the second, the Northern Regional League triumphed again, by two goals to one, this time at Windsor Park, Belfast, on 14 April 1941.²¹⁷

Despite a wartime petrol shortage, that game, played on Easter Monday 1941, attracted fans from all over Ireland to Belfast:

²¹⁰ *Derry Journal*, 5 Jan. 1942.

²¹¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 4 Apr. 1942.

²¹² *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 Sept. 1939.

²¹³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 28 Sept. 1939.

²¹⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 28 Sept. 1939.

²¹⁵ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 18 Mar. 1940.

²¹⁶ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 18 Mar. 1941.

²¹⁷ *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 19 Apr. 1941.

The inter-league football game at Windsor Park, Belfast, proved a big attraction to Eire folk, and two special trains from the south brought 1,200 enthusiasts. Other trains from provincial areas of Ulster carried full complements, while two excursion trains to Dublin carried 1,500.²¹⁸

That template continued during the remainder of the war virtually uninterrupted, with Dublin hosting the fixture on St Patrick's Day²¹⁹ and Belfast hosting the fixture on Easter Monday.²²⁰ The last such contest of the war years took place at Windsor Park in April 1945 when the League of Ireland defeated the Irish League by five goals to three.²²¹ Both the viability and public interest in such fixtures was clear and sustained into the immediate post-war years. This was evidenced by the financial success of a 1946 fixture at Windsor Park in which the Northern Regional League defeated the League of Ireland by three goals to nil. The minutes of Linfield record that

Mr Harvey referred to the success of the North v South game at Windsor Park. The match, which was the first all ticket one to be held in Ireland, was a great financial success, a record gate of £2,823.14.0 being taken.²²²

In 1947, the leagues played out a 2-2 draw at Dalymount Park on St Patrick's Day,²²³ followed by a victory for the League of Ireland by one goal to nil in the return fixture at Windsor Park in April (Easter Monday).²²⁴ The first fixture of 1948 witnessed a League of Ireland victory by two goals to one at Dalymount Park,²²⁵ whereas the return fixture resulted in a victory for the Irish League at Windsor Park by four goals to nil.²²⁶ A nil-nil draw began the 1949 fixtures at Dalymount Park on St Patrick's Day,²²⁷ followed by a victory for the Irish League by four goals to one at Windsor Park on Easter Monday.²²⁸

Interestingly, the teams that formed the Northern Regional League in 1940 benefitted hugely from the public interest in inter-league fixtures, with

²¹⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 Apr. 1941.

²¹⁹ *Northern Whig*, 17 Mar. 1942.

²²⁰ *Northern Whig*, 7 Apr. 1942.

²²¹ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 3 Apr. 1945.

²²² Linfield FC committee minutes, 14 May 1946, Minute book of Linfield FC April 1944-April 1954 (PRONI, Records of Linfield Football & Athletic Club, D3852/2).

²²³ *Evening Echo*, 18 Mar. 1947.

²²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 8 Apr. 1947.

²²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 18 Mar. 1948.

²²⁶ *Irish Independent*, 30 Mar. 1948.

²²⁷ *Irish Independent*, 18 Mar. 1949.

²²⁸ *Irish Independent*, 18 Apr. 1949.

each of the eight clubs receiving £150 from the receipts of the inter-league matches. In 1940 alone the net profit for the regional league had been £1,352.²²⁹ Given the apparent commercial potential it might come as little surprise to learn that, building on their unofficial collaboration pre-war, plans were already afoot to hold a cup competition between Irish League and League of Ireland teams. The Dublin press reported that such a venture ‘would be unofficial, though ...[and that] ... to compete in it each club must obtain permission from their respective association’.²³⁰ A conference consisting of the four largest Belfast clubs (Belfast Celtic, Distillery, Glentoran and Linfield) and their Dublin counterparts (Bohemians, Shamrock Rovers, Shelbourne and St James’s Gate) took place at the Grand Central Hotel in Belfast on 16 February 1942. At this,

the Dublin clubs proposed an end of season competition consisting of four clubs from the south and four from the north to be played on the same principle as the Irish Cup in a pooling arrangement.²³¹

Subsequently, the FAI gave its approval, offering ‘no objection to [the competition] going ahead as planned’.²³² The IFA minutes went further:

at the request of senior clubs a new competition was formed to play inter-city matches with clubs under the jurisdiction of the Eire association, and your council extended the season up to and including the 30th May to facilitate the competition.²³³

When the tournament got underway in May 1942, it featured Belfast Celtic, Linfield, Glentoran, Distillery, Cliftonville and Derry City from the north, and Dundalk, Cork United, Shamrock Rovers, Bohemians and Shelbourne from the south.²³⁴ Two southern teams, Dundalk and Shamrock Rovers, advanced to the final having defeated Belfast Celtic (3-2) and Cliftonville (7-1) respectively in semi-finals that were played home and away.²³⁵ In the final, played at Dalymount Park on 31 May 1942, Dundalk

²²⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 May 1942.

²³⁰ *Irish Press*, 24 Jan. 1942.

²³¹ Linfield FC committee minutes, 17 Feb. 1942, Minute book of Linfield FC April 1934-March 1944 (PRONI, Records of Linfield Football & Athletic Club, D3852/1).

²³² Minutes of the FAI Junior Emergency Committee, 18 Mar. 1942, Junior Emergency Committee Minute Book, Mar. 1940-Jan.1945 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/29).

²³³ IFA annual report 1942, Minutes of IFA Emergency Committee, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²³⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 May 1942.

²³⁵ *Derry Journal*, 29 May 1942.

triumphed by one goal to nil.²³⁶ In 1943, a two-legged final between Shamrock Rovers and Bohemians was played over consecutive days in Belfast then Dublin, the former occurring ‘in the frigid atmosphere of an unsympathetic public’ at Windsor Park. Ending in a 2-2 draw on aggregate, the game was decided on corner kicks, which ‘Rovers won by 19 corners to 9’.²³⁷ ‘In an all-northern final’ in 1944, the first leg at Windsor Park ended in a 3-3 draw, before Glentoran defeated Belfast Celtic by two goals to one at Dalymount Park two days later to win 5-4 on aggregate.²³⁸ The final edition of the north-south or ‘inter-city cup’ would be in 1945. Following a 2-2 draw at Celtic Park, Bohemians won the second leg of the final by one goal to nil against Belfast Celtic at Dalymount Park to triumph 3-2 on aggregate.²³⁹

Collingwood Cup

In November 1910, an association football team representing Trinity College Dublin (TCD), travelled north to contest a fixture against the ‘newly formed team’ of Queen’s University Belfast (QUB). Played at Celtic Park, home of Belfast Celtic, QUB defeated TCD by four goals to two in what is perhaps the earliest example of an inter-varsity association football fixture between northern and southern Irish universities.²⁴⁰ It is clear, however, that TCD’s association football tradition was already long established at that point: they competed in the IFA’s Challenge Cup competition as early as November 1886, when they played out a draw (2-2) with Oldpark FC of Belfast at College Park, Dublin.²⁴¹

First inaugurated in 1914, the premier competition at university level was to become known as the Collingwood Cup, named after Professor Bertram J. Collingwood of University College Dublin (UCD) who supplied the trophy. In its first edition, played at Prospect Park, Dublin, in February 1914, the semi-finals witnessed UCD defeat TCD by five goals to two, whilst QUB defeated

²³⁶ *Irish Independent*, 1 June 1942.

²³⁷ *Irish Independent*, 31 May 1943; *Irish Press*, 31 May 1943.

²³⁸ *Irish Press*, 30 May 1944.

²³⁹ *Sunday Independent*, 3 June 1945.

²⁴⁰ *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 19 Nov. 1910.

²⁴¹ *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1886.

University College Galway (UCG) by three goals to one.²⁴² In the final, played at Dalymount Park, Dublin, on the following day, UCD defeated QUB by two goals to one to win the inaugural Collingwood Cup.²⁴³ Following that encouraging opening, the competition would be suspended during the First World War and did not re-emerge until 1920. It appears that year's competition was staged both in Belfast, where QUB defeated TCD by three goals to nil at Celtic Park,²⁴⁴ and in Dublin where UCD defeated TCD by eight goals to one at Terenure Park, Dublin.²⁴⁵ In the final, played at Grosvenor Park, Belfast, home of Distillery FC, QUB defeated UCD by four goals to nil.²⁴⁶

The existing historiography has little to say about the Collingwood Cup. In so far as analysis exists it has not been entirely accurate. Whilst Garnham was generally wary of clichés when writing about the split in Irish football, he was wide of the mark in his contention that, in August 1921, the IFA had refused to allow QUB to play TCD, which had affiliated to the FAI. If correct, this would have been an early confirmation that the partition of Irish football was a reality.²⁴⁷

However, newspaper sources indicate the August 1921 contest was not a Collingwood Cup fixture. The 1921 edition had been played in the early months of that year. The Dublin press reported on TCD and QUB having played out a 1-1 draw at Terenure Park, Dublin, in February.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, we learn that the first post-split edition of the Collingwood Cup took place in February 1922, when UCD defeated TCD by four goals to two, again played at Terenure Park.²⁴⁹ Second, there is no contemporaneous evidence that QUB's participation lapsed during the 1920s whether due to partition or any other reason. Newspaper archives record their participation in the 1922 edition, when they played out a draw with TCD (2-2) at Terenure Park. In the following year,

²⁴² *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Feb. 1914.

²⁴³ *Irish Independent*, 5 Feb. 1914.

²⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 18 Feb. 1920.

²⁴⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 12 Feb. 1920.

²⁴⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 Feb. 1920.

²⁴⁷ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 187; see also Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 122.

²⁴⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Feb. 1921.

²⁴⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Feb. 1922.

QUB would win the Collingwood Cup for the second time when they defeated UCD by three goals to nil in the final played at Cherryvale, Belfast.²⁵⁰

Indeed, it would be the competition itself, rather than the participation of its primary northern entrant, that would lapse on occasion. In 1934, QUB defeated UCD in the Collingwood Cup final by three goals to one at College Park, Dublin.²⁵¹ Reporting on this game, the Dublin press noted that the competition itself had lapsed during 1932 and 1933,²⁵² although the reason for this is not clear. The Collingwood Cup did operate in something of an administrative vacuum as the IFA and FAIFS, owing to their inability to agree on a resolution to their senior football dispute, had effectively been in a standoff since formal negotiations had broken down in 1932. That the Collingwood Cup operated at arm's length to the worlds of the IFA and FAIFS may, indeed, have been one of the reasons it persisted. The interest manifest in the competition ensured that, despite short breaks, it endured as an all-Ireland competition during various political and economic crises that had taken hold between 1921 and 1939. Thus, in that period, we might consider the Collingwood Cup to have constituted unofficial collaboration between football in Ireland, north and south.

It is difficult to establish the exact origin of the Irish Universities Football Union (IUFU). In 1956, the Dublin press claimed that this body had been formed in 1939,²⁵³ although the earliest reference to such a body within the FAI archives dates from 1959.²⁵⁴ Newspaper archives indicate that, with the IFA prioritising the maintenance of their international prestige and consolidating the club game within their reduced jurisdiction, the FAI assumed an increasing degree of control over university football in Ireland during the mid-1960s.

In 1962, we learn that the Irish varsity team that was due to travel to Wales for an international fixture in March of that year, was to include five members of the QUB team that had just won the Collingwood Cup in Dublin

²⁵⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 Feb. 1923; *Irish Times*, 10 Feb. 1923.

²⁵¹ *Evening Herald*, 6 Dec. 1934.

²⁵² *Irish Independent*, 5 Dec. 1934.

²⁵³ *Sunday Independent*, 9 Dec. 1956.

²⁵⁴ Olympic, Under 23 and Amateur Teams, 1958–74, 18 Feb. 1959, International team management and fixtures, Oct. 1958– Nov. 1959 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/87).

that February. The squad also included two players from TCD, two from UCD, and one each from UCG and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).²⁵⁵ In 1966, twenty years after they had agreed to select only players born in their effective jurisdiction, the FAI permitted the IUFU to select players from QUB in Northern Ireland, for what were in effect, varsity international fixtures for the Republic of Ireland versus England, Scotland and Wales in 1966.²⁵⁶ The IUFU moved further under the FAI's official jurisdiction, arguably, in July 1970 when, in what was heralded as 'a new era in Irish football', the IUFU was additionally 'entrusted with the promotion and development of senior amateur soccer' in the Republic of Ireland by the FAI.²⁵⁷

Despite the acrimony of the previous half century, there are two clear reasons indicating that by the 1970s third level association football occupied a narrow space *between* the associations in Ireland. First, that the FAI chose to stage what was ostensibly now *their* competition – the Collingwood Cup – in Northern Ireland in 1971 is remarkable given that, 'in the year to mid-July 1971, fifty-five people had died violently, and there had been 300 explosions'.²⁵⁸ Hosted by QUB, the 1971 Collingwood Cup final was the final game of association football ever played at Celtic Park, the vacant former home of Belfast Celtic FC, and witnessed UCG defeat UCD by one goal to nil.²⁵⁹ Thereafter, the famous old stadium fell into disrepair whilst operating solely for the purposes of greyhound racing and, in 1985, was bulldozed to make way for a shopping centre and car park, known as the Park Centre.²⁶⁰ Second, and equally notable, is that a Northern Ireland varsity team was contesting internationals against its fellow home nation – Scotland – in March 1973.²⁶¹ This was more than five years before the IFA's senior team took on the same opposition as Ireland for the final time in May 1978.

²⁵⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 Feb. 1962.

²⁵⁶ Minutes of the FAI Senior Council, 7 Jan. 1966, Minute Book of the Senior Council, June 1965-June 1971 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/22).

²⁵⁷ *Irish Independent*, 22 July 1970; *Irish Press*, 22 July 1970.

²⁵⁸ Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: The persistence of conflict* (Dublin, 2006), p. 220.

²⁵⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 1 Mar. 1971.

²⁶⁰ Pdraig Coyle, *Paradise lost and found: the story of Belfast Celtic* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp 126-8.

²⁶¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 Mar. 1973.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex history of association football governance in Ireland addressing how it first emerged, its development and maintenance, and the fracturing that has endured to the present. The relationship between the Irish Football Association and Football Association of Ireland between 1921 and 1978 was complex and often acrimonious, yet the analysis presented here reveals collaboration as well as conflict.

The first section explored the context in which Ireland's single football association, the IFA, had developed since its formation in 1880 until its eventual sundering during 1921. From a base in Belfast, the game would spread beyond that city during the late nineteenth century to the point where regional outposts of the game justified their own sub-administrations in provincial towns in the north of Ireland. If we consider that to have been a phase of organic growth, notably it was one that aligned closely to what would, between 1920 and 1922, become the new political unit of Northern Ireland. In southern Ireland, football's development outwards from the key city of Dublin saw it organised according to traditional provincial boundaries albeit still under the control of the association based in Belfast. Indeed, Garnham has written of an economic and social bifurcation that 'underlay the eventual division of Irish football'.²⁶²

The IFA's seemingly sudden and conclusive split with Leinster would occur during the era of modern state formation on the island, and thus the partition of Irish football has tended to be characterised as a political affair. However, the observation that the IFA had been losing regions from its jurisdiction at least a decade prior to 1921, adds a crucial new layer to the previous work of Moore, Tynan and Garnham who, combined, had begun to detail an administrative fracture within Irish football, north from south, that existed prior to 1921. The loosening of the bonds of Irish football, or the exposure of the fractures within Irish football, that took place during the First World War, should lead us to nuance the notion of a single 'split' between north and south having occurred during 1921.

²⁶² Garnham, *Association football and society*, p 199; Garnham also cites in this passage C.S. Andrews, *Dublin made me: An autobiography* (Dublin, 1979), p. 45.

The first section also serves to begin outlining the identity of the two football nations that emerged from the 1921 split. Cronin suggests that, from its inception in 1880, the IFA stressed an identity that, while Irish, was constructed firmly within a unionist mind-set of ‘loyalty to the crown and state of the mainland’.²⁶³ Matthew Taylor asserts that the existence of separate associations for the nations of the United Kingdom meant that the game became a symbol of ‘British’ diversity rather than unity,²⁶⁴ but British it was. The First World War served to emphasise this too, and so paved the way for division, feeding divided nationalisms in Irish football as it did throughout Irish society. Section one’s findings present an obvious critique of previously simplistic chronicles of Irish football.²⁶⁵

Section two charts considerable conflict between the IFA and the new governing body, the FAI, that emerged from the split. It also reveals that the intensity of these divisions rested on ironies. The problem that was the naming dispute was exacerbated by the desire of the independent governing body in southern Ireland, the FAIFS – later the FAI – to remain associated with British football through membership of the International Board. Equally, that from 1921 the Irish Football Association – now governing only the north-eastern corner of Ireland that remained within the United Kingdom – perpetuated its historical claim to the title of Ireland until 1978, adds a layer of significant complexity to Northern Ireland’s football identity.

It is difficult to oppose a view that any prospect of healing the split was lost during the acrimonious years between 1921 and 1932, years in which the sporting press played their part in entrenching divisions. The matter was far from being closed in 1932, however, and section two of this chapter explained how that year was merely the end of a first phase of a cold war between the two Irelands in international football. Thereafter, stalemate endured. The case of schoolboy football, discussed here, reveals the limits that the split placed on ‘official’ cross-border cooperation while also hinting at an important theme –

²⁶³ Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland*, pp 123-4.

²⁶⁴ Matthew Taylor, *The association game: A history of British football* (Abingdon, 2013), p. 12; see also Alexander Jackson, *The greater game: A history of football in World War I* (London, 2014).

²⁶⁵ Examples include Brodie, *100 years*, p 15; Peter Byrne, *Football Association of Ireland: 75 years* (Dublin, 1996), p. 21.

the role of unofficial collaboration beyond the direct over-sight of the governing bodies.

A second phase of the cold war opened in 1946 as, finally, the British FAs sought to enter a FIFA World Cup. Evidence that has not previously been brought to light regarding this entire dispute illustrates how FIFA's acceptance of an FAI protest regarding naming in 1954, precipitated the eventual disappearance of the two Irelands in world football. Crucially, the IFA's British colleagues on the International Board – in response to FIFA's decision – outlined their nuanced acceptance of FIFA's determination. Consequently, qualification games to, and matches at, the 1958 World Cup, confirmed the practice of referring to the IFA's team as Northern Ireland during FIFA competitions. Furthermore, when the Republic of Ireland was the name universally applied to the FAI's team on the occasion of a friendly versus Chile in Dublin in March 1960, the full intent of the 1954 decision had been realised.

Thereafter, a third and final phase of the cold war played out between 1960 and 1978, whereby the IFA contested the British Home Championship as Ireland, and competitions under the jurisdiction of FIFA as Northern Ireland. Here too a gradual change in practice seems to have taken hold, culminating with the first ever international fixture between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in Dublin in September 1978. That fixture included a famous handshake between the two captains, Allan Hunter of Northern Ireland and John Giles of the Republic of Ireland, prior to kick off, and was for both the IFA and FAI, a complete recognition of the legitimacy of the other; one that could be avoided or delayed no longer.

Section three has presented a detailed overview of instances of collaboration at different levels of football in Ireland, between north and south. That collaboration often occurred at the same time as some of the most divisive and open confrontation between the IFA and FAI. At first sight the evidence seems to reveal a surprising level of co-operation between north and south in the post-partition era, but it is well to remember Garnham's point that when

football had ‘eventually acquire[d] a large following’ this was ‘surprisingly socially, politically and religiously mixed.’²⁶⁶

Moore found that the atmosphere between those in attendance at the 1927 inter-league match had been a ‘far cry’ from that which existed between the IFA and FAI at that time.²⁶⁷ Indeed, this study has unearthed the existence of a series of matches between 1925 and 1955 that the press would refer to as having amounted to unofficial championship of Ireland fixtures. On one hand, we might consider those to have been championship games between the very two Irelands that were competing for the right to that name in international football. On the other hand, it is reasonable to speculate that perhaps those beneath the elite administrative levels of football in Ireland, north and south, had much more in common than the often-petty actions of their governing bodies indicated. Indeed, such was the impact of that unofficial collaboration that during the crisis of the Second World War the governing bodies sanctioned official collaboration between its senior clubs. Section three also explored the ambiguous and fascinating position of universities football. The FAI annual report of 1980 could celebrate the success of the [FAI’s] ‘Irish Universities international side’, which intriguingly had competed in what the report described as ‘the ‘Home Countries’ championship, ‘scoring a home win over Scotland and an away point against Wales’.²⁶⁸

The import of the findings presented in sections two and three of this chapter are such that it is fair to conclude that the football identities of Ireland post-1921 were at once antagonistic and symbiotic, and increasingly the latter. Politically, there would have been no ‘home rule’ for the south without the necessary concessions made to the ‘home nation’ carved-out of Ulster that remained in the United Kingdom. Conversely, and unquestionably, a huge factor in the development of their respective football identities, was that the home nation subsequently refused for as long as it was possible, to recognise home rule in football for the south. By focusing on both the practical out-workings of the lengthy ‘naming’ dispute and the everyday, practical

²⁶⁶ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 198.

²⁶⁷ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, pp 184-5, 190.

²⁶⁸ FAI Annual Report, 1979/80, Minute book of the senior council, July 1976-Feb.1989 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/24).

interactions across the border, this chapter paints a complex picture of football in the post-partition decades.

Chapter 3: ‘Old traditions die hard’:¹ rugby and society in post-partition Ireland.

Introduction

This chapter sets out to give the reader a clear sense of the prevalence and distribution of rugby football clubs in Ireland, north and south in the decades after partition. This it achieves using data pertaining to club affiliations gleaned from both archival records and newspapers. Affiliation data is not available for all years between 1922 and 1990, but the research under-pinning this chapter has revealed sufficient coverage to establish the patterns in the dispersion of rugby football clubs across space and time, allowing us to ask questions about when and where rugby prospered, or not.

It also enables us to ask why. Having established the patterns of club affiliations across time and space, the chapter goes on to consider some factors influencing these patterns. Rugby extended its reach, and encountered limits, in the context of particular social, economic and cultural changes on the island. This chapter sets out to analyse this, elucidating the relationship between rugby and society in post-partition in Ireland. In doing so, section two considers the provincial distribution of clubs as this related to the concurrent urbanisation of Ireland between 1940 and 1980. In particular, it examines the extent to which rugby was confined to the cities and whether it succeeded in building a base in smaller urban centres across time.

If the second section is concerned with the extension of the game and urbanisation, then the third section assesses the development of the social base of the game in Ireland. It asks if educational reform, particularly increased access to education, extended the reach of the game after the Second World War. Related to this, it examines the game’s supposed dependence upon the professional classes and whether this changed. Finally, section three concludes with a consideration of whether the game received a boon from the ending of

¹ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, p. 106.

the GAA ban on foreign games. Does the evidence suggest that this broadened the playing base of rugby?

Fourth, the chapter examines how rugby interacted with economic trends during three distinct eras in Ireland, north and south, between 1929 and 1980. It asks whether a direct relationship can be identified between periods of economic (and associated demographic) prosperity or decline and the health of club rugby. Fifth, and finally, the chapter considers the impact of the television age on rugby in Ireland. Did the broadcasting of contests in which Ireland and Irish provinces competed on the international stage, especially when the Irish teams won, matter to the health of club rugby?

O’Callaghan asserted that ‘regional studies of Irish sport history reveal a bewildering variety of experience within and between sports according to class, religion, and geography among other variables’.² This examination of rugby confirms the variety and complexity of factors that have affected rugby in Ireland.

3.1: Club affiliations: The geography of rugby in Ireland, 1880-1988.

The administrative development of rugby in Ireland, and particularly how its northern and southern administrations interacted between 1874 and 1920, was detailed in chapter one. That early north-south interaction culminated in the formation of the IRFU in 1879. It has proved possible to retrieve from the archive club affiliation figures to the four provincial branches that would come to make up the IRFU, albeit at intervals from that point forward. The sections that follow will use that data to consider the factors that affected the geographical prevalence of rugby clubs affiliated to rugby’s governing body. Before examining in detail the post-partition era, it is worth considering the numbers of registered clubs, and their dispersion, during the pre-partition era. An opening count relates to the first season of the IRFU’s existence, 1879/80. While a Connacht Branch had not yet emerged, table 4 below reveals the

² Liam O’Callaghan, ‘Review article: Sport and the Irish: new histories*’, *Irish historical studies*, 41:159 (2017), p. 130.

existence of some clubs in that province. The game was most developed in Leinster (largely Dublin), followed by Ulster (mostly Belfast), then Munster trailed a good deal behind, while the game had reached Connacht but had yet to gather any momentum.

<u>Province</u>	<u>Clubs</u>
Leinster	45
Ulster	28
Munster	12
Connacht	3
Total	88

Table 4: IRFU clubs by province, 1879/80.³

The next available series of IRFU provincial affiliation statistics again relate to the pre-partition era, and these indicate that by 1908 little had changed. Though the number of affiliated clubs overall had retreated since 1880 (from eighty-eight to seventy-seven), that decline was shared by all the provinces with the exception of Connacht where there had been growth. Between 1908 and 1911, club affiliation grew again in Leinster and Munster, but was in decline in Ulster and Connacht (table 5).

³ Garnham, *The origins and development*, p. 41.

Province	1908	1909	1910	1911
Leinster	35	39	39	40
Ulster	25	25	23	20
Munster	10	12	14	17
Connacht	7	7	5	5
Total	77	83	81	82

Table 5: IRFU provincial and total club affiliation 1908-11.⁴

Following this, the qualitative evidence tells us that after the First World War and the Irish revolutionary era, rugby had not only recovered quickly but had grown considerably with 114 affiliated clubs in Ireland in 1924.⁵ The 128 clubs affiliated to the IRFU in 1927 represented a significant increase on the eighty-two of 1911. Significantly, Ulster had overtaken Leinster and by the mid-1920s was home to the largest number of affiliated clubs (increasing from twenty in 1911 to forty-eight in 1927), although it is not possible to pinpoint exactly when this occurred. By 1927, Leinster, in fact, had not quite recovered to the levels of 1911 (thirty-six clubs in 1927 compared with forty in 1911). Connacht continued to lag behind, but in that province too the number of affiliated clubs had more than doubled since 1911 (from five to twelve), while in Munster the number of clubs had almost doubled (from seventeen to thirty-two).

Thereafter, the affiliation statistics that can be gleaned from the IRFU archives allow for a broad overview of club affiliation across the provinces during the post-partition decades (fig. 2). In examining these, it is evident that only Leinster witnessed consistent growth whereas Munster, despite a slight dip between 1977 and 1987, was the province that witnessed the most notable growth in its club base during the post-partition era. In the case of both Ulster and Connacht, affiliation rates were not consistent across the decades, although

⁴ Minute book of the IRFU, 1894-1924 (IRFU archives, M003).

⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 15 Nov. 1924.

both had significantly enhanced their initial club base by the end of the period under review.

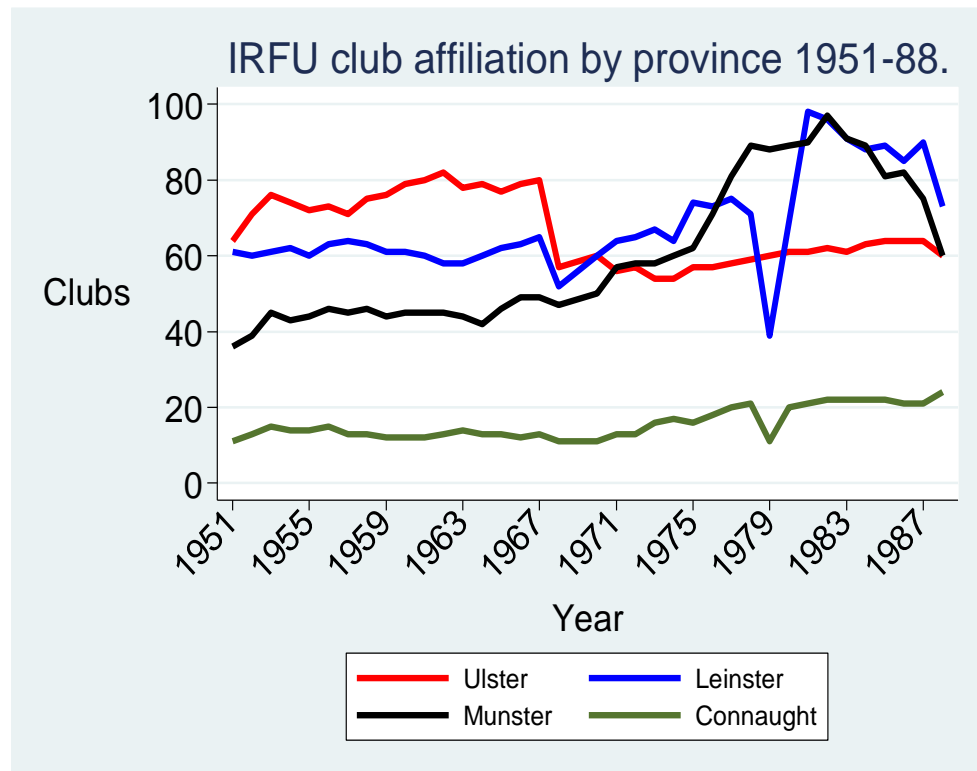


Fig. 2: IRFU club affiliation by province, 1951-88.⁶

The 172 clubs affiliated to the IRFU in 1951 was, despite the interruption of the Second World War, the highest number recorded to that date. The rapid rise in club affiliation within Munster between 1951 (thirty-six clubs) and 1982 (ninety-seven clubs), is one of the most substantive changes in club affiliation patterns during this period. Ulster reached its peak of eighty-two clubs affiliated in 1962, falling to sixty in 1970 (then tied with Leinster). Meanwhile, Munster’s surge continued, surpassing Ulster in 1971 (fifty-seven clubs to fifty-six, respectively), and later also surpassing Leinster by 1977 (eighty-one clubs to seventy-five, respectively). That Leinster affiliation figures dipped significantly in 1979 (thirty-nine clubs as opposed to sixty for Ulster and eighty-eight for Munster), appears to have been an administrative anomaly. In 1980, sixty-nine clubs were affiliated there as opposed to sixty-one in Ulster and eighty-nine in Munster. Indeed, by 1985, Leinster had resumed its

⁶ Minute book of the IRFU, 1950-1988 (IRFU archives, M09-20).

place as the strongest province (eighty-nine clubs as opposed to eighty-one for Munster and sixty-four for Ulster).

The data outlined above, albeit a snapshot of the total that will be expanded upon in the analysis that follows, establishes clear measures of the health of the game during the post-partition era. It also acts as a quantitative foundation upon which a qualitative assessment, exploring how rugby union in Ireland interacted with various crises and developments in the post-partition era, is grounded. In doing so, the analysis that follows goes some way to addressing the perception that research on the history of sport in Ireland, and arguably rugby in particular, had once ‘allowed a series of stereotypes and caricatures to prosper, while distortions of history have blossomed as inherited truths’.⁷ Even when definitive answers prove elusive, this chapter asks a series of relevant questions grounded in data.

3.2: Rugby and urbanisation in Ireland.

The administrative development of the IRFU between 1874-9 had, notably, included ‘strong representation from higher education and old boys’ clubs in major cities’.⁸ Moreover, an overview of available club affiliation data for the period 1880-1911, outlined above, indicates that by the twentieth century five key urban bases for rugby had emerged in Ireland’s biggest cities: Dublin, Belfast, Limerick, Galway and Cork. Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Galway were the cities in which the Leinster, Ulster, Munster and Connacht administrative branches of the IRFU were located respectively. Munster was the only province to contain more than one key urban centre, reflected in the fact that Limerick was the chosen site for a new provincial stadium for Munster in the late 1920s,⁹ although a competitive rivalry between the two urban centres of rugby in Munster had existed prior to this.¹⁰

⁷ Paul Rouse, ‘Why Irish Historians Have Ignored Sport: A Note’ in *History Review*, 14 (2003), p. 74, cited by O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 141.

⁸ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 245.

⁹ IRFU committee minutes, 6 Mar. 1925, Minute book of the IRFU, 1923-7 (IRFU archives, M004).

¹⁰ O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 41.

As Rouse has noted, urbanisation in Ireland in the late nineteenth century had been ‘uneven’.¹¹ Though less than eighteen percent of the Irish population lived in the five key urban areas by 1911,¹² the game’s administration, and the bulk of its affiliated clubs, were anchored in those cities. This is perhaps not a surprise. Scholars have contended that urban settings were fertile terrain for the development of modern sport during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹³ For instance, in New Zealand it has been said that ‘most rugby clubs in multi-club towns appear to have been based on particular suburbs and the old boys of particular schools’.¹⁴

The concentration of rugby clubs in those Irish cities comes under analysis in this section, which considers how those trends interacted with Irish urbanisation in the post-partition decades. A combination of limited provincial club affiliation lists pertaining to Ulster, and the more readily available provincial rugby cup draws published in the press, allow for the locations of the competing clubs to be mapped.

Senior rugby, 1925-50.

That analysis first concerns the level of senior club rugby. Each of the IRFU’s four provinces held an annual Senior Cup competition that, in every case, was first played for during the pre-partition era: Leinster (1881/2)¹⁵; Ulster (1884/5)¹⁶; Munster (1885/6)¹⁷; and Connacht (1895/6). In 1926, the five key cities, referred to above, were the home to around 20 per cent of the population of the island of Ireland.¹⁸ As previously implied, it would be a mistake to

¹¹ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 116.

¹² Area, houses and population, Ireland, Census of Ireland, 1911.

¹³ Examples include Michael T. Friedman and Jacob Bustad, ‘Sport and urbanisation’ in Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of sports history* (Oxford, 2017), pp 145-58.

¹⁴ James Belich, *Paradise reforged: A history of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the year 2000* (Hawaii, 2001), p. 385.

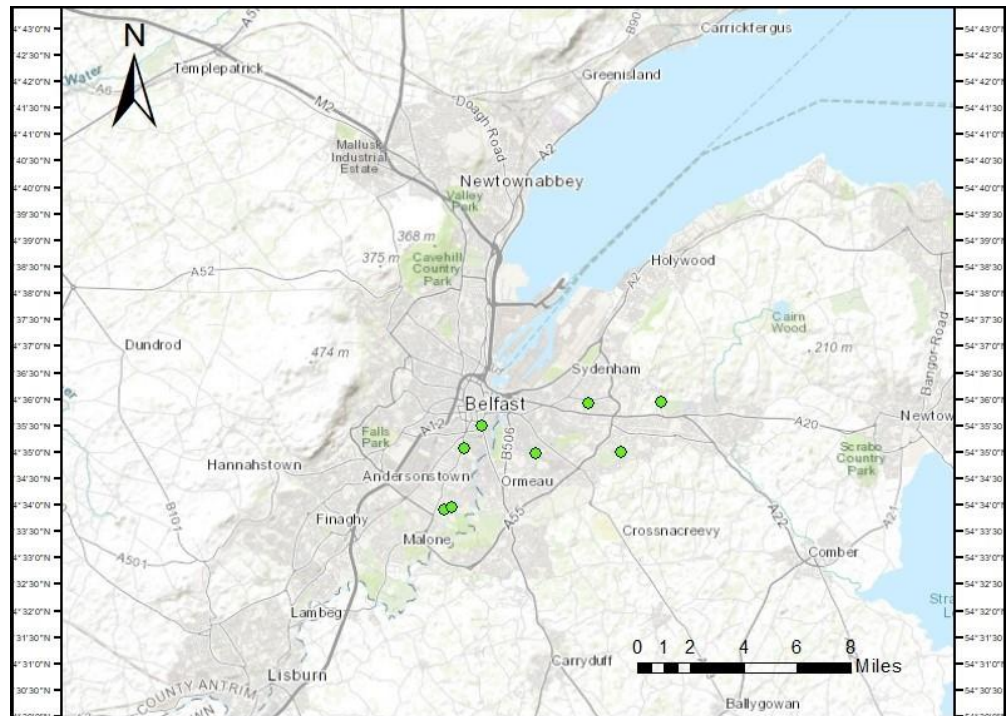
¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 12 Dec. 1881.

¹⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Oct. 1884.

¹⁷ *Kerry Evening Post*, 7 Apr. 1886.

¹⁸ Volume 1- Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1926, table 01; Population, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1926, xxiv.

assume that those urban areas were the location of one-fifth of Ireland's rugby clubs.



Map 6: Location of Belfast's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.¹⁹

John Nauright has claimed that a ‘Welsh urban bourgeoisie dominated the game in terms of administration and participation’²⁰ in that country. The link between elite schooling, middle class suburbs and rugby is also evident in the development of the game in Ireland. Between 1925 and 1950, the majority of clubs to compete in the annual Ulster Senior Cup were based in Belfast. These are highlighted in green in map 6 above. The two not from Belfast were Bangor FC of County Down and Lurgan FC of County Armagh, representing provincial towns with populations of 13,311 and 12,500 in 1926 respectively.²¹ Amongst the Belfast clubs entered were those situated in middle-class suburbs of the city, the North of Ireland FC situated in the Ormeau ward (1926 population of 39,528), and Malone FC situated in the St. Anne’s Ward (22,645). Other entrants, namely Collegians FC and Instonians FC, were

¹⁹ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1924/5, Minute book of the Northern Branch of the IRFU, 1922-5; & Annual report and statements of accounts, 1949/50 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU, (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/6-21).

²⁰ Nauright, *Sports around the world.*, p. 183.

²¹ Population of County Boroughs, urban districts and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1926, xxviii.

comprised of the old boys of local voluntary grammar schools, Methodist College Belfast and the Royal Belfast Academical Institution (RBAI). Methodist College, ‘situated in the southern suburbs’²² of Belfast (Malone Road), an area that was also home to the RBAI sportsground at nearby Osborne Park,²³ corroborates John Sugden and Alan Bairner’s contention that rugby had already ‘taken hold’ of those two schools by 1873-74’, and has since remained ‘an important feature of Ulster’s social as well as sporting life’.²⁴

Founded in 1919, Instonians was perhaps the most successful senior club affiliated to the Ulster Branch during the first half century following partition (1922-72). Central to their success, tradition and ethos, was that link with RBAI:

it cannot be stressed too often that, as a closed club, drawing its recruits from old boys of the School (Royal Belfast Academical Institution), our health is continuously dependent on the wellbeing of Rugby at the School.²⁵

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Bangor FC folded. However, they too had an established nursery, Bangor Grammar School, whose old boys stepped in to raise the club from the ashes, suggesting the well-established links between grammar schools and senior rugby clubs extended out from the city into greater Belfast during this era:

The prospect of the town of Bangor being without representation in the activities of the Ulster Branch was immediately recognised by the Old Boys Association of Bangor Grammar School, from which latter source was drawn the major strength of the earlier Bangor club. A meeting was convened by a number of the Old Boys Association for 24th July 1939 ... after a brief discussion it was unanimously agreed that a club be formed.²⁶

²² *Londonderry Sentinel*, 11 July 1922.

²³ *Northern Whig*, 15 May 1937.

²⁴ John Sugden and Alan Bairner, *Sport, Sectarianism and society in a divided Ireland* (Leicester, 1993), p. 55.

²⁵ W. Brownlow White (ed.), *Instonians 1919-1969: 50 years of fun and games* (Belfast, 1969), p. 10.

²⁶ *Bangor Rugby Football Club centenary 1885-1985* (Antrim, 1985), p. 9.



Map 7: Location of Dublin's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.²⁷

From the beginning of the game's history in Ireland, the alumni of British public schools were instrumental in the establishment of many early clubs across Ireland, including the Trinity College Dublin Rugby Club and the North of Ireland Football Club in Belfast.²⁸ Just as the North of Ireland club was an ever-present Ulster Senior Cup entrant between 1925-50, so too was Trinity College (Dublin University) a permanent feature in the Leinster Senior Cup in that time. The same was true of University College Dublin and Blackrock College, the latter in particular has been a stalwart educational bastion of rugby in south Dublin, one which the following section will return to also. That Dublin was a city that could support two universities and an increasing number of suburban educational institutions was crucial.

Joining those teams from educational settings in the Leinster Senior Cup, were senior clubs exclusively from Dublin, those identified in Map 7 above. These were Bective Rangers and Old Wesley of Donnybrook – the latter drawn from the old boys of Wesley College – and the Lansdowne and Wanderers Football Clubs of Ballsbridge. Both areas, and thus all four clubs, fell into the Pembroke urban district in 1926 (population 33,383). They were joined by Monkstown FC, located in the Dun-Laoghaire urban district

²⁷ *Irish Times*, 4 Feb. 1925 and 22 Jan. 1949.

²⁸ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 130; O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 24.

(18,987), Palmerston FC, which in 1926 fell into the Dublin south rural district (15,122), and Clontarf (Howth urban district in 1926, 4,029).²⁹ Later additions to the Leinster Senior Cup were St Mary's College RFC and Terenure College RFC- again sides comprised of the old boys of schools in south Dublin.

All of these clubs relied on the growing middle class suburbs for their members. Having achieved independence from the United Kingdom by 1922, Dublin was the capital of an Irish Free State that had a severe housing problem in the 1920s. Ruth McManus contends that the initial responses to that crisis resulted in 'the creation of new high-quality suburban housing for a limited number of people'.³⁰ Indeed, in 1931, General Richard Mulcahy suggested in Dáil Éireann that the Free State government's earliest initiatives to improve the housing conditions in working-class urban areas had, inadvertently, benefitted the professional and middle-class of Irish society, a demographic that has historically been associated with the game:

Attention is sometimes drawn to the fact that the Government policy of accelerating the erection of houses since 1922 has in effect improved the housing conditions of the better paid workers and of the middle classes and that there has been slow consequential improvement in the conditions of the poorly paid workers or of those living in insanitary areas.³¹

So too in Munster, O'Callaghan identifies a mix of elite education and suburban living as underpinning the strength of rugby in Cork from the 1870s.³² He demonstrated that rugby in Limerick acquired a broader social base over time,³³ but Cork's rugby clubs continued to be concentrated in the middle-class suburbs.³⁴ Sunday's Well has been identified by McManus as a

²⁹ Volume 1- Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1926, table 08.

³⁰ Ruth McManus, 'Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 111C (2011), p. 263.

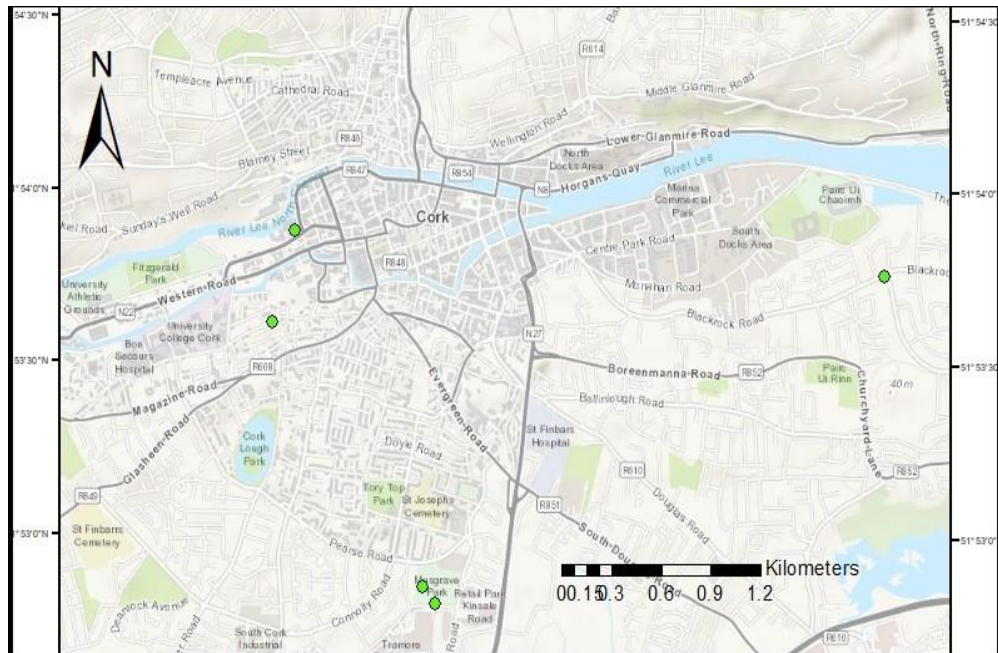
³¹ *Dáil Éireann ... , díospóireachtaí páirliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisg oifigiúil* (official report), (40:13), 18 Nov. 1931 (Dublin, Stationery Office).

³² O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 67-8.

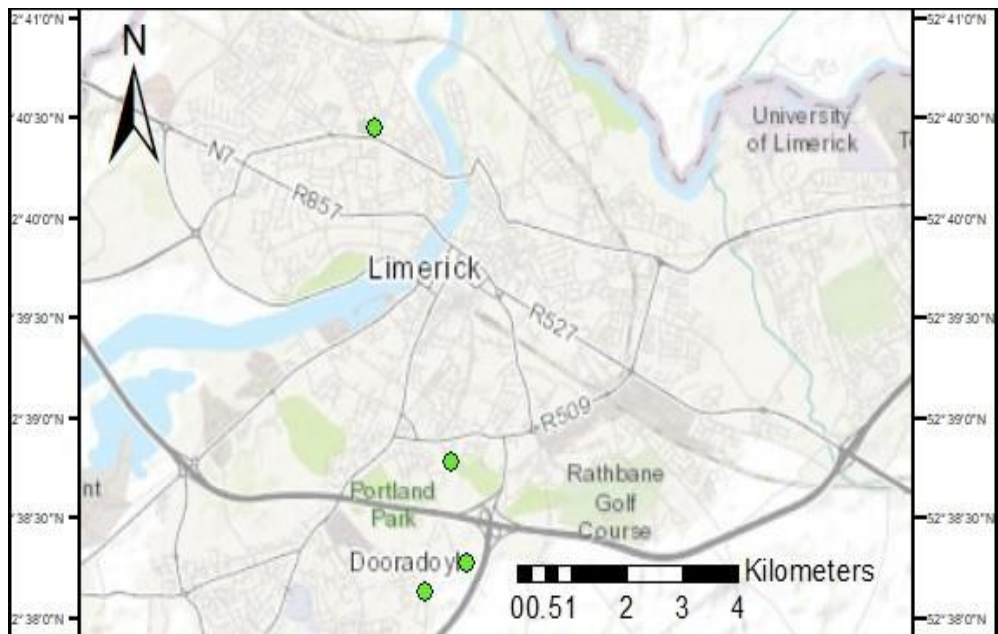
³³ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 91-110.

³⁴ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 85-91.

long-standing ‘high-status suburb’³⁵ in Cork and it, for example, spawned a prominent senior rugby club of the same name in 1906.³⁶



Map 8: Location of Cork's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.³⁷



Map 9: Location of Limerick's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50.³⁸

³⁵ Ruth McManus, ‘Brave new worlds? 150 Years of Irish suburban evolution’ in Eoghan Smith & Simon Workman(eds), *Imagining Irish suburbia in literature and culture* (Basingstoke, 2018), pp.9-37.

³⁶ *Evening echo*, 19 Oct. 1906.

³⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 23 Jan. 1925; *Irish Times*, 14 June 1962.

³⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 23 Jan. 1925; *Irish Times*, 14 June 1962.

Cork and Limerick provided the entirety of the province's senior cup entries between 1925-50. Munster Senior Cup entries comprised of the University College Cork, Sunday's Well, Constitution, Dolphin and Highfield rugby clubs were located in Cork City (1926 population of 78,490), and the Garryowen, Young Munster, Old Crescent and Bohemians rugby clubs of Limerick City (39,448).³⁹ The environs of the Young Munster club, O'Callaghan described as having been, at the turn of the twentieth century, 'a large working-class residential area including some of the city's more impoverished slums',⁴⁰ which was in contrast the other Limerick clubs who drew their strengths from middle-class suburbs.

The IRFU AGM of 1922 adopted the motion 'That steps might be taken to encourage the game in Connaught',⁴¹ reflecting the fact that the game there had not been keeping pace with development in the other provinces. A Connacht delegate at the 1931 IRFU AGM was reported to have 'referred to the western branch as "nobody's child"'. Worryingly, the player numbers reported per province confirmed that apparent under-development: 'Mr Thrift pointed out that the number of playing members in the provinces last season was: Leinster, 3606, Ulster, 2737, Munster, 1888 and Connacht 361.'⁴² This is perhaps not a surprise in the least populated province of Ireland (in 1926 it had a population of 552,907).⁴³ However, senior cup entries between 1925 and 1950 reveal that the province actually had the greatest spread of senior clubs outside of its main urban centre, Galway. Whilst the University College Galway, Corinthians and Galwegians rugby clubs were situated in Galway city (1926 population of 14,227), the provincial towns of Ballinasloe (9,819), Ballina (4,873), Sligo (11,437), Loughrea (2,805), and Roscommon (1,830) supplied a Connacht senior cup entry apiece. The elevation of clubs from these Connacht towns to senior status may reflect the fact that the clubs of the small city of Galway required senior competition whereas the game had developed

³⁹ Volume 1- Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1926, table 01

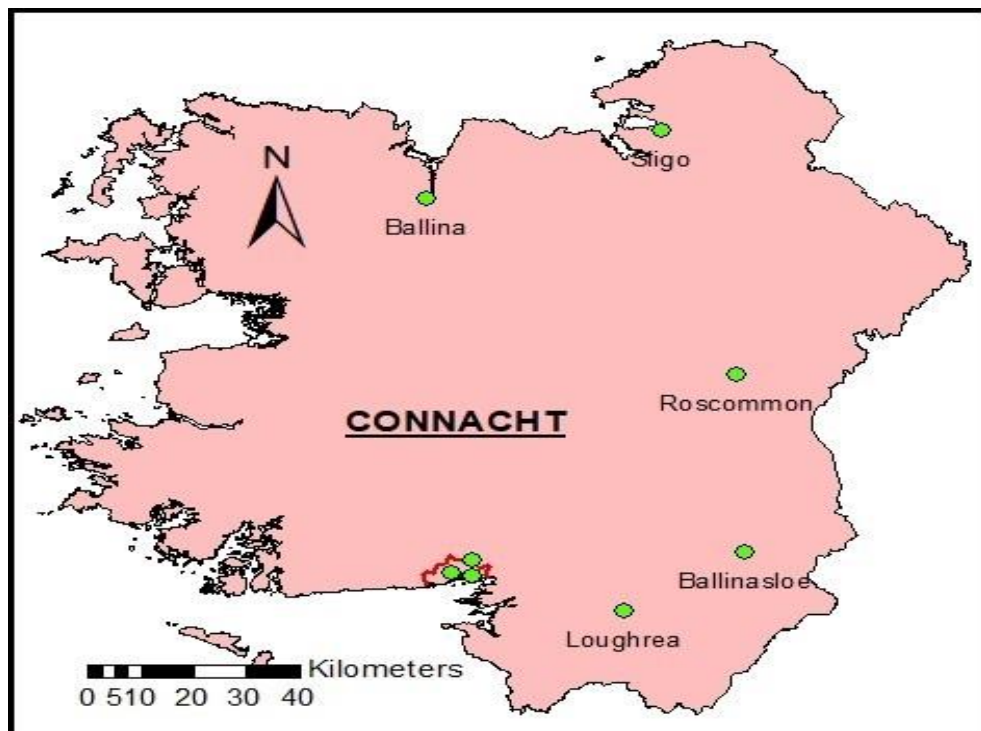
⁴⁰ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 100.

⁴¹ Minutes of the IRFU AGM, 10 Nov. 1922, Minute book of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 1894-1924, (Irish Rugby Football Union archives (IRFU), M003).

⁴² *Irish Independent*, 31 Oct. 1931.

⁴³ Volume 1- Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1926, table 08.

sufficiently in the bigger cities of the other three provinces to mitigate that need.



Map 10: Location of Connacht's senior cup rugby clubs, 1925-50 (Galway City within red boundary).⁴⁴

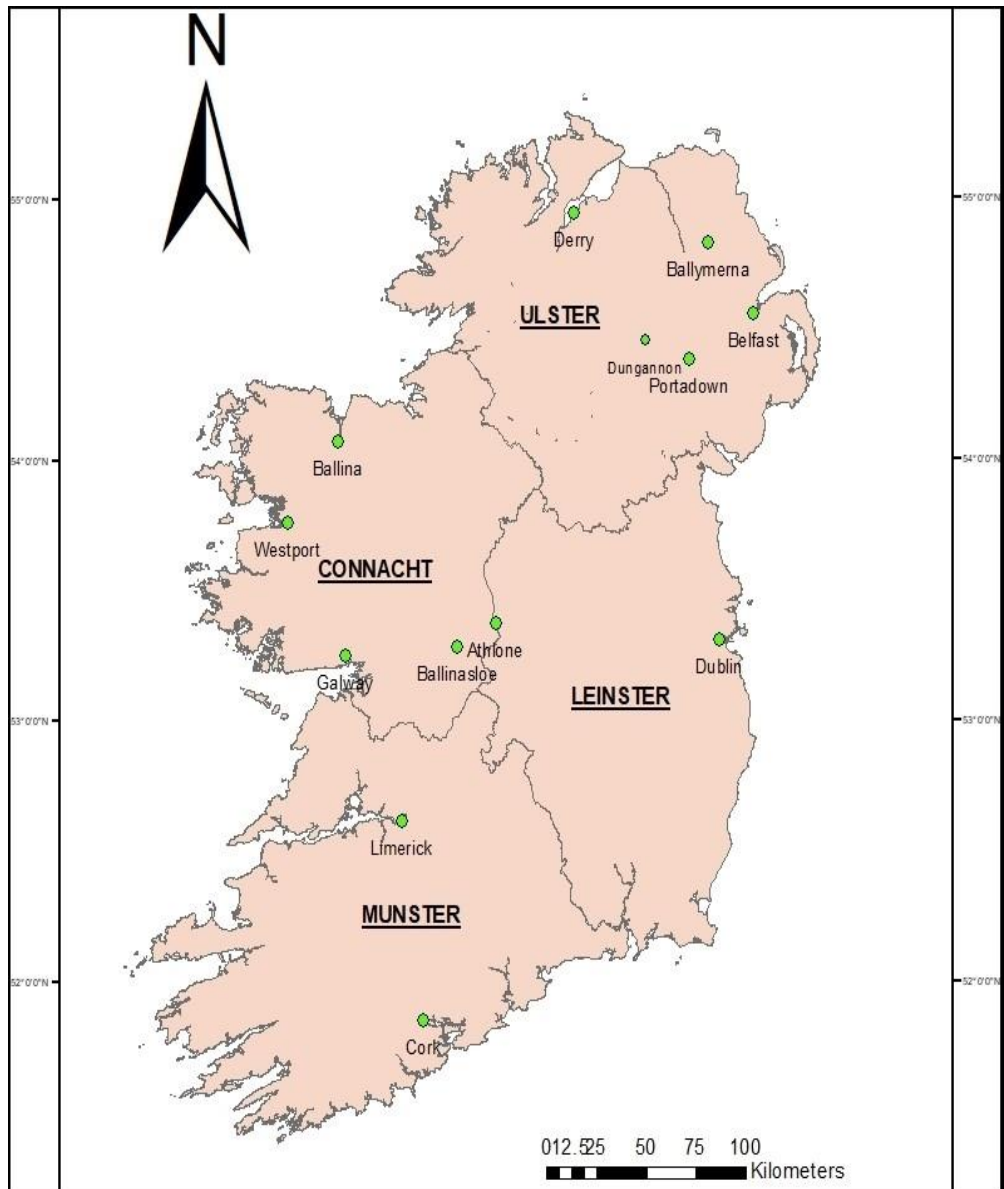
1950-70

The geographic spread of senior rugby clubs in Ireland was, between 1925 and 1950, almost entirely confined to the main urban centres. This was true of Leinster and Munster and less so in the case of Ulster and Connacht. Diarmaid Ferriter contends that ‘the substantial immigration of the rural population to urban areas, most notably Dublin, was also a pronounced feature of the post-(Second World) war era’.⁴⁵ In such a context, those key urban areas remained the environment where rugby union flourished.

Consequently, the distribution of clubs evident between 1925 and 1950, did not undergo much change between 1950 and 1970 (map 11).

⁴⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 7 Feb. 1931 and 29 Jan. 1949.

⁴⁵ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2005), p. 501.



Map 11: Location of senior cup rugby clubs (island of Ireland), 1950-70.⁴⁶

Once again, in Leinster and Munster, the senior cup entries were confined to clubs situated in Dublin, and Cork and Limerick respectively. The only new addition across those two provinces was the Shannon rugby club of Limerick, which began contesting the Munster Senior Cup, having contested the Munster Junior Cup since 1910.⁴⁷

From 1950, however, the number of provincial towns supplying senior cup entries in Ulster grew significantly. Whilst only Bangor and Lurgan had

⁴⁶ *Connacht Sentinel*, 9 Jan. 1951; *Cork Examiner*, 22 Dec. 1958; *Irish Times*, 13 Feb. 1961; *Limerick Leader*, 20 May 1957; Annual report and statements of accounts, 1969/70 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/46).

⁴⁷ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 44.

supplied teams between 1925 and 1950, teams from Ballymena (1961 population of 14,734),⁴⁸ Derry (53,762), Dungannon (6,511), and Portadown (18,609) began to feature. They competed alongside a growing list of clubs from Belfast (415,856), including the Civil Service FC, Belfast Royal Academy Former Pupils FC, and the Church of Ireland Young Mens Society FC.

In Connacht, whilst the teams situated in Sligo, Roscommon and Loughrea that had competed between 1925-50 no longer featured in the Senior Cup competition, clubs from Westport (1961 population of 2,882) and Athlone (9,624) took their place.⁴⁹ Interestingly, Athlone is a town located in County Westmeath, Leinster, albeit one situated right on the provincial boundary between Leinster and Connacht and, as we learn in chapter four, the town had links with Connacht in more sports than rugby.

Junior rugby, 1975-90

By 1972, the archival evidence informs us that nine of the Ulster Branch's thirteen senior clubs were based in Belfast, with eleven situated east of the River Bann.⁵⁰ This suggests that, at the senior level of the game, not much progress was being made in the development of the club game beyond the major cities. However, as map 12 below indicates, a much greater number of provincial towns, encompassing a wider geography, were homes to clubs that contested the Junior Cup competitions. This was true of all four provinces between 1975 and 1990. A dichotomy continued, throughout Ireland, between senior rugby clubs situated for the most part in the cities and junior rugby occupying the provincial towns. To some extent, this reflected a long-term pattern. Back in 1875 there had not only been two rugby worlds in Ulster, but (briefly) two unions:

⁴⁸ Population, towns of undefined boundary, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1961, xxix.

⁴⁹ Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1961, table 08.

⁵⁰ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1971/2 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/48).

There was the Northern Union, based in Belfast and catering for clubs in the city and immediate area. Outside of Belfast the game was governed by the Provincial Towns' Union. Among the clubs that made up the latter union were City of Derry, Dungannon, Bessbrook, Dundalk, Loughgall and Stewartstown. These were now joined by Armagh.⁵¹

Interestingly, the 'Leinster Junior Cup', first played for in 1889, had during the 1920s been rebranded as a 'Provincial Towns' Cup. Whilst intended as a competition 'for all clubs in provincial areas' it was, in reality, a competition limited 'to clubs affiliated to the Leinster Branch whose ground was situated outside a radius of eighteen miles from the GPO in Dublin'. By the late 1970s, we might consider the sponsorship of that competition by Smithwicks of the Guinness Brewery Group, to have sustained the interest of clubs such as New Ross, over 100 miles from the GPO.⁵²

In the 1920s, the Northern Branch, as it was then, acknowledged that work was required to develop the game in provincial centres:

The provincial clubs experience much difficulty in securing games, and it is hoped the city clubs will see their way, during the coming season, to give matches to these outlying teams who are making a great effort to develop and spread the rugby game in the province.⁵³

Similarly, in 1929 the Branch committee considered how to engage the game in the provincial towns of Ulster:

The committee had under consideration a suggestion that city clubs should, when possible, send teams to distant provincial centres with a view to stimulating increased interest in the game in those parts. This idea was met with wholehearted approval, and the hope was expressed that it would be carried into effect by the Belfast clubs.⁵⁴

Over the long term, for reasons discussed below, the game did gain ground in provincial towns. In 1972 the Ulster Branch reported that 'in practically all the

⁵¹ Seamus S. Duffy, *Try and try again: A centenary history of City of Armagh Rugby Football Club* (Armagh, 1976), p. 9.

⁵² *Irish Press*, 8 Nov. 1979.

⁵³ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1924/5 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/8).

⁵⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 24 Oct. 1929.

provincial towns, for instance, there is a Rugby Club, in almost every case with good grounds and facilities.⁵⁵

Connacht has been described as ‘fourth among equals’ in the hierarchy of Irish rugby.⁵⁶ Prior to this period under review, in 1973, Sean Diffley identified a ‘small and dwindling population’⁵⁷ as a demographic factor interacting negatively with rugby’s development in Connacht. In the following year, Van Esbeck alluded to unspecified ‘great difficulties’⁵⁸ contributing to the stunted or delayed development of the game in the western province. In his later assessment of why ‘Rugby, west of the Shannon was and still is underfinanced and perpetually stretched to honour its commitments to its own geographically scattered constituent organisations’, Ralph O’Gorman argued that:

Since the foundation of the [Irish Free] State the western province has suffered a dwindling population. The forecast is for a continuation of this trend. A constant and unrelenting imbalance allows the capital, Dublin to continue to grow at the expense of the increasingly scattered and thinly layered population of Connacht and many other areas of the country.⁵⁹

Paul Rouse, however, warns us against too simple a correlation between population decline and sporting participation:

Year after year, decade after decade, through the middle of the twentieth century the number of clubs organised to play sport in Ireland increased. The obvious corollary to this growth in clubs was an increase in playing membership. It is impossible to put a precise number on this growth, but while the number of people living on the island decreased until the 1960s, the numbers who joined sports clubs grew and grew.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Report of the working party on the development of rugby football, 1972 (PRONI, Irish Provincial Towns' Rugby Football Union papers, D3802/8).

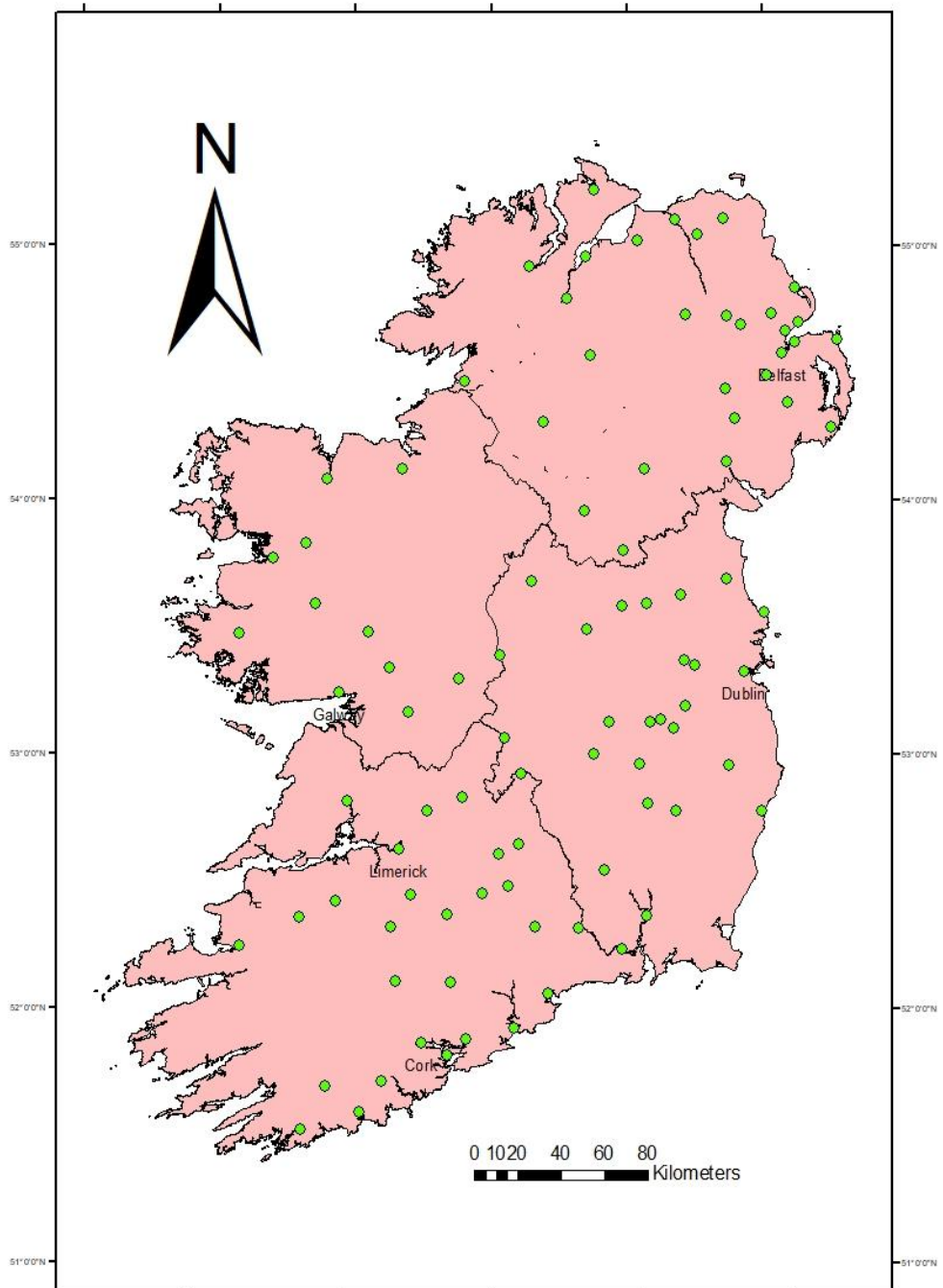
⁵⁶ Ruadhán Cooke & Éamon Ó Cofaigh, ‘IRF Off: Connacht’s Fight for Survival and the Foundation Myth of a Rugby Identity’, *The international journal of the history of sport*, 34:3-4 (2017), pp.201-16.

⁵⁷ Diffley, *The men in green.*, p. 63.

⁵⁸ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years.*, p. 110.

⁵⁹ Ralph O’Gorman, *Rugby in Connacht* (Galway, 1996) p. 12.

⁶⁰ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland.*, p. 280.



Map 12: Location of IRFU provincial junior cup entries, 1975-90.⁶¹

Overall, map 12 identifies a total of eighty-seven provincial towns in which teams competing in the Junior Cup competing were situated between 1975 and 1990: thirty in Ulster, twenty-four in Munster, twenty-three in

⁶¹ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1984/5 (PRONI, Records of the IRFU (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/61); *Nationalist & Leinster Times*, 19 Jan. 2975; *Southern Star*, 10 Feb. 1990; *Western People*, 8 Feb. 1975.

Leinster, and ten in Connacht. The average population of those provincial towns providing the teams competing in each provincial junior was the following: Ulster, 10,153; Munster, 4,260; Leinster, 5,373; and Connacht, 6,542. The average population of those provincial towns situated in the Republic of Ireland was 4,880 and the average for those situated in Northern Ireland was 12,456.⁶²

To some extent, the expansion of junior rugby into the provincial towns of Ireland illustrated in map 12, compared with the persistence of senior rugby in the five key cities (maps 6-11), will have been due to developments within the game's social base and how the game interacted with wider societal changes. Both of those factors are considered in later sections. Before that, however, we turn to the qualitative evidence regarding another factor that perhaps aided the development of junior rugby in areas where, previously, the game had gained little traction. O'Callaghan has written of how from the mid-1950s, Munster rugby reflected wider Irish society as both were experiencing 'an incipient process of modernisation', and that clubs began 'realising the revenue-generating potential of developing their own facilities'.⁶³

Notably, a throng of new clubs in provincial towns that affiliated to the Munster Branch proved particularly active in developing modern facilities between 1960 and 1975. We might consider such ventures to have both reflected and affected the extension of the game's existing urban heartlands in that province. For example, in County Limerick, on what was described as 'a historic day for Abbeyfeale, and indeed Limerick, rugby', IRFU president D.G. O'Donovan 'officially opened the new grounds and pavillion' at Abbeyfeale RFC in October 1966.⁶⁴ Only two years earlier, Abbeyfeale had won the Munster Junior Cup for the first time, defeating Nenagh by three points to nil at Thomond Park.⁶⁵

In County Cork, Youghal Rugby Club, founded in 1963, grew quickly to a point whereby they possessed their own ground, stand and clubhouse

⁶² Volume 1 – Population, Census of Ireland, 1981, table 08; Towns and villages booklet, Census of Northern Ireland, 1981.

⁶³ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 58.

⁶⁴ *Limerick Leader*, 31 Oct. 1966.

⁶⁵ *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 May 1964.

which opened in 1971.⁶⁶ Dunmanway Rugby Club, also located in County Cork, was founded in 1973 and had quickly taken up a tenancy at a 12.5-acre former racecourse site for training and the playing of matches, while their early plans included the eventual development of a clubhouse.⁶⁷ In County Tipperary, Clonmel Rugby Club, first established in 1898,⁶⁸ was revived in 1969 and it appears a successful future was linked to the provision of modern club facilities. Moreover, the targeted provincial direction of industry (discussed later in section four) was directly cited as aiding the revival of rugby in Clonmel:

With new industries coming into progressive towns like Clonmel sporting amenities are very important. In fact potential industrialists often ask what sporting amenities are available for their staff. The Clonmel Rugby Club will leave no stone unturned to provide first class amenities for their players and supporters.⁶⁹

Newport Rugby Club, also located in County Tipperary, was founded in 1971 and by 1973 had launched a fundraising campaign towards the development of facilities, 'conscious of the present day requirements to develop a strong club'.

70

More significant, unquestionably, was the development of club facilities commensurate with the game gaining a foothold in areas of Munster where the game had traditionally been less well-developed. In County Waterford, for example, when Waterpark Rugby Club progressed from junior to senior status with the Munster Branch by 1976, they stated that the 'new status brings with it new demands on the club and so the need arises to build a club pavilion befitting this status'.⁷¹ So too in County Kerry, Tralee Rugby Club applied to Listowel Circuit Court for a certificate of registration as a club in 1968 after 'the club members purchased the old golf course links and clubhouse in Tralee and were in the process of reconstructing the clubhouse'.⁷²

⁶⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 4 Oct. 1971; *Evening Echo*, 29 Mar. 1976.

⁶⁷ *Evening Echo*, 23 July 1973.

⁶⁸ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 34.

⁶⁹ *The Nationalist* (Tipperary), 28 June 1975.

⁷⁰ *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 June 1973.

⁷¹ *Munster Express*, 26 Aug. 1977.

⁷² *Cork Examiner*, 20 June 1968.

In Leinster, where the growth in club affiliation was not as intense as that in Munster during this period, the development of new club facilities was less frequently reported upon. Exceptions include Seapoint Rugby Club in Dublin who in 1972, ‘after 38 years of frustration ... directed two architects to draw up plans for two football pitches and a pavilion and bar at Kilbogget, Cabinteely’.⁷³

Facilities improved in the other provinces too. In Connacht, the opening of a ‘new £13,000 pavilion and playing grounds’ at Sligo Rugby Club in 1971, was said to provide ‘modern sporting and social facilities which are the ambition of many older clubs’.⁷⁴ In Ulster, Enniskillen Rugby Club was reported in 1981 to have ‘grown enormously since in numbers and popularity since it acquired extensive grounds at Mullaghmeen ... [ensuring the provision of] what must be the outstanding rugby premises of any club in Ireland’.⁷⁵

Concluding this period under review, former Irish Rugby Union international player and coach Mick Doyle tacitly recognised the urbanisation, or perhaps provincialisation, of rugby in Ireland by the 1990s, when stating that a ‘ruralizing (of) the game’⁷⁶ was the next logical step for the IRFU to take in order to broaden its player base. Rugby by the early 1990s remained an urban phenomenon, albeit a more broadly distributed one, reaching more consistently beyond the cities and with a strong base in provincial towns.

3.3: Rugby’s social base and its development.

In 1973 Sean Diffley described rugby in Ireland as ‘a fairly conservative commodity’⁷⁷ Such a representation of the social base of rugby was shared at that time by Edmund Van Esbeck, who stressed the key role played by elite educational establishments, such as Dublin University, in the game’s dissemination throughout Ireland.⁷⁸ That the historiographical consensus

⁷³ *Evening Herald*, 11 May 1972.

⁷⁴ First established in the late nineteenth century, the club had been revived from a hiatus in the mid-1960s, *Sligo Champion*, 15 Jan. 1971.

⁷⁵ *Fermanagh Herald*, 16 May 1981.

⁷⁶ Mick Doyle, ‘As equal as the next man’ in Patrick O’Dea (ed.), *A class of our own: Conversations about class in Ireland* (Dublin, 1994), pp 139-55.

⁷⁷ Diffley, *The men in green*, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, pp 13-7; see also Diffley, *The men in green*, p. 18.

coalesces around the central role of elite educational establishments in the game's development in Ireland is indisputable. Indeed, Nauright suggested the role elite education played in promoting the game in Ireland was felt particularly 'among the middle and upper classes'.⁷⁹ If this was most obvious in Dublin such links were not unique to that city. On at least one occasion prior to the First World War, the North of Ireland Football Club, based in Belfast, suggested socio-economic ties between their membership and the game's traditional base in Dublin:

The North of Ireland Football Club is the leading rugby club in Ulster and shares with Dublin University the front position in Ireland, and its members are all of the public school and university class, some of the leading Belfast merchants and professional men.⁸⁰

Richard Holt has written that 'rugby began in Ireland as an elite game',⁸¹ and, in the case of Munster, O'Callaghan has written that 'the social appeal of rugby football in Munster was limited to a narrow group of middle and upper-class men', though this class base would become more diverse in the case of Limerick.⁸²

The conceived wisdom regarding the social base of rugby in Ireland then, is that it has been underpinned by elite educational settings, and that it has been rooted among those invariably described as being of the middle, upper or professional classes. That such an assumption, however pervasive, may be (at least to some extent) subjective and ambiguous,⁸³ necessitates a careful consideration. Thus, this section will first explore the realm of schools' rugby in Ireland, its role as a vital cog in the game's social base in Ireland and how it interacted with wider educational reform, and the role it has served. Second, and unquestionably overlapping with educational attainment, it considers if the consensus regarding rugby's supposed dependence upon Ireland's professional classes is justified. Third, it will consider the impact that the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games had on the social base of rugby in Ireland.

⁷⁹ Nauright, *Sports around the world*, p. 179.

⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 23 Dec. 1913.

⁸¹ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 245.

⁸² O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 67.

⁸³ Salar Mohandesi, 'Class consciousness or class composition?', *Science & Society*, 77:1 (2013), p. 75.

Schools' rugby in Ireland

The importance of schools to the history of rugby union is grounded in the very foundational myth of that game – that one day at Rugby School in 1823 William Webb Ellis ‘first took the ball in his arms and ran with it’.⁸⁴ In Ireland, the prestigious Ulster and Leinster Senior Schools Cup competitions, that date to 1876⁸⁵ and 1887⁸⁶ respectively, connect schools closely to the game’s earliest development, the former actually predating the formation of the IRFU in 1879. What follows considers the development of schools rugby in Ireland during a time period that overlaps with significant reform within the education systems, particularly as access to education increased upon the introduction of free secondary education in Northern Ireland (1947) and the Republic of Ireland (1967).

O’Callaghan has written that, ‘in reality, rugby within southern Irish educational culture has historically had a decidedly Catholic and competitive flavour ... The Munster Schools Senior Cup was established in 1909 and has historically been dominated by Catholic schools’.⁸⁷ Elite (private) Catholic schools in Dublin had historically dominated schools rugby there also. For example, Blackrock College’s success in the 1929 Leinster Senior Schools Cup was their twenty-eighth victory in a competition that had ‘only been in existence for a little over forty years’.⁸⁸ Protestant schools appear to have been more important within the small community that was Connacht schools rugby. For example, St Joseph’s College, Garbally Park, Ballinasloe, a Catholic secondary school, defeated Galway and Sligo grammar schools, both Protestant, in the senior and junior schools cup finals respectively in 1938.⁸⁹

Whether Protestant or Catholic, these schools facilitated the education of a privileged minority. In Ulster, what became Northern Ireland’s voluntary grammar school sector included the traditional powerhouses of the game such

⁸⁴ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 85.

⁸⁵ *Freeman’s Journal*, 29 Feb. 1876.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 24 Mar. 1887.

⁸⁷ O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 118.

⁸⁸ *Sunday Independent*, 24 Mar. 1929.

⁸⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 25 Mar. 1938.

as Royal Belfast Academical Institution and Royal School Armagh who contested the first Ulster Schools Cup final in 1876.⁹⁰ Those schools continued to dominate this level of the game, providing all but one of the entrants to the 1945 edition of that tournament, Cavan Royal School being the only Ulster Schools Cup entry from outside the six Ulster counties of Northern Ireland. It too drew from a narrow and privileged social base.

Pre-war the opportunity for education reform in Northern Ireland had been scuppered by both the violence that engulfed the birth of Northern Ireland and the non-co-operation of the Catholic minority with bodies such as the Lynn Committee of 1923.⁹¹ In the south, the secondary education available was characterised by a neglect of scientific subjects and limited accessibility, both factors that contributed to poor Irish economic performance.⁹²

The proposed reform of secondary education in Great Britain, revealed by a government white paper of 1943 (Educational Reconstruction),⁹³ likely contributed to an increased demand for improved secondary education in Northern Ireland, commensurate with the British proposals.⁹⁴ Growing out of this, the aftermath of the Second World War is said to have focused and energised the minds of both the government and the electorate, towards ‘a restructuring of the entire education system’⁹⁵ in Northern Ireland. Until then, only ten local authority secondary schools existed in Northern Ireland within a wider system that largely catered to the better off.⁹⁶ That was soon swept away by the Education Act (Northern Ireland) of 1947. It provided that:

⁹⁰ Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 1944/5 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/16); those schools contested the first Ulster Schools Cup final in 1896, *Freemans Journal*, 29 Feb. 1876.

⁹¹ See N.C. Fleming, ‘The First Government of Northern Ireland, Education Reform and the Failure of Anti-Populist Unionism, 1921–1925’, *Twentieth century British history*, 18:2 (2007), pp 146-69.

⁹² Tom Garvin, *Preventing the future: Why was Ireland so poor for so long?* (Dublin, 2004), pp 8-24.

⁹³ *Burnley Express*, 31 July 1943.

⁹⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 Aug. 1943.

⁹⁵ Donald Harman Akenson, *Education and enmity The control of Northern Ireland schooling 1920-50* (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 146.

⁹⁶ Thomas Joseph Durcan, *History of Irish education since 1800* (Bala, 1972), p. 188.

It shall be the duty of every local education authority to secure that there shall be available for their area sufficient schools — for providing secondary education, that is to say, full-time education suitable to the requirements of senior pupils.⁹⁷

Comparable reform in the Republic of Ireland did not emerge until a historic announcement by the education minister Donogh O'Malley in 1966, that free secondary education would be provided for all from September 1967.⁹⁸ Whilst the timing led some to refer to the Republic of Ireland as a 'late starter',⁹⁹ nonetheless, the result was a system consisting of both fee paying and non-fee paying secondary schools, the latter including vocational, community and comprehensive schools.¹⁰⁰

In order to assess how such reform impacted upon schools rugby in Ireland, a breakdown of provincial school affiliation data in both parts of Ireland, for the decades following the reform, is provided below. In the case of Ulster, the author's processing of archival affiliation data is presented alongside Northern Ireland education statistics (table 6). From our point of view, it is convenient that in 1968, one year after the introduction of free secondary education in the Republic of Ireland, there begins an unbroken twenty-year stretch of detailed IRFU provincial schools' affiliation statistics relating to Leinster, Munster and Connacht (table 7).

⁹⁷ Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1947, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1947/3/contents> [accessed 10 Nov. 2020].

⁹⁸ *Irish Times*, 12 Sept. 1966.

⁹⁹ Richard Breen & Christopher T. Whelan, *Social mobility and social class in Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), p. 98.

¹⁰⁰ Tracy Bradfield and Frank Crowley, 'The demand for fee-paying secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland', *Irish educational studies*, 38:3 (2019), pp 359-75.

Year	Second level schools (NI)	Ulster Branch affiliated schools	Grammar schools (NI)	Secondary /other schools (NI)	Schools outside NI
1950	120	36	28	7	1
1955	134	37	29	7	1
1960	211	42	29	12	1
1965	254	47	33	13	1
1970	266	49	32	17	0
1975	261	45	32	13	0
1980	262	58	38	20	0
1985	260	76	40	36	0

Table 6: Ulster Branch affiliated schools 1950-85, by type of school.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹Annual report and statements of accounts, 1949/50 – 1984/5 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/26-61); Report of the Ministry of Education, 1950-73 (HMSO, Belfast, Cmd. 307-585); Northern Ireland annual abstract of statistics, 1982 & 1985 (HMSO, Belfast, Policy Planning and Research Unit, Department of Finance and Personnel).

Year	Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Total
1968	31	12	2	45
1970	32	14	8	54
1972	38	15	8	61
1974	42	16	8	66
1976	39	15	10	64
1978	42	13	12	67
1980	46	16	11	73
1982	45	17	12	74
1984	52	17	11	80
1986	52	16	11	79
1988	53	24	12	89

Table 7: IRFU school affiliations by province (Republic of Ireland), 1968-88.¹⁰²

In 1945, aside from Cavan Royal School, the remaining twenty-four schools affiliated to the Ulster Branch were located in Northern Ireland, and were exclusively drawn from the elite voluntary grammar school sector, including traditional powerhouses of the game such as Royal Belfast Academical Institution and Royal School Armagh.¹⁰³ The reform of education did not see an end to these institutions. In 1966, the Northern Ireland minister for education, Captain William Long, urged caution regarding the speed and breadth of that change. ‘It is not my intention,’ he stated. ‘to attempt to impose a uniform comprehensive system on the whole of Northern Ireland, which would mean the end of our grammar schools as we know them today.’¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Minute book of the IRFU, 1967-88 (IRFU archives (IRFU), M015-20).

¹⁰³ Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 1944/5 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/16).

¹⁰⁴ *Second session of the eleventh parliament of Northern Ireland, 15 Elizabeth II, House of Commons, volume 65*, (1966, 67), 15 Dec. 1966.

The creation of a larger, more accessible, education system under the 1947 Act did lead to greater social mobility and the growth of a Catholic middle class that had emerged by the mid-late 1960s.¹⁰⁵ That said, not only did the elite grammar schools stay in place, they remained at the heart of rugby, with an Ulster Branch report published in 1972 noting that:

It is easily forgotten that the majority of boys of Secondary age in Ulster are to be found in non-Rugby Schools. The game is, in effect, confined to the Grammar Schools – and not all of these, either, since some play Gaelic games or Hockey only – and a few Secondary schools in the Belfast area ... The Secondary Schools, in most cases relatively new, have no Rugby tradition and, more to the point, usually draw their pupils from Soccer-playing backgrounds.¹⁰⁶

By the early 1970s, if voluntary grammar schools still dominated affiliations to the Ulster Branch, the game was no longer confined there, the data above demonstrating that rugby in Ulster consolidated and expanded its existing base while also developing a new base in an unfamiliar setting, the non-elite school. At that point this shift was exclusive to Northern Ireland given its earlier embrace of free education. Almost three in ten of all second level schools in Northern Ireland in 1950 (around 29 per cent), had rugby teams affiliated to the Ulster Branch. At that point there were four times as many grammar schools affiliated compared to secondary/other schools (twenty-eight as opposed to seven). By 1985, it was still true that almost three in ten of all second level schools in Northern Ireland were affiliated to the Ulster Branch (around 29 per cent). By then, however, the overall number of schools had climbed significantly while the Ulster Branch attracted the allegiance of an almost equal number of grammar schools and secondary (and other) schools (forty as opposed to thirty-six).

Evidently, affiliation from the secondary sector was increasing at a faster rate for most of the period between 1950 and 1985. In 1950, seven such schools affiliated to the Ulster Branch alongside twenty-eight voluntary grammar schools in Northern Ireland plus Cavan Royal School in the Republic

¹⁰⁵ Michael McKeown, 'Anatomy of a myth: The impact of the 1947 education act upon Roman Catholic access to academic secondary education in Northern Ireland, 1947-67', *Irish educational studies*, 16:1 (1997), pp 213-22.

¹⁰⁶ Report of the working party on the development of rugby football, 1972 (PRONI, Irish Provincial Towns' Rugby Football Union papers, D3802/8).

of Ireland. The number of secondary schools had more than doubled to seventeen by 1970, and from there that number doubled again to thirty-seven secondary schools by 1990.

Thus, over a period of around forty years the Ulster Branch had succeeded in incorporating a new and untapped educational setting into the schools base of their game. This was a significant achievement. Notably, Joanne Hughes has written that ‘although state-controlled schools have an “open” enrolment policy, they remain Protestant in character’.¹⁰⁷ In 1960, for instance, we learn that three of the new Belfast secondary schools for boys that had affiliated to the Ulster Branch, those from Northern Ireland’s ‘controlled’ education sector, were Mountcollyer Intermediate School (Clifton ward), Ashfield Boys Intermediate School (Victoria ward), and Ballygomartin Secondary School (Woodvale ward). Those were situated in electoral wards of Belfast that, in 1961, were approximately 52 per cent (Clifton), 85 per cent (Victoria) and 83 per cent (Woodvale) Protestant in their religious composition.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, whilst theoretically non-denominational in character, these schools were and remain largely Protestant in composition.¹⁰⁹

New schools from non-traditional faith backgrounds began to affiliate, such as St Patrick Catholic Grammar School in Downpatrick in 1960,¹¹⁰ and also schools from the secondary sector. For instance, Brownlow College in Craigavon, County Armagh, which later became Northern Ireland’s first school to change to an integrated religious status in 1991,¹¹¹ had affiliated to the Ulster Branch at some point between 1985 and 1990.

Turning to the south, in 1967 the Leinster Branch deemed that efforts were required to improve ‘the level of teaching of rugby in many schools and [noted] the necessity to assist with the “teaching of teachers”’.¹¹² It is not an accident that this coincided with the shift to the provision of free secondary education in the Republic of Ireland. Just five months after the introduction of

¹⁰⁷ Joanne Hughes, ‘Are separate schools divisive? A case study from Northern Ireland’, *British educational research journal*, 37:5 (2011), p. 835.

¹⁰⁸ Belfast County Borough report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.cssni.org.uk/about-us/controlled-education-sector> [accessed 9 Dec. 2020].

¹¹⁰ <https://www.spgs.org.uk/ethos-mission-aims> [accessed 9 Dec. 2020].

¹¹¹ <https://brownlowcollege.co.uk/about-us/integration/> [accessed 9 Dec. 2020].

¹¹² *Irish Times*, 11 Jan. 1967.

free second-level education there, the IRFU appointed a Schools Standing Committee in January 1968, to ‘consider and make recommendations to the IRFU committee regarding measures for the encouragement of rugby football in the schools’.¹¹³ Again, we must surely consider that this was a reaction on the part of rugby’s administrators to the introduction of free secondary education. They recognised, it seems, that work was required to extend their influence into a previously untapped educational sector.

The affiliation data above demonstrates that those efforts were a success. Between 1968 and 1988, schools rugby in the Republic of Ireland grew significantly in the three southern provinces, almost doubling in that time (from forty-five schools to eighty-nine). In Munster alone, school affiliations doubled in that time (from twelve schools to twenty-four). Leinster, beginning that period with by far the largest schools base, added an additional twenty-two schools (from thirty-one schools to fifty-three). Although, as usual, starting from a lower base Connacht did achieve a six-fold increase in school affiliations between 1968 and 1988 (from two schools to twelve).

In Leinster, where elite schools with rich rugby traditions had dominated the game, educational reform does not appear to have been as impactful as in Munster and Connacht, perhaps because the game’s base in that province had been established many decades prior to 1967. Despite having been the IRFU’s poor relation for generations, it is perhaps in Connacht where the clearest impact of widening access to secondary education was visible within rugby. Writing in the *Irish Times* in 1975, Edmund Van Esbeck pointed to Clifden Community School, a Franciscan College which in that year made only their second ever appearance in the final of the Connacht Senior Schools Cup,¹¹⁴ as proof of how the game was growing in schools. The school had introduced rugby to the curriculum as recently as 1968 and had, by 1974, won the Connacht Juvenile Cup and League.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Van Esbeck contended

¹¹³ *Irish Times*, 24 Jan. 1968.

¹¹⁴ Clifden won the game, played at the Galway sportsground against St Joseph’s College, Garbally Park, by ten points to six, *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 1975.

¹¹⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 4 Jan. 1974.

that this was a remarkable achievement given their location ‘in the unlikely rugby territory of Connemara’.¹¹⁶

The impact of widening access to secondary education on rugby in Munster appears both intriguing and somewhat indirect. Only one additional Munster school affiliated to the IRFU in the first decade that followed the introduction of free secondary education (1968-78). The impact of education reform, according to Tony Farnar, was that the key to social mobility ‘was no longer inherited wealth, but secondary and third-level education’.¹¹⁷ As O’Callaghan has demonstrated, the professional and middle classes were crucial to the early development of rugby in Cork during the late nineteenth century,¹¹⁸ and it is clear this continued into the post-partition era also. Consequently, we find that the 265 per cent increase in university educated persons in Munster between 1971 and 1991 offered the game fruitful soil.¹¹⁹ Arguably, the process then was somewhat more indirect than one might imagine at first glance. Increased access to education enlarged the middle-class and it was this over time, it seems, that drove the growth of the game, including in schools.

Rugby in Ireland and the professional class(es)

Historically, the key stepping stones towards the echelons of the professional class in the Republic of Ireland, secondary and third level education, are said to have been a preserve of the middle classes, who were poised to take advantage of new opportunities whilst being resistant to radical institutional change.¹²⁰ Consequently, it may be said that free secondary education provided the foundation upon which the middle class of Munster grew considerably, and thus replenished a crucial and historically significant socio-economic base to

¹¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 1975.

¹¹⁷ Tony Farnar, *Privileged lives: A social history of middle-class Ireland 1882-1989* (Dublin, 2010), pp 195-6.

¹¹⁸ O’Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 72.

¹¹⁹ Volume 12 – Education, scientific and technological qualifications, Census of Ireland, 1971, table 12; and Volume 9 – Education, Census of Ireland, 1991, table 08.

¹²⁰ C. Whelan and D. Hannan, ‘Trends in educational inequality in the Republic of Ireland’, *ESRI working paper no. 100*, (Dublin, 1998), <https://www.esri.ie/publications/trends-in-educational-inequality-in-the-republic-of-ireland-an-analysis-of-the-1994> [accessed 15 Nov. 2021]; Farnar, *Ordinary lives*, p. 170.

the game in that province.¹²¹ Significantly, by the late 1990s, over 80 per cent of workforce entrants in the Republic of Ireland had completed secondary education and over 40 per cent had experienced some third-level education; this latter figure compares favourably with the EU average of 20 per cent.¹²² The potential for an overlap between an expansion of schools rugby and greater social mobility, both as a result of widening access to secondary education, is intriguing. It underpins schools' rugby's role as perhaps the most important layer in the social base of the game in Ireland. Moreover, the wider societal value of enhanced educational access and attainment, connects to at least one of the most strongly held assumptions concerning the social base of the game in Ireland, that exemplified by Diffley's confident assertion regarding the professional classes:

Rugby in Ireland, it is true ... is certainly not the game of the people as it is in Wales and New Zealand, and its committed followers, players and officials, come mainly from the university and professional classes.¹²³

The census of Ireland in 1881 had defined the 'professional classes' as comprising 194,684 persons from three orders: 1) persons engaged in the general or local government of the country; 2) those in the army or navy; and 3) those in the clerical, legal and medical professions; also teachers, literary and scientific persons, engineers and artists.¹²⁴ Following the partition of Ireland, the 1926 Census of Ireland enumerated those employed in 'professional occupations (excluding clerks)',¹²⁵ and the Census of Northern Ireland enumerated those under the occupational group 'professions'.¹²⁶ In combination, those statistical sources are sufficient to allow an exploration of how Ireland's male professional class interacted with the development of men's club rugby in Ireland between 1930 and 1980 (fig. 3).

¹²¹ In England, an expanding base to schools rugby beyond its traditional sector of the public schools and Oxbridge is also evident; see Tony Collins, 'Amateurism and the Rise of Managerialism: The Case of Rugby Union, 1871–1995', *Sport in history*, 30:1 (2010), pp 104–20.

¹²² Eleanor O'Higgins, 'Government and the creation of the Celtic Tiger: Can management maintain the momentum?', *The academy of management executive*, 16:3 (2002), p. 106.

¹²³ Diffley, *The men in green*, p. 15.

¹²⁴ General report, Census of Ireland, 1881, p. 21.

¹²⁵ Volume 2- Occupations, Census of Ireland 1926, table 01.

¹²⁶ Industrial distribution of the occupied population, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1926, *xlvi*.

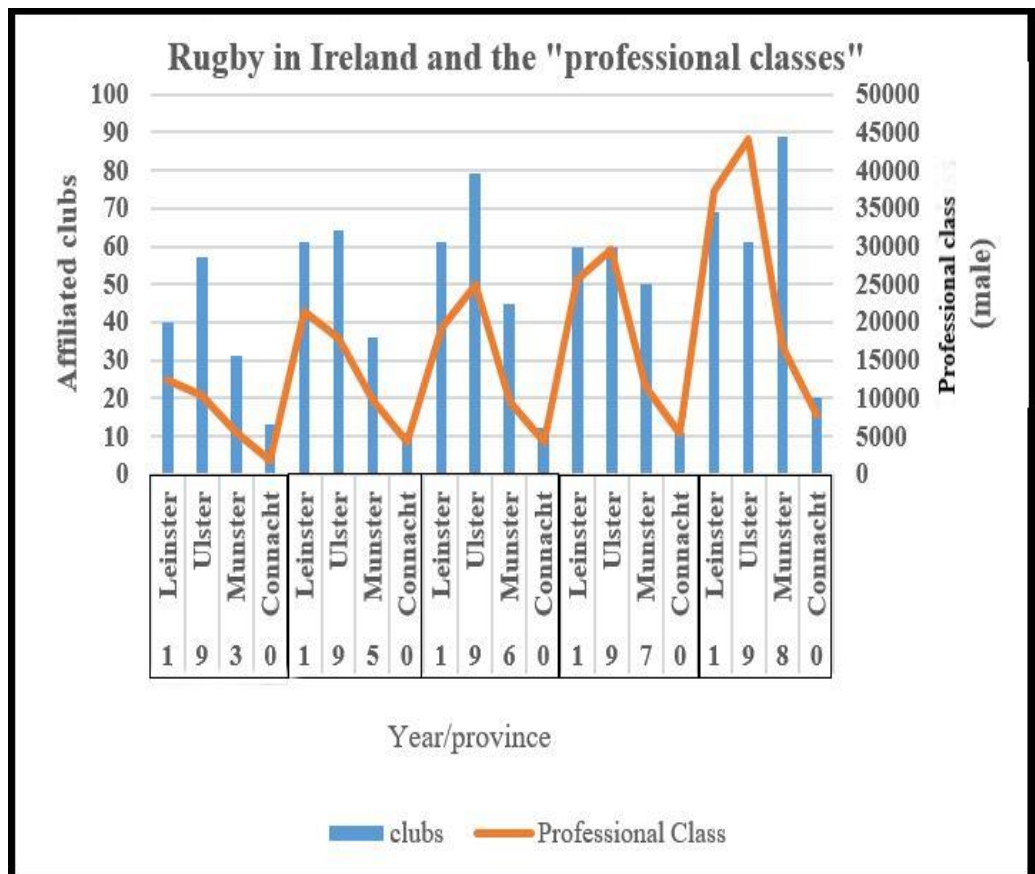


Fig.3: Chart plotting the number of provincial rugby club affiliations in Ireland (bar), and the number of male professional occupations by province (line), 1930-80.¹²⁷

The data above suggests the supposed association between rugby and the professional classes of Ireland, is not as simplistic as the preconceived wisdom might suggest. The professional cohort grew in Leinster (from 12,282 to 37,348) and Ulster (from 10,297 to 44,173), between 1930 and 1980. That is to be expected, perhaps, given that the economies of Dublin and Belfast, those most likely to cater to and sustain professional occupations, are included in those provincial totals respectively. In fact, the professional cohort across the island of Ireland grew consistently across the period, totalling in 1930 (29,967), in 1950 (53,412), in 1960 (57,830), in 1970 (71,849), and in 1980 (106,163). The only blip in that growth across half a century for the provinces of Ulster and Leinster occurred when the professional cohort dipped in Leinster during the 1950s (from 21,416 in 1950 to 19,229 in 1960). This may have been a

¹²⁷ Minute book of the IRFU, 1930-80 (IRFU archives, M005-18); Occupations, Census of Ireland: 1926, 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981; Industrial distribution of the occupied population, Census of Northern Ireland: 1926, 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981.

direct effect of the economic depression of that decade, which will be discussed in the following section.

That provincial club affiliation charted a fairly similar trajectory to the size of the professional class of the provinces, demonstrates mild correlation rather than any degree of causation. From the dataset, it is possible to determine the number of professional occupations in a province per affiliated rugby club there; this will be referred to below by a unit representing professional occupation/affiliated club (p/c). If a crude calculation that will not encapsulate some of the other complex interactions that comprised the social base of the game in Ireland, it does allow for some headline statistics concerning the assumption identified at the outset of this section.

In 1930, we might hold Leinster, or rugby in Leinster to be more precise, to have been the province most dependent on a professional class base (307 p/c), far in excess of, in descending order, Ulster (181 p/c), Munster (179 p/c), and Connacht (142 p/c). By 1950, the stagnation and marginal decline in club affiliations in Connacht (eleven in 1950 as opposed to thirteen in 1930), meant it was now the province whose club affiliation was most dependent on a professional class base (393 p/c). The contemporary situation in the other provinces was Leinster (351 p/c), Ulster (281 p/c), or Munster (270 p/c).

By 1970, perhaps as a result of its club base having dwindled over the previous decade (sixty affiliated clubs in 1970 as opposed to seventy-nine in 1960), Ulster was now the province most dependent on its professional class base (491 p/c). The growth of the game in the southern border counties of Ulster beginning around 1970, as detailed in Chapter One, saw it expand into an area with a tiny professional class (2,197 in 1970). It is also possible that in the context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the game may have retreated, to some extent, temporarily to consolidate around its Belfast heartland, resulting in the Ulster club affiliation interacting with Belfast's professional class more than in the previous decade. Consequently, perhaps, Ulster measured 724 p/c in 1980, far exceeding both Leinster (541 p/c) and Connacht (390 p/c).

The most significant calculation made in relation to 1980 was that concerning Munster. Club affiliations had been booming in that province for at

least two decades, reaching eighty-nine affiliated clubs by 1980. Evidently, the game in Munster (189 p/c in 1980) was not reliant on a professional class base to sustain this development. That reality should lead us to significantly nuance some of the lazier assumptions regarding the social base of rugby in Ireland offered by Diffley and Van Esbeck during the 1970s. The social base of the game in Ireland was, it is clear, somewhat more diverse across the four provinces across, and across the post-partition decades, than some of the preconceived wisdom would lead us to believe.

Did the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games affect rugby?

As was outlined in chapter one, when discussing Ulster, between 1884 and 1971 rugby was among the ‘foreign games’ that the GAA prohibited its members from playing, promoting or attending. Liam O’Callaghan has discussed the deleterious effects that ‘the ban’ had on rugby, in rhetoric and in practice, during the 1920s and 1930s.¹²⁸ The analysis that follows seeks to throw some light on whether the lifting of ‘the ban’ in 1971 had any substantive impact on rugby in Ireland. As noted, school affiliations were recorded in the IRFU annual report of 1968 for the first time, and thus began an unbroken twenty-year period of annual provincial affiliation statistics (fig. 4). Provincial affiliation statistics for IRFU clubs, in addition, are at hand for the period between 1971 and 1987 (fig. 5):

¹²⁸ Liam O’Callaghan, ‘Rugby football and identity politics in Free State Ireland’, *Éire-Ireland*, 48:1-2 (2013), pp 148-67.

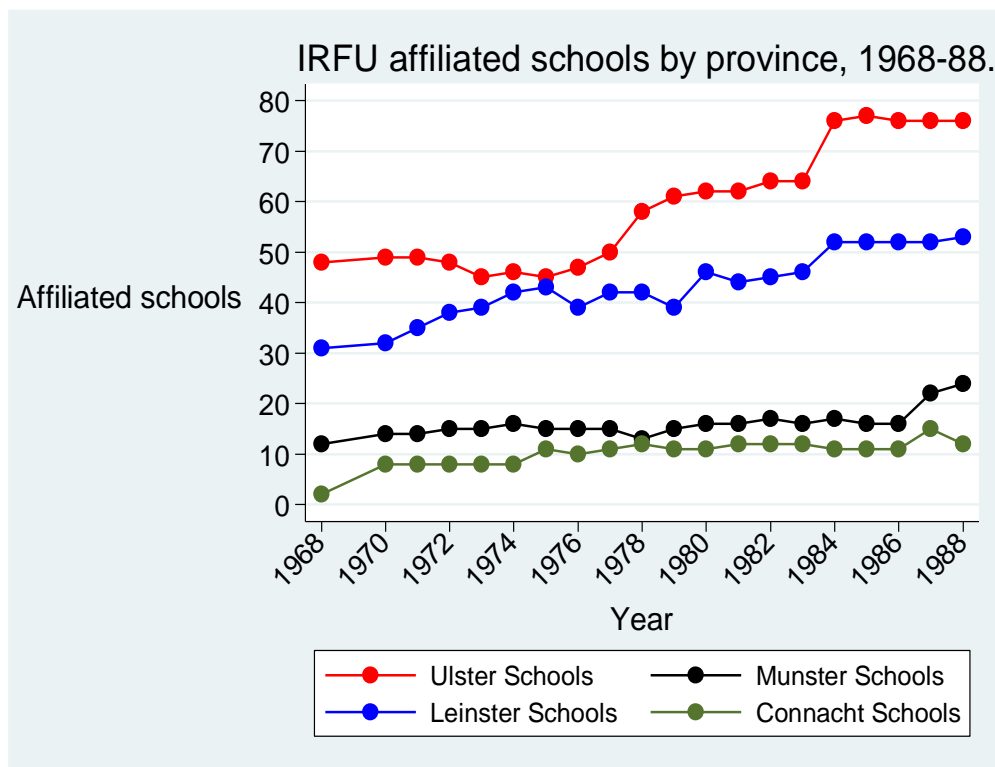


Fig.4: IRFU affiliated schools by province, 1968-88.¹²⁹

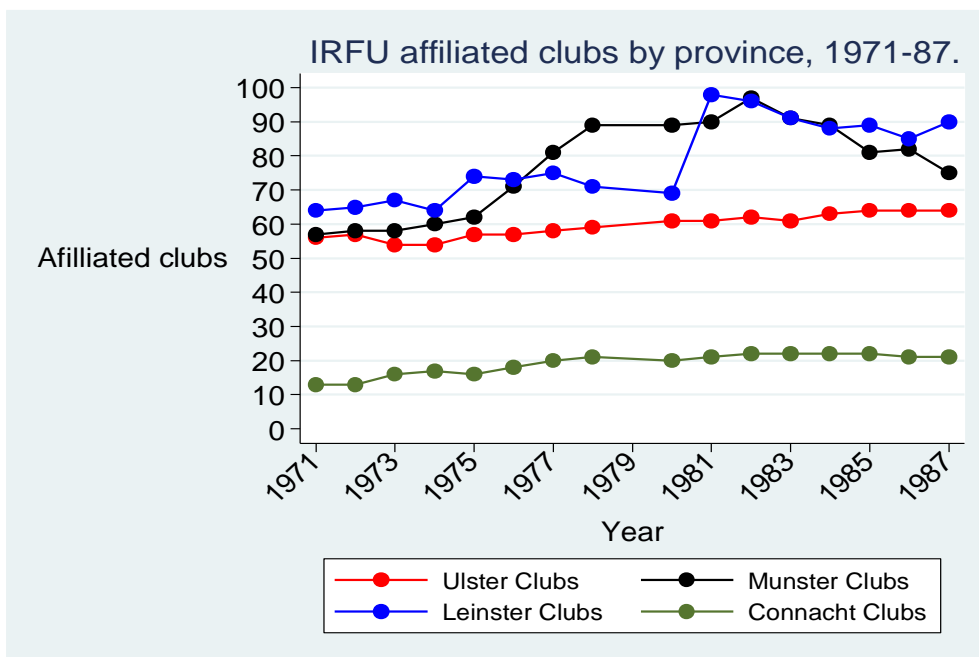


Fig.5: IRFU affiliated clubs by province, 1971-87.¹³⁰

The data above suggests that the health of schools rugby in Ireland improved considerably in the years after the lifting of the ban. For instance, the

¹²⁹ Minute book of the IRFU, 1968-88, (IRFU archives, M015-20).

¹³⁰ Minute book of the IRFU, 1968-88 (IRFU archives, M016-19).

provincial growth in schools affiliations ranged from a six-fold one in Connacht (from two schools in 1968 to twelve in 1988); a 100 per cent increase in Munster (from twelve to twenty-four); a 71 per cent increase in Leinster (from thirty-one to fifty-three); to a 58 per cent increase in Ulster (from forty-eight to seventy-six). So too in club rugby. When a measurement of provincial club affiliation in the year the ban was lifted (1971) is compared to a figure sixteen years later (1987), the change in affiliation figures is striking: the increase ranged from a 62 per cent increase in Connacht (from thirteen clubs to twenty-one); a 41 per cent increase in Leinster (sixty-four to ninety); a 32 per cent increase in Munster (from fifty-seven to seventy-five); to a 14 per cent increase in Ulster (fifty-six to sixty-four). As was described in chapter one, Ulster's sporting divisions were sustained by structural factors more important than the ban, but the lifting of that may have had some effect across all four provinces.

In April 1971, the participation of Mayo's Ray Prendergast and Galway's Liam O'Neill, two prominent Gaelic footballers, in a Castlebar XV that won an annual Easter rugby tournament in Connacht, was reported as 'the first immediate effects' of the ban having been lifted.¹³¹ Ireland's 'top' rugby referee, Kevin Kelleher, foresaw the opportunity for rugby to develop once it had emerged from that long shadow, remarking that 'those prejudices are not so much among the young people as the older members of the community'.¹³² By early 1974, Martin Newell, a former Galway Gaelic footballer who had since progressed to representative level in rugby with Connacht, and Ned Byrne, a forward with Wanderers RFC in Dublin who had won an All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship with Kilkenny in 1972, were cited by the *Irish Press* as illustrative of how the ban's ending had led to rugby gaining GAA members who were 'out to enjoy their new found freedom'.¹³³ Later in 1974, the movement of players in the opposite direction was also evident. Among the Treaty Sarsfields team that retained the Limerick Senior Football

¹³¹ *Irish Independent*, 13 Apr. 1971.

¹³² *Irish Independent*, 15 Apr. 1971.

¹³³ *Irish Press*, 11 Jan. 1974.

Championship was Mick Bromell, ‘a well-known rugby player with Thomond and Bohemians’, who scored three points in that game.¹³⁴

In Munster, scene of much polarised commentary on the ban during the 1920s and 1930s,¹³⁵ it is notable that, despite the appeal of Cork GAA County Board chairman Con Murphy to the city’s two top rugby schools – Presentation Brothers College and Christian Brothers College – to ‘participate in Gaelic games’, it was claimed in 1985 that ‘the record shows that there was no great swing to Gaelic games by the rugby colleges’.¹³⁶ Attempts to facilitate such a ‘swing’ were made as early as 1972 among Leinster schools. Then, a Gaelic football blitz ‘for rugby playing schools’,¹³⁷ was inaugurated at St Paul’s College, Raheny, Dublin (a ‘GAA playing school’).¹³⁸ Interestingly, by 1980 it was St Paul’s that had taken up rugby although, it must be said, this was in addition to rather than as a replacement of Gaelic games. Nonetheless, the press coverage indicates they were competitive upon their entry into the prestigious Leinster Schools Cup. St Paul’s eventually lost by fifteen points to six against favourites De La Salle, Churchtown, but not without a game in which, for a time, there were ‘definite signs of the north-city school causing an upset’.¹³⁹

Further, and almost certainly to Con Murphy’s chagrin, rugby clubs began to affiliate to the Munster Branch from areas that had been more traditionally associated with the GAA. These included Crosshaven (1972),¹⁴⁰ Clonakilty (1976),¹⁴¹ and Muskerry (1978) in Cork.¹⁴² Similarly in Connacht – Castlebar (established 1971),¹⁴³ Ballinrobe (1972),¹⁴⁴ and Carrick-on-Shannon (1975)¹⁴⁵ – and in Ulster – County Cavan Rugby Club (reformed in 1974),¹⁴⁶

¹³⁴ *Evening Echo*, 10 Dec. 1974.

¹³⁵ *Limerick Leader*: 10 Mar. 1924, 7 Feb. 1925 & 2 Feb. 1929; *Irish Press*, 13 Mar. 1939.

¹³⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 5 Nov. 1985.

¹³⁷ *Irish Press*, 13 May. 1975.

¹³⁸ *Irish Press*, 18 Apr. 1972.

¹³⁹ *Irish Independent*, 12 Feb. 1980.

¹⁴⁰ *Southern Star*, 14 Oct. 1972.

¹⁴¹ *Southern Star*, 11 Dec. 1982.

¹⁴² *Southern Star*, 22 Apr. 1978.

¹⁴³ *Connaught Telegraph*, 12 Oct. 1983.

¹⁴⁴ *Mayo News*, 15 Jan. 1972.

¹⁴⁵ *Leitrim Observer*, 1 Mar. 1975.

¹⁴⁶ *Anglo Celt*, 18 Sept. 1986.

and Inishowen Rugby Club in County Donegal (1972)¹⁴⁷ - rugby clubs emerged in areas that had till then been regarded as GAA territory.

Reflecting in 1978, Van Esbeck would opine on a 'great explosion' to the benefit of rugby that was manifest in the number of new players, clubs, schools and spectators gained during the previous twenty years. One of numerous reasons he cited for this, significantly, was the GAA's removal of its ban on foreign games, which he contended had since allowed for the introduction of rugby to schools with little tradition in the game, such as Connemara in County Galway:

the removal of the ban on foreign games broke down the last great barrier of resistance and now one can go into the heartland of the country and hear people talk of the game and its personalities with a facility to match their city cousins.¹⁴⁸

Gearoid O'Tuathaigh considered the imbalanced spread and development of rugby and Gaelic games that followed the ban's ending in his contribution to a landmark study of the GAA. In expressing his view that rugby had successfully penetrated schools traditionally accustomed to Gaelic games, he stated:

The GAA has reason to feel aggrieved that, to date, the main consequence of its abolition of the ban on foreign games has been the increased playing of rugby and soccer in secondary schools that were once exclusive GAA strongholds. The traditional strongholds of rugby schools, on the other hand, have not moved in any significant way to afford Gaelic games an enhanced place in their sporting activities. This applies in particular to rugby schools in the Republic. It is perhaps too early to expect Protestant schools of the unionist tradition in Northern Ireland to show a more positive attitude towards Gaelic games, to the extent of actively facilitating their promotion among their pupils; though the participation of the Northern Ireland police force in Gaelic football matches is potentially significant.¹⁴⁹

The evidence compiled in this section, and that which proceeded it, demonstrates that any simplistic narrative which offers a single reason for the growth in affiliated rugby clubs in Ireland would be flawed. Urbanisation,

¹⁴⁷ *Donegal Democrat*, 25 Oct. 1985.

¹⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 4 Mar. 1978.

¹⁴⁹ Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, 'The GAA as a force in Irish society: An overview', in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse(eds), *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 237-56.

though crucial, is not alone an explanation. Post-war social change that saw expanded access to education, the growth of the professional classes and the ending of the GAA ban, as this section shows, help us to understand how rugby's playing base may have grown, but these too do not amount to a full explanation. Rather, and as will become clear in sections that follow, it is unquestionable that the 1970s was an era in which multiple converging forces, such as increased economic prosperity and the impact of live television broadcasts of rugby games, all had marked impacts on rugby club affiliation in their own right.

3.4: Rugby in Ireland and economic trends.

This section considers how rugby fared during three distinct periods of economic upheaval in Ireland during the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰ These are, first, the Great Depression defined as the years between 1929 and 1938; second, the post-war period defined as that between 1945 and 1960; and third, the period between 1964 and 1980. The first was an era of worldwide economic depression that followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929. The analysis that follows asks whether rugby in Ireland witnessed a decline consequent to the economic slump experienced during the 1930s and, if so, were the effects felt evenly both north and south? The second considers the extent to which the economies of Ireland recovered from the associated disruption of the Second World War and what impact did this have on the development of rugby in both jurisdictions? The third concerns a period in which the economic performance of the Republic of Ireland, far outpaced that in Northern Ireland, and thus it is the patterns of development in the southern provinces that comes under review then.

¹⁵⁰ It has been suggested that economic circumstances have been a part of the story of sporting development since as far back as pre-industrial societies; Neil Tranter, *Sport, economy and society in Britain 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), p.1; see also Stefan Syzmanski, 'Economics and (modern) sports history', *International journal of the history of sport*, 32:15 (2015), pp 1775-7.

The Great Depression (c.1929-38)

During the nineteenth century the greater Belfast area became the most industrially developed region of the island,¹⁵¹ but Northern Ireland had not performed strongly during the 1920s. By mid- 1928, the official number of registered unemployed persons in Belfast's traditional industries was 32,565: shipbuilding and iron founding (6,206), and textiles (26,359).¹⁵² Unemployment was also a real problem in the south, as was emigration. Indeed, once Fianna Fáil had entered parliamentary politics, and before the Wall Street crash, these issues had assumed a more important place in public political debate in the south, as exemplified by a Cumann na nGaedheal election meeting in Arklow, Co Wicklow in 1927¹⁵³ and a speech by TD Sean Lemass, later Taoiseach, in October 1929.¹⁵⁴

However, the economic fallout from the Wall Street Crash in 1929 worsened matters considerably in the north. Rugby's stronghold of Belfast was the region of Ireland (north and south) worst affected by the global downturn in manufacturing with increasing male unemployment exacerbated by rising levels of emigration also.¹⁵⁵ By 1932 Northern Ireland's unemployment had climbed to 72,000 (up from 48,000 in 1925).¹⁵⁶ In 1933 the numbers employed in the key ship-building industry comprised a mere tenth of what these had been a decade earlier, whilst considerable emigration further dwindled the male workforce in particular.¹⁵⁷ By 1939, Northern Ireland was the poorest part of the United Kingdom, its average income being only 58.3 per cent of the United Kingdom average.¹⁵⁸ Inter-communal violence was a frequent response to economic distress and limited employment opportunities,¹⁵⁹ and tensions

¹⁵¹ Mike Cronin, *Irish history for dummies* (Hoboken, 2011), p. 295.

¹⁵² *Belfast News-Letter*, 4 Aug. 1928.

¹⁵³ *Irish Times*, 12 Sept. 1927.

¹⁵⁴ *Irish Times*, 21 Oct. 1929.

¹⁵⁵ Susannah Riordan, 'Politics, Economy, Society: Northern Ireland, 1920-1939' in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Cambridge History of Ireland, vol iv 1880 to the present* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 317-20.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The orange state* (London, 1976) p. 12.

¹⁵⁷ Riordan, 'Politics, Economy, Society: Northern Ireland, 1920-1939', pp 317-20.

¹⁵⁸ Patrick Buckland, *A history of Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1981), p. 74.

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter Five on football violence in Belfast during the 1930s.

resulted in three weeks of rioting in 1935 that left eleven dead and 300, mostly Catholic, families driven from their homes.¹⁶⁰

In contrast, in the south, agriculture was a more significant sector of the economy. During the first decade of independence, agriculture had remained the focus of economic development policy. Indeed, Frank Barry has claimed the Irish Free State ‘was one of the least industrialised countries in Europe’.¹⁶¹ When a Fianna Fáil government, led by Eamon de Valera, won the 1932 election in the Irish Free State,¹⁶² they soon set about implementing their own brand¹⁶³ of protectionist industrialisation that aimed to ‘escape a developmental trap posed by its over-dependence on Britain and its inability to industrialise under free market conditions’.¹⁶⁴ Its economic policy was characterised by protectionist measures, intended to foster indigenous industry, combined with initiatives such as the Control of Manufacturers Acts of 1932 and 1934, which were intended to control the growth of foreign enterprises and investments by obliging new entrants ‘to take out licenses and establish a majority shareholding among native citizens’.¹⁶⁵

As a result, industrial employment in the Irish Free State did increase by around 53 per cent between 1929 and 1938.¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, a disastrous economic war with Britain during the mid-1930s, brought about through the refusal of the new government to hand over land annuities owed to Britain as a result of both the land acts and the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, saw the British impose tariffs on Irish agricultural exports such as meat and dairy products. In return, the Irish Free State imposed heavy duties on British coal, iron and steel imports.¹⁶⁷ The economic consequences were severe, perhaps

¹⁶⁰ Patrick Buckland, ‘A Protestant State: Unionists in Government, 1921–39’, in D. G. Boyce and A. O’Day (eds), *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism Since 1801* (London, 2001), p. 223.

¹⁶¹ Frank Barry, ‘The leading manufacturing firms in the Irish Free State’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 42:162 (2018), p. 293.

¹⁶² Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 51.

¹⁶³ Similar to that enacted by Britain in November 1931, see Kevin O’Rourke, ‘Independent Ireland in comparative perspective’, *Irish economic and social history*, 44:1 (2017), pp 19-45.

¹⁶⁴ Nicola Jo-Anne Smith, *Showcasing globalisation? The political economy of the Irish Republic* (Manchester, 2005), p. 169.

¹⁶⁵ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁶ Mary E. Daly, *Industrial development and Irish national identity 1922-1939* (Syracuse, 1992), p. 76.

¹⁶⁷ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, pp 13-4; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A new economic history 1780-1939* (Oxford, 1994), p. 421; Kevin O’Rourke, ‘Burn everything

particularly for the agriculture sector, and undoubtedly contributed to Irish national debt increasing from £16.1 million in 1932 to £30.9 million in 1939.¹⁶⁸

During the 1930s then, Irish rugby operated within the context of two host economies, both of which were experiencing a concurrent collapse in their respective key sectors. To what extent then was rugby in Ireland affected by these economic trends of the 1930s?

According to the IRFU's affiliation records, the 1930s began with Ulster containing fifty-seven clubs. This was seventeen more than in Leinster (forty clubs), twenty-six more than in Munster (thirty-one clubs), and over four times greater than the affiliation in Connacht (thirteen clubs).¹⁶⁹ The club base of rugby was impacted only marginally, or even experienced growth during this time, and was certainly impacted less than association football's club base during the Great Depression (see Chapter Four). Consequently, by 1939 Connacht had lost five clubs since 1930 (now eight), Ulster had lost only three clubs since 1930 (to fifty-four), Leinster had gained seventeen (to fifty-seven), and Munster had gained one (to thirty-two).

That said, financial data gleaned from the provincial rugby archives reveals that at least one level of the game in Ulster, spectator revenue, came under significant pressure during this era. The Branch's financial records indicate that the Schools Cup began that decade as the Ulster Branch's greatest source of income by far, turning a £599 profit (gate receipts less competition expenses) in 1930 as opposed to a £216 profit made by the Senior Cup and a £70 made by the Junior/Provincial Towns Cup. Profit on the Senior Cup plummeted to £101 in the following year (1931), a decrease of 53.24 per cent before remaining relatively stable in the years through until 1938. Profit on the Junior Cup fluctuated year-on-year throughout the 1930s, although the £17 in 1938 represented an almost 76 per cent collapse in the Junior Cup's

British but their coal', *The journal of economic history*, 51 (1991), pp 357-66; see also J.P. Neary and C. Ó Gráda, 'Protection, economic war and structural change: The 1930s in Ireland', *Irish historical studies*, 27:107 (1991), p. 250.

¹⁶⁸ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, pp 13-4; Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A new economic history*, p. 421; O'Rourke, 'Burn everything British but their coal', pp 357-66.

¹⁶⁹ Minute book of the IRFU, 1927-31 (IRFU archives, M005).

profitability since 1930.¹⁷⁰ This likely contributed to the failure to revive that competition following the Second World War as the Ulster Branch statement of accounts for 1946 does not list this competition on its balance sheet.¹⁷¹

More worryingly for the Branch, was the profit or loss on its cup competitions, such as that on the Schools Cup which declined by around 61 per cent between 1930 and 1938 (from £599 to £231). This was evidently impacting the Branch's annual statement of accounts (income less expenses) between 1930 and 1939 that included losses of £300 (1934),¹⁷² £120 (1936),¹⁷³ £377 (1937),¹⁷⁴ and £300 (1939).¹⁷⁵ In many ways the jewel in the Branch's crown, the prestigious Schools Cup's income in 1935 was noted as 'having been actually less than the grant given to the schools for travelling expenses' alone in that season.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps as a result, in 1937, the Ulster Branch made an application to the IRFU 'for the renewal of the grant towards schools travelling expenses'. Among the measures adopted to stabilise the profitability of the Schools Cup was a restriction on free entry to the Schools Cup final for schools personnel, and the withholding of schools grants payments until the end of each season.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, the 1931 Ulster Branch AGM discussed 'a distinct shrinkage in every item of income'.¹⁷⁸ Given that the general public's disposable income was under serious strain, it should not be surprising to find the number of paying spectators to the Ulster Branch's annual cup competitions went into decline. The picture was not entirely uniform, however. Belfast's famous North of Ireland Rugby Club was still able to report that 1930 had been 'one of

¹⁷⁰ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1929/30 – 1939/9 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/13-22)

¹⁷¹ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1945/6, Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 1945/6 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/17).

¹⁷² *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 Sept. 1934.

¹⁷³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 Sept. 1936.

¹⁷⁴ *Irish Times*, 18 Sept. 1937.

¹⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, 16 Sept. 1939.

¹⁷⁶ Ulster Branch minutes (AGM), 20 Sept. 1935, Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union, 1935/6 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/11).

¹⁷⁷ Ulster Branch Minutes (Finance), 16 Aug. 1937, Minute book of the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union 9 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/A/13).

¹⁷⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 Sept. 1931.

the best years in its history,' in terms of their club's finances.¹⁷⁹ In the junior rugby clubs of Ulster's provincial towns, they too survived the worst effects of the economic depression. Newry Rugby Club reported 'a fairly successful season' when 'the membership had considerably increased' in 1931.¹⁸⁰ For Strabane Rugby Club, so too was 1931 a 'successful year' in which the prospects for the following season were also deemed to have been 'quite cheerful'.¹⁸¹

Rugby in Leinster seems to have been affected differently. The Leinster Branch was the strongest of the IRFU's three 'southern' provincial affiliates for the entire duration of the 1930s. It began that decade with seventy-one clubs, and this healthy state of affairs represented a 42 per cent growth in affiliation since 1922 (from fifty clubs).¹⁸² Leinster ended the 1930s with sixty-nine clubs but that itself was a recovery from a low point of sixty-five clubs in 1934-5.¹⁸³ It is possible that the less industrialised southern economy (and so its sports) was, perhaps, less exposed to the initial shock of the crash.

That modest decline of affiliated clubs in the mid-1930s – of around 10 per cent between 1932 and 1935 – may have derived from the accumulated effects of the depression but was also likely linked to the economic war with Britain. Aside from the game's urban, professional base, junior rugby in the provincial towns of Leinster was even then an important driver of the affiliation figures.¹⁸⁴ In the same year as the Anglo-Irish Agreement that brought an end to the economic war with Britain (1938), the president of the Leinster Branch was P.J. Power, the first to have been elected from a junior club in a provincial town (Naas RFC, County Kildare).¹⁸⁵ In the case of Connacht, it is conceivable that the impact of the economic war on agricultural incomes was absorbed by the provincial base of the game there, as in 1930 Ballina and Roscommon were among that Branch's thirteen affiliated clubs,¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 May 1930.

¹⁸⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 May 1931.

¹⁸¹ *Strabane Chronicle*, 23 May 1931.

¹⁸² *Irish Independent*, 8 Oct. 1930.

¹⁸³ *Irish Times*, 7 Oct. 1931, 3 Oct. 1934, 2 Oct. 1935, 7 Oct. 1936, 6 Oct. 1937, 5 Oct. 1938, & 4 Oct. 1939; *Irish Press*, 7 Oct. 1931, 5 Oct. 1932, 4 Oct. 1939; *Irish Independent*, 8 Oct. 1930 & 5 Oct. 1938.

¹⁸⁴ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p.131; O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 22-6.

¹⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 5 Oct. 1938.

¹⁸⁶ *Connacht Sentinel*, 21 Jan. 1930.

yet by 1937 neither was among the Branch's eight affiliated clubs still contesting senior or junior cup competitions.¹⁸⁷

If the revenues of the Ulster Branch slumped and seem to reveal a telling picture, then it is difficult to discern a consistent pattern in the Leinster Branch's finances. The Branch's financial position fluctuated significantly during this era, ranging from 'an increase of income over expenditure' of £137 in the 1934/5 season,¹⁸⁸ to a very large 'excess of expenditure over income' of £323 in the 1937/8 season.¹⁸⁹

Post-war (c.1945-60)

The existing historiography¹⁹⁰ suggests that the economic fortunes of the two states on the island of Ireland could scarcely have been more divergent in the years following the Second World War. Northern Ireland arguably began this era in a much more favourable position, having just emerged from what James Loughlin has described as 'economic progress during the artificial conditions of wartime'.¹⁹¹ Thereafter, the extension of the new British welfare state to Northern Ireland in the late 1940s led to significant improvements in healthcare and education provision between 1946 and 1949 that, according to Jackson, meant that Unionist politicians were 'lulled by the conviction that they had struck a deal which offered fabulous riches in return for minimal outlay'.¹⁹²

However, Crafts has written that whilst from the 1950s Western Europe witnessed a period of unprecedented economic growth, for both Britain and Northern Ireland, 'this was a period when performance was disappointing by comparison with other countries'.¹⁹³ Moreover, the contribution of a Labour MP and a former government minister, Alfred Robens (Blyth), to a debate on

¹⁸⁷ *Connacht Sentinel*, 10 May 1937.

¹⁸⁸ *Irish Times*, 2 Oct. 1935.

¹⁸⁹ *Irish Times*; *Irish Independent*, 5 Oct. 1938.

¹⁹⁰ Mary E. Daly, 'Migration since 1914', in *Cambridge history*, vol. iv., pp.527-52.

¹⁹¹ James Loughlin, *The Ulster question since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 29.

¹⁹² Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, peace and beyond* (Oxford, 2010), p. 352.

¹⁹³ N.F.R. Crafts, 'The golden age of economic growth in post-war Europe: Why did Northern Ireland miss out?', *Irish economic and social history*, 22 (1995), pp 5-25.

the employment situation in Northern Ireland in the House of Commons at Westminster in 1955 suggests that all was not well in that country:

I wish to draw the attention of the House to the serious situation in Northern Ireland resulting from the large-scale unemployment there. This problem is causing grave anxiety to the workers. It is a matter of great concern to the industrialists and even to those who are in employment because of the feeling of considerable insecurity which exists.¹⁹⁴

The 1950s witnessed Belfast's linen industry, with its 76,000 (mostly female) employees at the beginning of the decade, teetering on the brink of collapse by the end of that decade. Furthermore, Fraser has written that Belfast's Harland & Wolff shipyard 'simply mirrored the patterns of British shipbuilding', an industry that during the 1950s saw devastation on the Clyde, Tyne, Wear and Mersey. Outside of Belfast, 'Northern Ireland displayed the highest levels of unemployment in the United Kingdom, in the cases of Derry, Strabane and Newry dramatically so'.¹⁹⁵

In the south, the post-war era began with an increase in state capital expenditure that was 'intended to alleviate unemployment and emigration'.¹⁹⁶ As welfare states became common throughout much of the rest of western Europe after 1945, the Republic of Ireland lagged far behind.¹⁹⁷ The Republic of Ireland received over £47 million in investment from the European Recovery Plan (also known as the Marshall Plan) between 1948 and 1952, but again this was a comparatively small amount.¹⁹⁸ The emphasis on British trade remained and a 1948 trade agreement which eased access for Irish agricultural imports to the UK was arguably of more economic significance than the Marshall Plan.¹⁹⁹ The economy was characterised by unimpressive rates of growth and productivity throughout the 1950s.

¹⁹⁴ *Parliamentary debates (Hansard)*, , *fifth series (House of Commons)*, 5 May 1955 (1942-81, vol. 540-London, 19 Apr. 1955- 6 May 1955).

¹⁹⁵ T.G. Fraser, *Ireland in conflict, 1922-1998* (New York, 2000), p. 32.

¹⁹⁶ David O'Mahony, *The Irish economy* (Cork, 1967), pp 181-2.

¹⁹⁷ O'Rourke, 'Independent Ireland', pp 19-45.

¹⁹⁸ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 17

¹⁹⁹ See T. Geiger, 'Why Ireland needed the Marshall Plan but did not want it: Ireland the sterling area and the European recovery programme, 1947-8', *Irish studies in international affairs*, 11 (2000), p. 194; Brian Girvin, 'Stability, crisis and change in post-war Ireland 1945-1973', in *Cambridge history*, vol. iv, p. 387, 396.

These economic trends were linked to a spike in emigration from the Republic of Ireland, peaking in the mid-1950s. Then, a failure to recognise the continued dependence on Britain saw Ireland diverge from a British interest rate increase in early 1955. The consequences of this led to a macroeconomic crisis of 1955-6 that has been described as ‘the defining event in post-war Irish economic history’.²⁰⁰ Jack Murphy, TD for Dublin South Central, informed a debate in *Dáil Éireann* of a 39.5 per cent increase in those registered unemployed in Dublin City between May 1956 and May 1957.²⁰¹ And, in 1956 emigration reached its highest level during the twentieth century.²⁰² In *Dáil Éireann*, Sean MacBride claimed that:

We have now, after 35 years of self-Government, a lower population than we ever had before; we have an annual emigration rate of some 40,000 people a year, and a grave economic crisis.²⁰³

Below, the impact of emigration during the 1950s is presented according to the same provincial boundaries that comprised the IRFU, rather than by national jurisdiction (table 8).

Province	1951 population	1961 population	Population change (per cent)
Leinster	1,336,576	1,332,149	-0.3%
Ulster	1,624,173	1,642,566	+1.1%
Munster	898,870	849,203	-5.5%
Connacht	471,895	419,465	-11.1%

Table 8: Irish provincial population change, 1951-61.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Patrick Honohan and Cormac Ó Gráda, ‘The Irish macroeconomic crisis of 1955-6: How much was due to monetary policy?’, *Irish economic and social history*, 25 (1998), p. 52.

²⁰¹ *Dáil Éireann, díospóireachtaí párliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisc oifigiúil* (official report), 16th *Dáil*, Vol.161 No.9, 14 May 1957 (Dublin, Stationery Office).

²⁰² Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 19.

²⁰³ *Dáil Éireann, díospóireachtaí párliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisc oifigiúil* (official report), 15th *Dáil*, Vol.159 No.10, 25 July 1956 (Dublin, Stationery Office).

²⁰⁴ Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland 1961, table 04.; Population, migration, general report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1961, xxv.

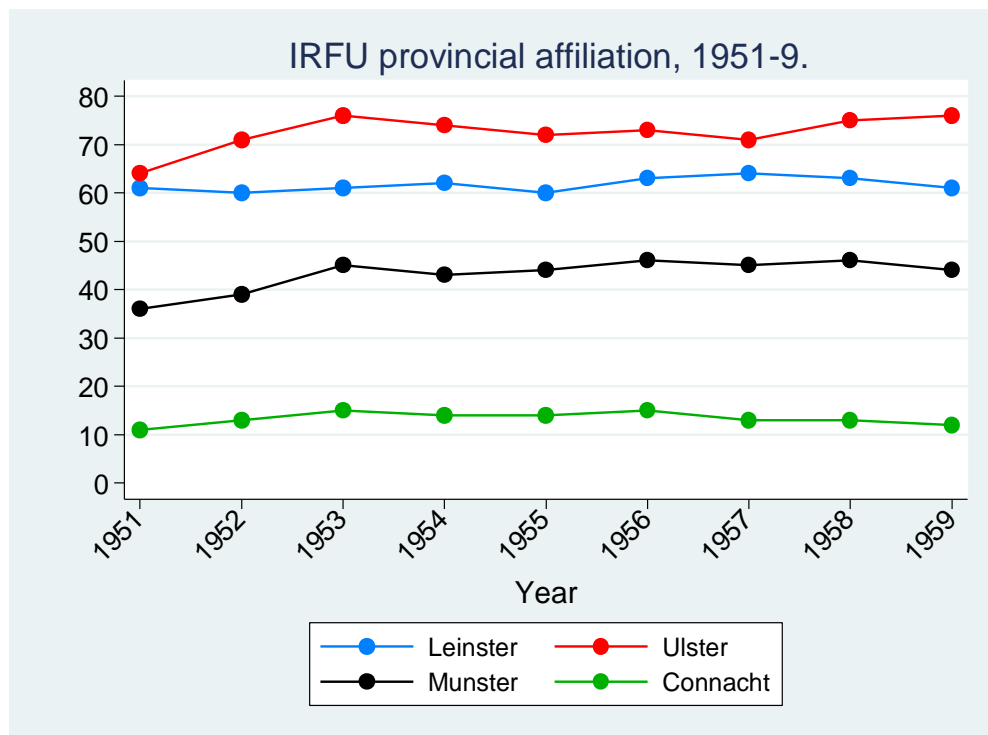


Fig. 6: IRFU provincial club affiliation, 1951-9.

But how was the health of rugby in Ireland during that time? Despite the negative economic outlook in both parts of Ireland, IRFU club affiliation remained stable or demonstrated marginal growth in all four provinces between 1951 and 1959. Collectively, an increase of twelve clubs in Ulster (from sixty-four to seventy-six),²⁰⁵ an increase of eight clubs in Munster (from thirty-six to forty-four), an increase of one club in Connacht (from eleven to twelve) indicated the game was in a healthy condition across the island. Whilst it may appear surprising that there was no change in Leinster (sixty-one clubs in both 1951 and 1959). Given that it had experienced the strongest growth in club affiliation between 1951 and 1959, it is notable that Ulster was the only Irish province where the population had grown between 1951 and 1961.

A direct comparison between rugby in the two political jurisdictions is perhaps useful given the disparity in real terms in relation to emigration. In the Republic of Ireland, the ‘estimated net emigration’ between 1951 and 1961 was

²⁰⁵ Cavan FC was the only club from outside Northern Ireland to affiliate to the Ulster Branch; Annual report and statements of accounts, 1951/2 – 1959/60 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/28-36).

408,776,²⁰⁶ whereas in the same decade Northern Ireland witnessed an ‘intercensal increase’ of 54,121.²⁰⁷ The effect on the national psyche in the south has been long commented on. Indeed, the 1950s in the Republic of Ireland have been described as one of ‘doom and gloom’, ‘the worst since the Famine’ and a ‘lost decade’.²⁰⁸ For many young people, crossing the Irish sea in search of work in Great Britain²⁰⁹ became ‘a part of the generally accepted pattern of life’.²¹⁰

In order to compare the fate of rugby between the political jurisdictions, north and south, the graphic below (fig. 7) has subtracted Cavan FC from the Ulster Branch total listed in the IRFU affiliation data. In doing so, that leaves us with a reliable club figure for Northern Ireland. Equally, adding Cavan to a combined total for Leinster, Munster and Connacht provides a reliable figure for clubs located in the Republic of Ireland.

²⁰⁶ Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1961, table 01.

²⁰⁷ Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1961, table 04; Population, migration, general report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1961, xxv.

²⁰⁸ See Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road*; Brian Girvin, ‘Political culture, political independence and economic success in Ireland’, *Irish Political Studies*, 12:1 (1997), pp 48-77; Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O’Shea and Carmel Quinlan (eds), *The Lost Decade. Ireland in the 1950s* (Cork, 2004).

²⁰⁹ Enda Delaney, *The Irish in post-war Britain* (Oxford, 2007), pp 12-13.

²¹⁰ Report of the Commission on emigration and other population problems, 1948-54 (Dublin, Stationery Office, 1955), p. 137.

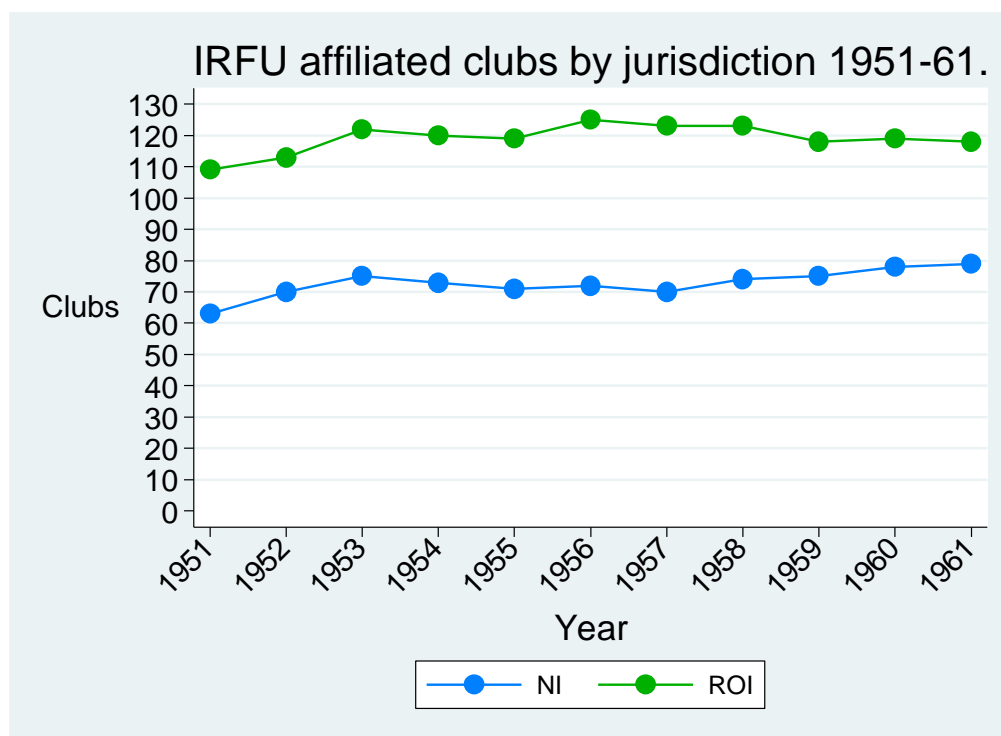


Fig. 7: IRFU affiliated clubs located in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), 1951-61.²¹¹

The comparison at first glance appears revealing. The 8.25 per cent growth in affiliated clubs in the Republic of Ireland (from 109 to 118), was considerably less than the 25.4 per cent growth in affiliated clubs in Northern Ireland (from sixty-three to seventy-nine). The most rapid growth in both jurisdictions occurred between 1951 and 1953. Thereafter, northern affiliation declined between 1953 and 1957 (from seventy-five clubs to seventy), before a recovery to seventy-nine clubs by 1961. Despite the macroeconomic crisis of 1955-6, southern affiliation continued to increase during this time (from 119 in 1955 to 125 in 1956), although that would then decline to 118 by 1961. Overall, the evidence presented above demonstrates that it would be a stretch to suggest that the wider economic trends, and associated problems, had an enormous or easily measurable impact on IRFU club affiliation; instead IRFU club affiliation was, at worst, inconsistent, during a decade of turbulence for both national economies within its jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, by the early 1960s, a combination of interventionist economic policies and wider economic forces led to over a decade of sustained

²¹¹ Minute book of the IRFU, 1951-61 (IRFU archives, M009-12).

economic growth in the Republic of Ireland, the first such period it experienced since it had obtained independence from the United Kingdom. By 1963, there had been an 18.5 per cent rise in Gross National Product (GNP), compared with the 2 per cent rise that was forecast in 1958, the balance of payments crisis of a decade previous had reached ‘near equilibrium’, and during 1961-2 ‘the long established excess of emigration over the natural increase of the population was reversed’.²¹²

1964-80

The available economic data indicates that there was real economic progress in the Republic of Ireland during the 1960s. Between 1960 and 1970, the value of Irish agricultural exports, for example, increased by almost 125 per cent.²¹³ In addition, a small but consistent increase in population represented, by 1970, an almost 5 per cent increase on that of 1961,²¹⁴ with 1970 representing a 50 per cent rise in real income compared to 1960,²¹⁵ although a second failed attempt to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1967 was a setback during that phase of economic growth.

Eventually, however, the Republic of Ireland joined the EEC in January 1973, an accession that occurred concurrent to that of the United Kingdom and Denmark.²¹⁶ EEC subsidies, which had begun at an initial £86m in 1973,²¹⁷ looked destined to turbocharge that earlier progress. Indeed, Campos et. al. estimate that Ireland’s EEC accession boosted per capita growth rate by two percentage points during the mid-1970s.²¹⁸ However, Girvin argues against

²¹² Frank Barry, ‘Politics and fiscal policy under Lemass: A theoretical appraisal’, *Institute of international integration studies*, 292 (Dublin, 2009), pp 1-2.

²¹³ TSA08: Value of Merchandise Exports by Area of Origin, Year and Statistic, <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp> [accessed 28 Sept. 2020].

²¹⁴ Population, Republic of Ireland, 1961-70, <https://data.oecd.org/ireland.htm> [accessed 28 Sept. 2020].

²¹⁵ Second programme for economic expansion, Aug. 1963 (Dublin, Stationery Office, Pr. 7239).

²¹⁶ John O’Hagan, ‘The Irish economy 1973 to 2016’, in *Cambridge history*, vol. iv, pp 500-26.

²¹⁷ Rising to £305 million by 1979; Net Current Income and Expenditure of Central and Local Government (excluding FISIM) by State, Year and Item, <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp> [accessed 10 Sept 2020].

²¹⁸ N. F. Campos, F. Coricelli and L. Moretti, ‘Economic Growth and Political Integration:

attributing EEC entry to immediate economic transformation,²¹⁹ and this is perhaps justifiable given that the Irish economy could not be insulated from the effects of a worldwide recession in 1974-5,²²⁰ which had been caused by the first oil crisis.

Thereafter, a sharp increase in government borrowing between 1977 and 1978 from 3.6 per cent to 6.1 per cent of GNP saw no commensurate expansion of capital expenditure (a 0.3 per cent increase between 1977 and 1979).²²¹ The resultant inflationary wage-price spiral made Irish exports uncompetitive whilst expanding consumer demand increased imports.²²² A second oil crisis in 1979 precipitated another international recession, and price stability replaced economic expansion as the immediate economic policy as Ireland's budget deficit increased dramatically between 1979 and 1982.²²³ Consequently, it might be fair to posit that the first era of sustained economic growth in independent Ireland from approximately 1960 until 1973 had come to a shuddering halt between 1974 and approximately 1980. In such a changing economic context, IRFU provincial affiliation between 1964 and 1980, at least in the case of its three provinces fully within the Republic of Ireland, is detailed below (fig. 8).

Estimating the Benefits from Membership in the European Union Using the Synthetic Counterfactuals Method', Centre for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper, 9968 (2014), <https://ftp.iza.org/dp8162.pdf> [accessed 20 June 2021].

²¹⁹ Brian Girvin, 'Ireland transformed? Modernisation, secularisation and conservatism since 1973', in *Cambridge history*, vol. iv, pp 407-40.

²²⁰ O'Hagan, 'The Irish economy', pp 500-26.

²²¹ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 29.

²²² Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 488-9.

²²³ J. Bradley, 'The legacy of economic development: The Irish economy 1960-1987', in McCarthy (ed.), *Planning Ireland's future*, pp 128-52.

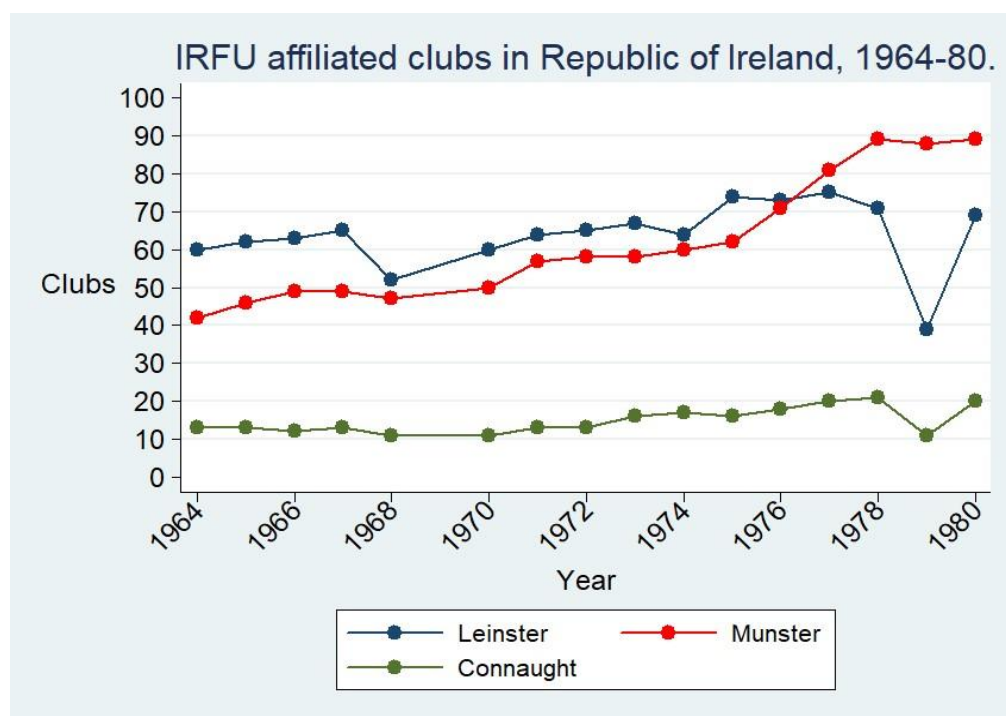


Fig. 8: IRFU affiliated clubs by province, 1964-80 (ROI only).²²⁴

Between 1960 and 1963, Connacht added two clubs (from twelve to fourteen), Leinster lost three (from sixty-one to fifty-eight), and Munster lost one (from forty-five to forty-four). However, by 1970, Connacht (eleven) had returned to a marginal decline, whereas Leinster (then sixty clubs) and Munster (then fifty) were growing once again. Thereafter, Connacht witnessed their strongest ever period of growth between 1970 and 1978 (from eleven clubs to twenty-one). The headline statistics spanning the period 1960-80, from which an exploration of rugby’s development in relation to wider economic trends become possible, are the following: Munster club affiliation increased by almost 98 per cent (from forty-five clubs to eighty-nine), Connacht by 66 per cent (from twelve clubs to twenty), and Leinster by around 13 per cent (from sixty-one clubs to sixty-nine). Notably, a 78 per cent increase in Munster affiliation between 1970 and 1980 alone (from fifty clubs to eighty-nine), saw them briefly become the IRFU’s largest province in terms of affiliated clubs.

Demographic change alone, which was explored in a previous section, evidently did not sustain the growth in club affiliation between 1960 and 1980. This is evident in the fact that the population of Leinster increased by over 34

²²⁴ Minute book of the IRFU, 1960-80 (IRFU archives, M011-18).

per cent between 1961 and 1981, while its rugby club affiliation was up only 13 per cent between 1960 and 1980. By contrast, a 98 per cent increase in Munster club affiliation between 1960 and 1980 went far beyond the concurrent population growth that was less than 18 per cent. Connacht's 66 per cent rise in club affiliations similarly outpaced population growth which was only 1 per cent during this time.²²⁵ Alternatively, in the context of that country's economic growth that began in approximately 1960, we might consider some headline economic statistics when we seek to account for that considerable growth of rugby in the Republic of Ireland during this era. For example, the Republic of Ireland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by 141.06 per cent between 1970 and 1979.²²⁶

Whilst it is evident that a rise in rugby club affiliation in the Republic of Ireland at least coincided with economic growth in the 1960s, it remains highly likely that a combination of other social or political factors, rather than economic factors alone aided that acceleration of club affiliations during this period. This impression is bolstered by the evidence outlined from both the 1930s and the 1950s, which suggests that economic and demographic performance, north and south, mattered to the health of the game but not to such a significant extent that it overwhelmed other social and cultural factors. Bearing this in mind, it is worth noting that the first ever television broadcast in the Republic of Ireland by the state's broadcasting authority *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (RTÉ) occurred on 31 December 1961. It included addresses in which President De Valera and Cardinal D'Alton expressed concern over the potential social impact of the new medium on Irish society,²²⁷ and it is to the impact of such revolutionary change that we now turn our attention.

3.5: Rugby in Ireland, television and international engagement.

In the 1950s, Northern Ireland witnessed, due to the broadcasting power of the BBC, the technological advancement that was the dawn of the television age,

²²⁵ Volume 1-Population, Census of Ireland, 1981, table 01.

²²⁶ <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm> (accessed 7 Sept. 2020).

²²⁷ Robert J. Savage, *Irish television: The political and social origins* (Santa Barbara, 1996), p. xi.

first with the arrival of BBC Northern Ireland in 1953 and Ulster Television in 1959. In contrast, as noted the first television broadcast by Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) in the Republic of Ireland, did not occur until New Year's Eve 1961.²²⁸ This section first considers how the sports broadcasting revolution was received by rugby in Ireland, and then how that technology related to the matter of Irish rugby's international engagement. Did the broadcasting of the elite level of the game, international rugby, on television affect popular engagement with the sport? Is it possible to draw any link between this and the growth of the club game?

It is important to note that during an earlier phase of innovation in sports broadcasting, on wireless radio, newspaper sources suggest Ireland's Five Nations Championship fixture vs Wales at Lansdowne Road in 1927 was the first in which a commentary was broadcast, 'under the direction of the Dublin broadcasting station'.²²⁹ This station was 2RN, a forerunner of what became Raidió Éireann which had begun transmissions on New Year's Day 1926.²³⁰ An inaugural broadcast of a GAA game had occurred one year earlier, and it has been said that 'the popularity of GAA radio commentaries helped spread the fame of the games'.²³¹

Within a decade, Radio Athlone, the successor to 2RN and predecessor to Raidió Éireann, was providing commentary, 'courtesy of the BBC',²³² of Five Nations Championship fixtures that did not include Ireland, such as Scotland vs England at Murrayfield, Edinburgh, in March 1937. Athlone was the location of a high-power transmitter installed by the state in 1932-3 and such commentaries were now reaching a much wider audience,²³³ albeit surveys found that more than a third of households in Ireland did not have a

²²⁸ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, pp 300-1.

²²⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 Mar. 1927.

²³⁰ Richard Pine, *2RN and the origins of Irish radio* (Dublin, 2002), xviii.

²³¹ Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA*, p. 183.

²³² *Irish Times*, 20 Mar. 1937.

²³³ Pine, *2RN*, xix.

radio license,²³⁴ and those that did were predominantly located in ‘professional and commercial Dublin’ as opposed to rural Ireland.²³⁵

Following the Second World War, however, Raidió Éireann’s live coverage increased in volume and breadth, expanding to include commentary from Leinster vs New Zealand at Lansdowne Road in November 1945,²³⁶ an interprovincial between Leinster and Ulster at Lansdowne Road in November 1947,²³⁷ and the Munster Senior Cup final between Dolphin vs. Sunday’s Well at the Mardyke, Cork, in April 1949.²³⁸ International fixtures were the highlight of the rugby year and attracted the largest audiences both in attendance and in listeners. We will return to Irish rugby’s international engagement below.

Notably, in the realm of broadcasting, there was a significant element of cross-border interaction due to the broadcasting power of the BBC and its subdivision, BBC NI, in Belfast, which in 1954 went as far to offer to pay the IRFU £200 ‘towards the cost of the improved broadcasting facilities on the upper west stand, Lansdowne Road ground’.²³⁹ The strength of a new BBC transmitter, installed atop Divis Mountain in Belfast in July 1955, soon began ‘to intrude on political and cultural sensibilities in the Republic’.²⁴⁰ This meant it is likely that the BBC’s live TV coverage of a Five Nations Championship fixture between England and Scotland in March 1958,²⁴¹ for example, would have reached some of the around 3,500 households in the Republic estimated to have owned a television after the Belfast transmitter was installed.²⁴² In June 1959, the *Irish Independent* reported that the BBC intended to build a new signal station that would improve television reception in counties Fermanagh and Tyrone, further reporting that this would make their programmes more

²³⁴ Darragh O’Donoghue, ‘Between ourselves and 1950s Ireland: The use of radio archives as an historical source’, *The radio journal – international studies in broadcast and audio media*, 9:1 (2011), p. 31.

²³⁵ Brown, *Ireland: A social and cultural history 1922-79* (London, 1981), pp 218-9, cited in O’Donoghue, ‘Between ourselves’, p.31.

²³⁶ *Irish Independent*, 17 Nov. 1945.

²³⁷ *Cork examiner*, 15 Nov. 1947.

²³⁸ *Cork examiner*, 30 Apr. 1949.

²³⁹ IRFU committee minutes, 19 Nov. 1954, Minute book of the IRFU, 1965-7 (IRFU archives, M010).

²⁴⁰ Savage, *Irish television*, p. 37.

²⁴¹ *Irish Times*, 15 Mar. 1958; see also Paddy Dolan, ‘Cultural cosmopolitanization and the politics of television in 1960s Ireland’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 36:7 (2014), pp 952-65.

²⁴² Savage, *Irish television*, p. 37.

readily available in parts of South Donegal, Leitrim, North Sligo, Monaghan and Cavan.²⁴³

As Ireland entered the 1960s the question of television coverage had become ever more pressing for the rugby authorities. The IRFU participated in a discussion about television coverage that dominated the agenda (10/14 items) of a meeting of the committees of the Home Unions in 1960.²⁴⁴ Further, the live televising of the second half of four Ulster representative matches during the 1960/61 season on BBC television was a milestone that the Ulster Branch described as ‘another innovation’ which demonstrated ‘that attendances tended to improve rather than decline’.²⁴⁵

Despite the *Irish Times* carrying the headline that ‘big rugby games [were] not for TV’ in January 1962,²⁴⁶ Ireland’s Five Nations Championship fixture versus England in February 1962 was the first to be broadcast on Irish television.²⁴⁷ Following that, RTÉ provided television broadcasts of Irish international games, either live or as a highlights package, often as part of its *Sports Stadium* programme on a Saturday afternoon. This increased to two broadcasts of Five Nations Championship games involving Ireland in 1965 – versus England²⁴⁸ and Scotland²⁴⁹ – increasing in 1966 to television broadcasts of all four of Ireland’s Five Nations Championship fixtures.²⁵⁰ In January 1967, Ireland’s international versus Australia at Lansdowne Road, a match that preceded the Five Nations Championship, was also broadcast on RTÉ television.²⁵¹

What follows amounts to a quantitative examination of the development of club rugby in the Republic of Ireland, measured by club affiliations to the IRFU’s Leinster, Munster and Connacht branches, which is

²⁴³ *Donegal Democrat*, 26 June 1959; also reported in *Irish Independent*, 25 June 1959.

²⁴⁴ Minutes of meeting of committee of home unions, 29 May 1960, Minute book of the IRFU, 1957-60 (IRFU archives, M011).

²⁴⁵ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1960/1 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/37).

²⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 30 Jan. 1962.

²⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 10 Feb. 1962.

²⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 13 Feb. 1965

²⁴⁹ *Irish Times*, 27 Feb. 1965.

²⁵⁰ *Irish Times*: 29 Jan. 1966, 12 Feb. 1966, 26 Feb. 1966, 12 Mar. 1966.

²⁵¹ *Irish Times*, 21 Jan. 1967.

plotted against television ownership statistics across thirteen years in the period between 1962 and 1976 (fig.9).

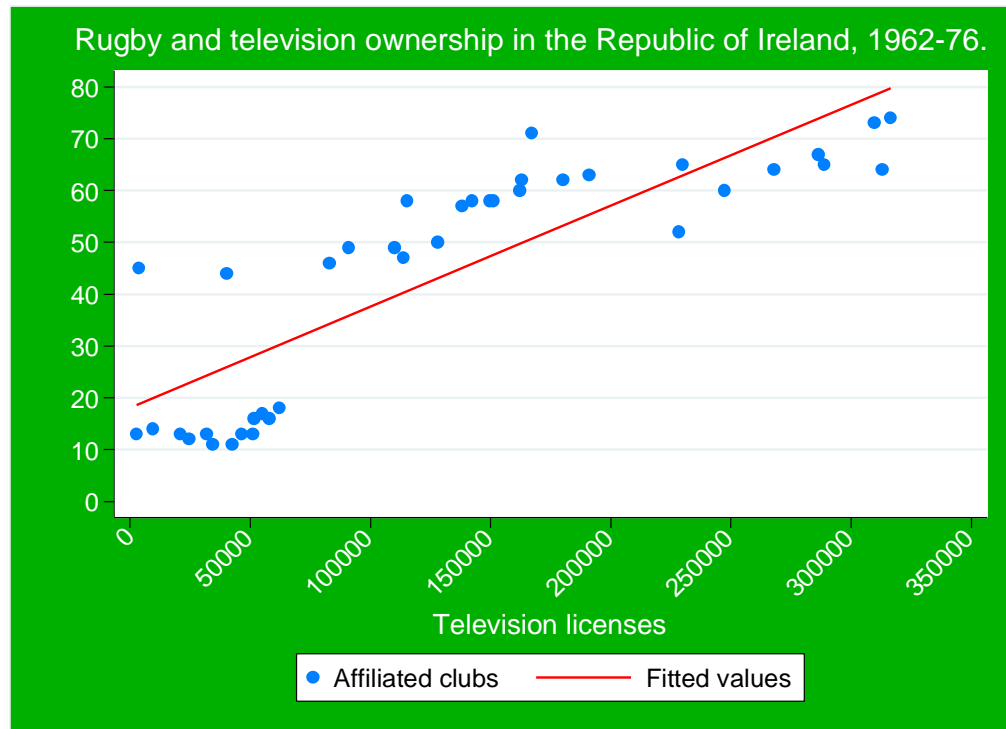


Fig. 9: Two-way linear prediction showing the relationship between television ownership and IRFU provincial club affiliation in the Republic of Ireland, 1962-76.²⁵²

The data reveals a strong correlation between television ownership and the number of IRFU affiliated clubs in the Republic of Ireland provinces of Leinster, Munster and Connacht between 1962 and 1976. The average number of television licenses per province in the dataset was 130,923, the median was 115,300 television licenses, and the range in the data concerning television licenses was 313,631. During the period 1962-76 television ownership across those three provinces was at its peak in 1975. We can calculate that in that year there was one affiliated club per 4,275 televisions in Leinster, whereas that was one club per 2,628 televisions in Munster, and one club per 3,608 televisions in Connacht.

Television broadcasts were initially perceived as a threat by the [English] Rugby Football Union (RFU), who adjudged in 1953 that the

²⁵² Distribution of radio and television licenses by county and province, Statistical Abstract of Ireland, 1963-76 (Stationery Office, Dublin, Pr. 7151-Pr.1.6787).

prospect of televising Saturday international games would damage club rugby fixtures, which usually took place on that day.²⁵³ The Ulster Branch's annual report of 1961/2, however, suggested that television broadcasts were having a demonstrable impact in improving attendances at club games:

now playing an increasingly important part in sport generally, whether for good or ill is still uncertain ... the fees paid do give substantial revenue. Moreover, there is some evidence that new patrons are being attracted to attend club matches.²⁵⁴

Writing in the *Irish Times* in 1978, Edmund Van Esbeck reflected on some of the factors influencing the accelerated development of rugby at all levels throughout Ireland over the previous two decades:

The first and most important was undoubtedly television. The televising of the major games brought rugby into the homes of people who had never seen the game and with the advent of TV, came the quite remarkable growth of clubs in the rural areas.²⁵⁵

Famously, it was in that year (1978), when the most famous international engagement of Irish rugby of the century occurred although, ironically, it would be on the occasion of one of its provinces, Munster defeating New Zealand in a stunning upset by twelve points to nil at Thomond Park, Van Esbeck writing that 'Munster and Irish rugby had known no better day'.²⁵⁶

In the four years that followed (1978-82), Munster club affiliation increased by a mere 9 per cent (from eighty-nine clubs to ninety-seven). Whilst the lack of a spike in affiliation suggests a lack of correlation between high-profile international engagement, on-field success and the development of club rugby, it must be noted that by 1978 Munster was already the strongest of the four IRFU provinces (eighty-nine clubs as opposed to Leinster's seventy-one). In the four years prior to that 1978 fixture, Munster club affiliation had increased by 48 per cent (from sixty clubs in 1974 to eighty-nine in 1978).²⁵⁷ It

²⁵³ *Cork Examiner*, 6 Jan. 1953; *Evening Herald*, 21 Dec. 1953.

²⁵⁴ Annual report and statements of accounts, 1961/2 (PRONI, Records of the Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch), D3867/C/38).

²⁵⁵ *Irish Times*, 4 Mar. 1978. See also David Rowe, 'The Global love-match: Sport and television', in Toby Miller (ed.), *Television: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 3 (Abingdon, 2004), pp 92-109.

²⁵⁶ *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1978.

²⁵⁷ Minute book of the IRFU, 1974-82 (IRFU archives, M017-19).

is perhaps fairer to suggest that the historic 1978 success was both a symptom and consolidation of the earlier explosion in club affiliation in Munster.

In 2004, David Rowe reflected on how ‘in a little over three decades sport and television have become mutually and internationally indispensable’,²⁵⁸ however, what this section has demonstrated is at most a strong correlation between television ownership and club affiliation. It is harder much harder to argue with any certainty that television ownership, never mind television ownership alone, was the cause of rugby’s accelerating development. Tellingly, IRFU club affiliation declined by 6.66 per cent overall between 1981 and 1986,²⁵⁹ indicating that a context of tumultuous wider economic crises and political instability²⁶⁰ mattered more than international success broadcast into Irish households via television. Ireland, of course, won the triple crown in both 1982 and 1985.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter are based on the accumulation of a range of quantitative data concerning the affiliation of rugby football clubs in Ireland between 1922 and 1990, principally to the IRFU but also its provincial subdivisions. Those affiliation statistics, and the spatial and temporal trends that they reveal, are considered here as a means of evaluating the health of the game between 1922 and 1990. This forms the basis of a first section that, in its own right, makes a contribution to the historiography. The data was compiled from the records of the IRFU and, to a lesser extent, its Ulster Branch based in Belfast. It was supplemented by a rich array of qualitative commentary concerning the health of the game and the wider society in which the game was played and administered. That qualitative evidence was gleaned from newspaper archives, parliamentary debates and government publications to name a few. Having established the temporal and spatial patterns, the chapter considers some of the demographic, social, cultural and technological

²⁵⁸ Rowe, ‘The Global love-match: Sport and television’, p. 92.

²⁵⁹ Minute book of the IRFU, 1981-88 (IRFU archives, M019-20).

²⁶⁰ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 104; Kennedy, Giblin and McHugh, *The economic development*, p. 88; Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, pp 501-2.

developments affecting the preponderance and dispersal of affiliated rugby clubs in Ireland. These factors, that are in some instances inter-related, are: the relationship between rugby and Irish urbanisation; the social base of rugby in Ireland; how the game was impacted by wider economic trends; and finally the impact of both broadcasting and Irish rugby's international engagement.

Section two considered the patterns of dispersion of affiliated rugby clubs alongside patterns of urbanisation in Ireland between 1925 and 1990. It found that the game was, unsurprisingly, better developed in what remain its five urban heartlands: Dublin, Belfast, Limerick, Cork and Galway. This was especially true of senior club rugby in all provinces between 1925 and 1950. Though that level of the game did witness limited provincial expansion between 1950 and 1970, by 1990 it remained largely located in those five cities. This is confirmed when one looks at where clubs taking part in the inaugural All Ireland league of that year were located. The analysis did demonstrate that the junior level of the game in Ireland had a much broader geographical base, encompassing both those cities and the provincial towns and villages of Ireland, and this became noticeably more the case in the period 1975-90.

Section three explored whether particular kinds of social change broadened the playing base, real and potential, of the game in Ireland. The initial focus was at the level of schools rugby. Elite schools were for many years central to the fostering of the game. Schools rugby in Ulster was overwhelmingly the preserve of elite educational settings (voluntary grammar schools attended by Protestant boys), while in Munster and Leinster elite Catholic schools dominated the respective schools cup competitions. But how was the game's playing base affected by educational reform and increased access to education in Northern Ireland (1947) and the Republic of Ireland (1967)? After 1947, to their credit, the Ulster Branch managed not only to consolidate their traditional base but, eventually, to add a new schools base to the game drawn drawing from Northern Ireland's growing secondary school sector. Similarly, after 1967, the Leinster, Munster and Connacht branches each succeeded in significantly increasing their base of affiliated schools. As in Ulster, this growth was not to the detriment of their traditional base, which has been maintained. The section then considered the merits of a central pillar in

the historiography of the game in Ireland, one which is undeniably linked to educational attainment, the conceived wisdom that rugby in Ireland has been, to some extent, the preserve of the professional classes.

A quantitative analysis plotted provincial club affiliation against statistical census data pertaining to the professional classes, north and south. It is evident that the received wisdom, or preconceived notion, lacks nuance and, ultimately, is a simplistic assumption. The interaction between the game and the professional classes could not occur in isolation from other contextual events. The section also considered whether the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games in 1971 provided for circumstances in which the game of rugby could grow. The existing historiography has tended to consider the vexed issue of the ban through the lens of what the GAA stood to gain, or lose, from deleting its sanctions for members who played games such as rugby. On this occasion, the question has been explored from the opposite side of the fence, looking at the effect upon rugby. To that end, we found that after 1971, when rugby (among other games) was released from the social and cultural stigma that had previously attached to it, club affiliations expanded. The game soon grew, including in areas where previously the GAA had been dominant, and though this has sparked some resentment, rugby maintains a peaceful co-existence with Gaelic games.

The chapter's third analytical lens (section 4) involved a consideration of the role that wider economic trends played in shaping the preponderance and dispersal of affiliated rugby clubs. This was explored in relation to three periods: 1929-38, 1945-60, and 1964-80. In the first case, I found that rugby largely withstood the impact of the Great Depression and the Economic War during the 1930s. In the cases of Ulster and Leinster, the two strongest provinces at that time, club affiliation was largely unaffected by the devastation visited upon the economies of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. The historiography of the post-war era tend to emphasise the struggles of the southern economy to a greater extent than that of the northern economy. In reality neither economy was doing well. Despite this, I found that the game remained robust in all provinces during the 1950s. When rugby in Northern Ireland was disaggregated from rugby in the province of Ulster as a whole this conclusion continued to hold. Rugby club affiliation, north and south, was not

meaningfully impacted by what in reality was a dire era for both economies. In a third subsection, rugby in the Republic of Ireland between 1964 and 1980 was considered. This revealed that, commensurate with the economic growth there between 1960 and 1973, rugby club affiliation rocketed, particularly in Munster. However, when the economic progress slowed between 1974 and 1980, the game continued to grow, again demonstrating its robustness in the face of adversity and suggesting that factors other than population growth and pounds in that population's pockets mattered.

The chapter's fourth analytical theme (section 5) asks how rugby in Ireland interacted with, and benefitted from, the revolution in broadcasting that was the dawn of the television age. In a multifaceted contribution to the historiography, the section found that rugby benefitted from the exposure the game enjoyed through television. This was despite what we might consider to have been an impulsive, initial reaction against television amongst rugby's administrators, a reaction driven by the game's conservative ethos. Club affiliation rose significantly in tandem with such developments between c.1950 and 1990 as new audiences were exposed to the game. The section demonstrated how, from the birth of RTE television in late 1961, a growing television audience in the Republic of Ireland correlated with increased rugby club affiliation to the IRFU's southern provinces between 1962 and 1976. Irish rugby's participation in international, the elite level of the game, saw little in the way of success prior to the mid-twentieth century. When Irish provincial and international teams enjoyed some sustained successes between 1978 and 1985, the now consolidated medium of television brought that success into many Irish households. This suggests that though the GAA may have smeared rugby as a foreign game, international engagement was a tremendous advantage in capturing the imagination of the Irish public.

Chapter 4: A game for the masses? Football and society in post-partition Ireland.

Introduction

This chapter sets out to establish the prevalence of football clubs in Ireland, north and south, in the decades after partition. It does so using data on club affiliation and junior cup participation, gathered from official records and newspapers. This data is not available for the whole period, but that uncovered has proved sufficient to establish patterns in the preponderance and dispersion of association football clubs.

Having established these patterns of club affiliation and cup participation across time and space, the chapter goes on to consider some factors influencing these patterns. Mirroring chapter three, it does this under five broad headings. First (in section 2), this chapter considers the regional distribution of clubs with an emphasis on the impact that changing patterns of urbanisation had on the development of the game. Second (in section 3), it considers the social base of the game, with a focus on the role of workplace football. This was a core base of the game, north and south, for much of the twentieth century. This consideration of workplace football is in many ways a parallel to the consideration of schools rugby in chapter three. Then, again mirroring chapter three and in the same section, the chapter considers two important areas relating to the expansion of the game's social base. In the case of football, the chosen themes are the development of women's football and, once more, the question of whether the game received a boon from the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games. Like rugby, football's potential to develop had arguably been stunted across several generations by the rhetorical and practical impact of the GAA's ban.

Third (in section 4 and once again paralleling chapter three), the chapter explores how football interacted with economic trends during three distinct eras in Ireland, north and south, between 1929 and 1980. Fifth, and finally, the chapter considers the impact of the television age on football in Ireland, as well as considering the importance of that game's international engagement, notably qualification for and participation in major international competitions.

As was the case in chapter three, this approach provides a building block for future study by establishing clear measures of the health of the game for long periods of the post-partition era. That it does so for the game both north and south is of vital importance and is a key strength.

4.1: Club affiliations and cup entries: measures of the health of the game.

As recent work by Martin Moore¹ and Paul Gunning² has emphasised, association football before the IFA has a more vibrant and complex history than previously thought. Once that body was established, charting club affiliations is a useful measure of the health of the game. The archival data spanning approximately the first three decades of the IFA's existence (Fig. 10), when football clubs in Ireland affiliated directly to the administration based in Belfast, indicates significant growth (from seven clubs affiliated in 1881 to 420 in 1910). The year-on-year trajectory was a little more erratic, however. For instance, between 1886 and 1894, affiliation did not retain a steady path but rather fluctuated up and down across those nine years. Nonetheless, Neal Garnham, the foremost historian of Irish football of that period, has described the overall growth as 'a phenomenal rise', especially as the game's introduction to Ireland was 'comparatively late'.³

¹ Moore, 'The origins of association football', pp 505-28.

² Gunning, 'Association football in the Shamrock Shire's Hy Brasil', pp 608-30.

³ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 40.

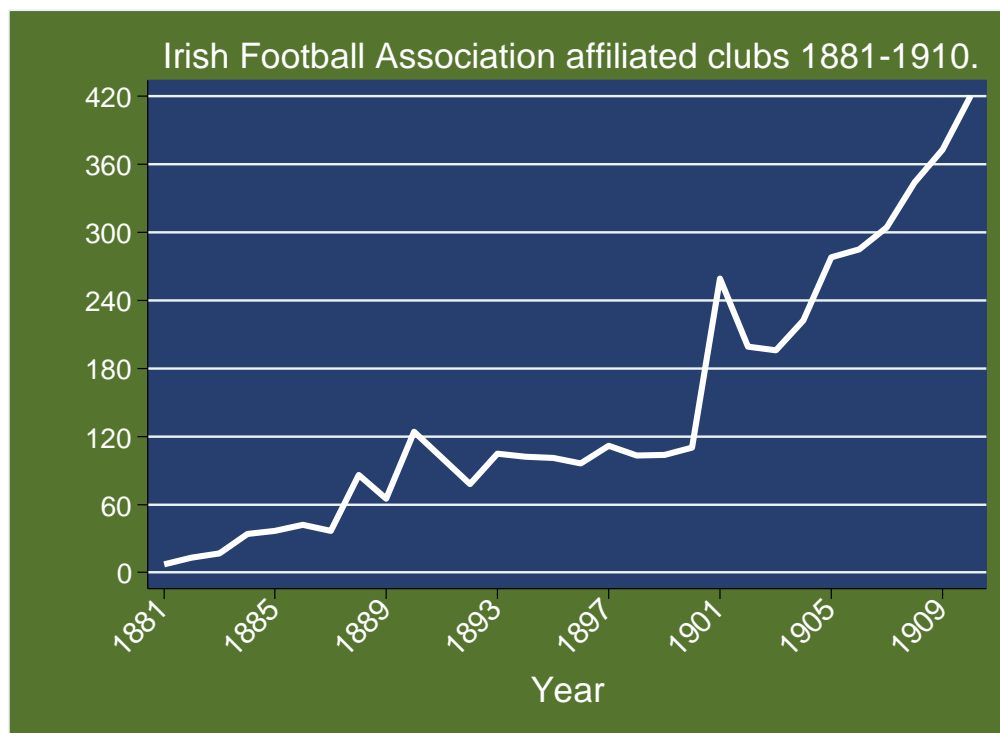


Fig. 10: Irish Football Association affiliated clubs, 1881-1910.⁴

The affiliation figures pertaining to the turbulent decade that followed reveal that the First World War proved detrimental to the continued attachment to the Belfast administration of clubs from the more isolated northern regions and from southern provinces (Table 9).

Year	North east	North west	Mid Ulster	Ferm. & West.	Leinster	Munster	IFA total
1912	128	29	40	12	80	20	309
1917	67	11	10	0	38	0	126
1918	144	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	77	0	259
1919	138	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	73	0	261
1920	180	26	30	9	43	0	432
1921	142	10	29	5	67	0	387
1922	181	17	20	7	0	0	282

⁴ IFA Council Minute Book, 1898-1910 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/1/1-3); Cash Book of the Irish Football Association, 1880-1902 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/5/1/1-2).

Table 9: IFA affiliated clubs by Divisional Association, 1912-22.⁵

For instance, the IFA lost 183 clubs between 1912 and 1917 (falling from 309 to 126). Each of its divisional associations shared in that decline – North East losing 61 clubs; Mid Ulster, 30 clubs; North West, 18 clubs; Leinster, 42 clubs; Munster, 20 clubs; and Fermanagh & Western, 12 clubs. Indeed, if affiliated clubs were one's only measure, then football ceased to exist in the Munster and the Fermanagh & Western regions. Following the war's end in 1918, IFA club affiliation stood at 261 clubs across all of its divisional associations in 1919, although a new conflict, the Irish War of Independence, had begun in January 1919. Newspaper sources tell us that the IFA reported the affiliation of 'some 432 clubs' at its AGM of 1920, an increase of over 65 per cent on the previous year (261 clubs affiliated).⁶ At the final IFA AGM prior to the split with Leinster, held in Belfast in May 1921, the island-wide club affiliation to the Belfast administration was reported at 387,⁷ which suggests that the post-World War recovery was hit by the worsening trouble in Ireland. And worse was to come. Following the split, in 1922, the first season during which IFA affiliation related to Northern Ireland only, affiliations to that reduced organisation stood at 282 clubs.⁸ For the historian that year inaugurates the longest and most consistent run, available from either archival or newspaper sources, of club affiliation data relating to the Irish Football Association after 1922 (Fig. 11).

⁵ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries' names and addresses, 1912-22, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1); *Northern Whig*, 10 May 1919; *Freemans Journal*, 2 June 1919.

⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 May 1920.

⁷ IFA annual report and accounts, 1921, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/2/1).

⁸ IFA annual report and accounts, 1922, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/2/1).

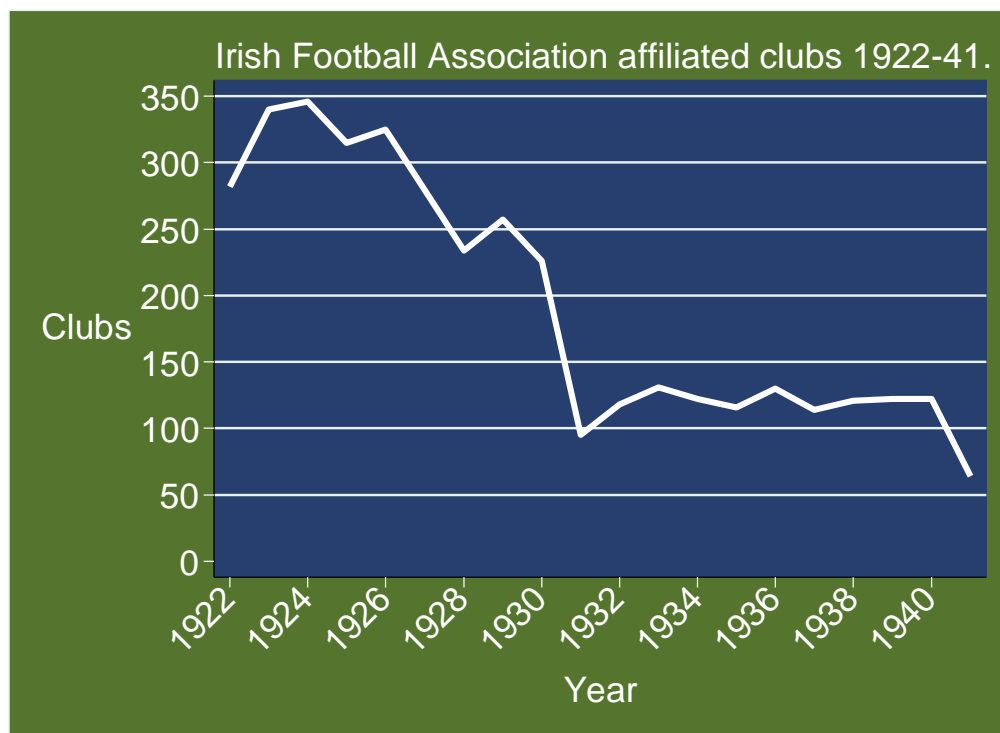


Fig. 11: Irish Football Association affiliated clubs, 1922-41.⁹

Following that split from Leinster, an increase of fifty-eight clubs between 1922 and 1923 (from 282 clubs to 340), must have been somewhat reassuring for the IFA. Any hint, however, that this presaged a consistent period of stabilisation, after the turmoil unleashed by the internal and external conflict of the preceding decade, was soon scuppered by a decline of 112 clubs over four years during the mid-1920s (from 346 in 1924 to 234 in 1928). Having bottomed out in 1931, a very limited recovery was evident during a fairly stagnant 1930s. Then affiliation fluctuated between a high of 131 clubs (1933) and a low of 114 clubs (1937). Affiliation remained stable at 122 clubs in both 1939 and 1940, although the following year (1941) witnessed affiliations collapse to fifty-eight clubs, a level last evident during the late 1880s.

Unfortunately, the affiliation data available in the case of the IFA is not consistent for the post-war period. Nonetheless, the sections that follow advance an analysis drawing upon further archival affiliation data at a regional

⁹IFA annual report and accounts, 1922-30; List of clubs affiliated with secretaries' names and addresses, seasons 1931-41, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

level, statistical sources pertaining to Northern Ireland, and qualitative evidence from newspaper sources. These sections explore the extent to which those macro-patterns interacted with a most challenging period in the history of the IFA that included the split, the Great Depression and the Second World War.

The FAIFS (later the FAI) was the southern association that emerged from the split with the IFA during 1921. Regrettably, the data on club affiliations that emerges from the archival material of the body is limited for the period between the world wars. Consistent data is available for FAI club affiliations in the Republic of Ireland between the mid-1960s and early 1970s, and again from the mid-1970s to 1988 (see Fig. 12).

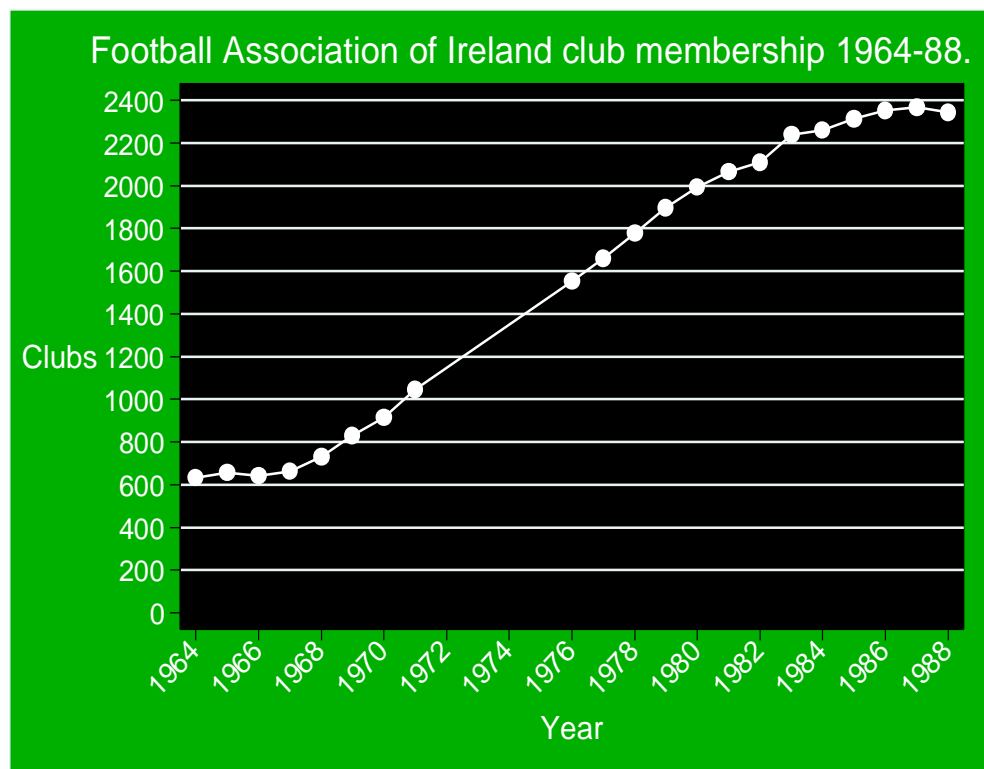


Fig. 12: Football Association of Ireland club membership, 1964-88.¹⁰

Our capacity to compare the fortunes of the IFA and FAI are constrained by limitations in the data. Leaving the comparative aside for the moment, Fig. 12 demonstrates that FAI membership underwent significant growth, at least in terms of member clubs, between 1964 (631 clubs) and 1971

¹⁰ FAI annual report, 1964-88, Minute book of the senior council (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/22-4).

(1,047 clubs). A five-year hiatus ensues in the matter of affiliation data (between 1971 and 1976), although once we can resume tracking affiliations the growth trend was confirmed, with a marked 505 club increase (from 1,047 in 1971 to 1,552 in 1976). That surge continued over the final twelve years for which affiliation statistics can be gleaned from the archival records of the FAI, when a further 790 clubs were added (from 1,552 in 1976 to 2,342 in 1988).

The sections that follow consider the factors that underpinned that remarkable growth (a 231 per cent rise in FAI affiliated clubs in the Republic of Ireland, from 631 in 1964 to 2,342 in 1988), during an era of first economic growth (c.1960-c.1980), then recession (after 1980). This was also a period when television made association football available to the Irish public as never before, while the ending of the GAA ban in 1971 changed the context significantly, especially in provincial Ireland.

Fortunately, it is possible to plug some of the chronological gaps in the archival data pertaining to both associations and their respective club affiliations through the mining of newspaper archives. In doing so, the temporal patterns relating to one specific layer of the wider participation trends, that of junior football challenge cup entries, can be gleaned in relation to both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (see fig. 13). Accumulating this data involved painstaking work but crucially it not only served to confirm the partial patterns revealed in the extant records on club affiliations held by the associations but extended our capacity both to chart the fortunes of each association and to think comparatively about this.

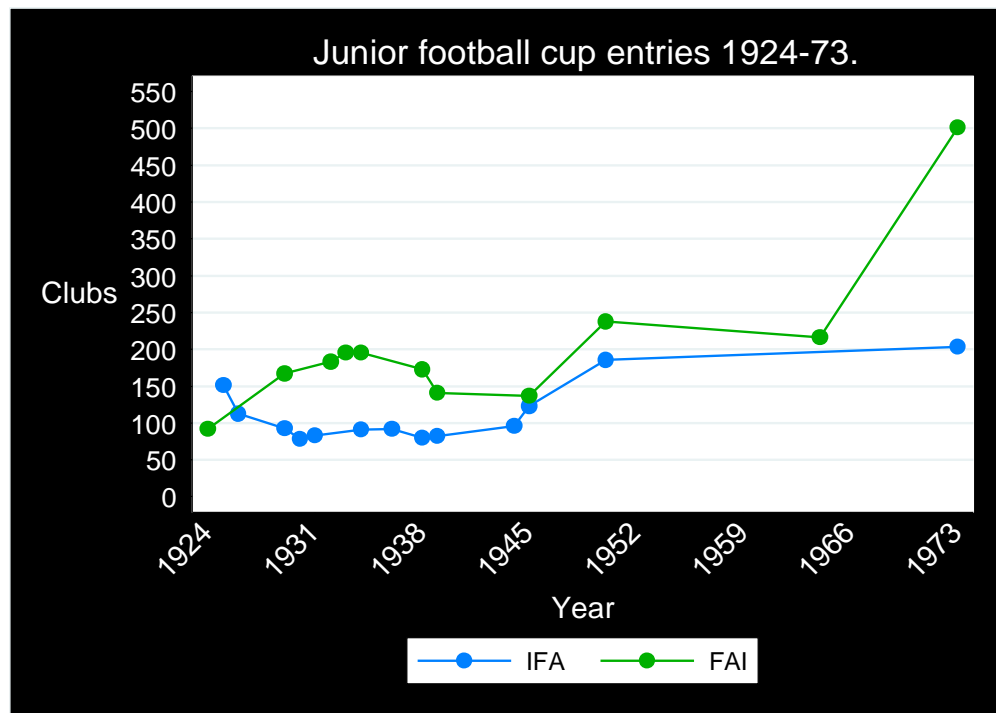


Fig. 13: Junior cup entries by association, 1924-73.¹¹

The data reveals that the participation trends in these junior cup competitions were moving in opposing directions in the second half of the 1920s, with IFA junior cup entries declining by fifty-eight (from 151 in 1925 to ninety-three in 1929), whilst FAI junior cup entries increased by seventy-five (from ninety-two in 1924 to 167 in 1929). A stagnant decade followed for both associations, when that southern surge ground to a halt during the wider context of the Great Depression (see section four). Following the further disruption caused by the Second World War, both associations rebounded strongly – IFA junior cup entries increased by sixty-three (from 123 in 1945 to 186 in 1950), whilst FAI junior cup entries rose by 101 (from 137 in 1945 to 238 in 1950). Thereafter, after some stagnation from 1950, FAI junior cup entries rocketed between 1964 and 1973 (from 216 to 501), whereas by 1973 the IFA had achieved only marginal growth in junior cup entries since 1950 (203 in 1973 compared to 186 in 1950).

Taken together, this data reveals a fascinatingly mixed picture incorporating periods when the comparative development for the IFA and FAI

¹¹ *Irish Independent, Belfast News-Letter, Belfast Telegraph, Northern Whig & Irish Press, 1924-73.*

trended in opposite directions, and periods when the trends moved in a similar direction. An example of the first would be the mid-1920s, when the FAIFS prospered while the IFA saw affiliations and junior cup entries decline. An example of the second would be the years of the Second World War when both associations struggled, prompting an unusual level of co-operation (as noted in Chapter Two).

4.2: Football and urbanisation in Ireland.

As discussed in chapter three, urban settings have been crucial to the development of sport,¹² and football is no exception in that regard. Indeed, the founding of the game and its earliest development in England, as it emerged between 1850 and 1870, was closely associated with the industrial revolution, whereby leisure time was linked to factory occupations in rapidly growing urban areas in the north of the country.¹³ This section considers the interaction between football and urbanisation in Ireland, whilst the section that follows considers factory and other occupations and their interactions with football in Ireland.

To date, several historians have made valuable observations that have informed our understanding of football's relationship to urbanisation in Ireland. Paul Rouse has made the important observation that 'the spread of sport across Ireland was unusually dependent on their adoption in small country towns and rural parishes.'¹⁴ For football, however, the city was king and provincial participation, at least in senior football, was limited in the early twentieth century. Richard Holt has written that association football 'had gained a fair

¹² For example, Milton T. Friedman and Jacob J. Bustad, 'Sport and Urbanization' in Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp 145-58; see also Xavier Pujadas, 'Sport, Space and the Social Construction of the Modern City: The Urban Impact of Sports Involvement in Barcelona (1870–1923)', *International journal of the history of sport*, 29:14 (2012), pp 1963-80; & Julien Sorez, 'A History of Football in Paris: Challenges Faced by Sport Practised within a Capital City (1890–1940)', *International journal of the history of sport*, 29:8 (2012), pp 1125-40.

¹³ Peter Swain, 'Football Club Formation and the Lancashire Leisure Class, 1857–1870', *International journal of the history of sport*, 34:7-8 (2017), pp 498-516; also Wray Vamplew, 'Industrialization and sport', in *Oxford Handbook*, pp 131-44.

¹⁴ Rouse, *Sport & Ireland*, p. 7.

following, partly among the northern Protestant working class but also amongst Catholics in Belfast, Londonderry and Dublin' by 1900.¹⁵

Mark Tynan asserts that, in the south, Dublin clubs not only dominated football in Leinster, but that three in particular – Shamrock Rovers, Shelbourne and Bohemians – were the strongest teams in the [Irish Free] state.¹⁶ Regarding Munster, David Toms found that football was a game 'that had its strongest concentration in the larger towns and cities', alluding to its comparative strength not only in that province's three largest cities – Cork, Limerick and Waterford – but noting that major provincial towns in Tipperary's south riding, including Carrick-On-Suir, Clonmel and Cahir, were 'mainstays of the game'.¹⁷

Employing some of the same statistical sources as Toms, this section examines the extent to which senior football, and participation in the Irish League and League of Ireland, remained a domain dominated by Belfast and Dublin clubs, respectively. Further, it charts patterns of urbanisation against the geographic distribution of clubs participating in the junior challenge cup competitions run by the IFA and FAI.¹⁸ The geographic spread of football clubs in Ireland was gleaned by mining national newspapers (north and south) for junior cup first round draws and with regard to senior league composition. Census-based statistical publications underpinned a calculation of the population density of the county (for junior level) or urban area (for senior level) in which those clubs were located.¹⁹ To ensure consistency throughout, southern urban areas will be categorised according to how they came to be defined by the 1951 Census of Ireland – either as 'County Boroughs' (cities); as 'towns' with legally defined boundaries; or as 'suburban areas' that

¹⁵ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 244.

¹⁶ Tynan, 'Association football and Irish society', p. 123.

¹⁷ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 6.

¹⁸ The most prestigious competition in both jurisdictions at that level, and thus taken to be at least one viable indicator as to the health of the game.

¹⁹ For NI county land areas see CAIN, 'Background information on Northern Ireland society-geography', <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ni/geog.htm> [accessed 24 Apr. 2021]; For ROI county land areas (2011), see CD115: Population density and area size by electoral division, census year and statistic, Central Statistics Office, <https://data.gov.ie/dataset/cd115-population-density-and-area-size-by-electoral-division-censusyear-and-statistic>, [accessed 24 Apr. 2021]; Note, the area size of towns and cities was recorded in either acres or hectares in each census and required converting to km² before the population density of those urban areas could be calculated

extended beyond the legally defined boundaries of cities. Combined with an accompanying qualitative analysis, a temporal and spatial analysis follows. Generated using ArcGIS mapping software, these maps provide the clearest picture of the geographic development of post-partition football yet achieved.

1920s and 1930s

Irish Football Association	Irish League	Football Association of Ireland	League of Ireland
Club	Location	Club	Location
Distillery	Belfast	Bohemians	Dublin
Queen's Island	Belfast	Shelbourne	Dublin
Linfield	Belfast	St James's Gate	Dublin
Cliftonville	Belfast	Frankfort	Dublin
Glentoran	Belfast	Jacobs	Dublin
Glenavon	Lurgan	Dublin United	Dublin
		Olympia	Dublin
		YMCA	Dublin

Table 10: Senior club football in Ireland, 1921/2 season.²⁰

The formation of first the FAIFS,²¹ and subsequently the League of Ireland,²² was led by senior Dublin clubs during 1921. This left a gaping hole in the Irish League, the competition in which they had, until then, competed. Indeed, table 10 above reveals that Glenavon FC, based in Lurgan, County Armagh, was the only club from a provincial town competing in senior league

²⁰ *Irish Independent*, 10 Sept. 1921; *Evening Herald*, 6 Sept. 1921; *Freeman's Journal*, 24 Sept. 1921; see also Conor Heffernan & Joseph Taylor, 'A league is born: The League of Ireland's inaugural season 1921-1922', *Soccer & Society*, 22:8 (2021), pp 845-57.

²¹ IFA emergency committee minutes, 24 June 1921, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²² *Evening Herald*, 18 Aug. 1921.

football in Ireland in 1921. Between 1923 and 1929, however, a considerable phase of geographical expansion of the Irish League in Northern Ireland included: - Newry, Barn (Carrickfergus), Ards, and Larne in 1923;²³ Portadown in 1924;²⁴ Coleraine in 1927;²⁵ Bangor and Ballymena in 1928;²⁶ and Derry City in 1929.²⁷ Indeed, in 1929, the IFA claimed that:

the interest manifested in the game is demonstrated by the progress made, and the success of football in what is known as the provincial towns of Ballymena and Coleraine is a clear indication that it is still the greatest winter sport.²⁸

The combined 1926 population (127,192) of the provincial towns containing clubs that joined the Irish League between 1923 and 1929 – Carrickfergus (4,751), Ards (10,150), Larne (9,706), Newry (12,159), Portadown (11,991), Coleraine (8,080), Bangor (13,316), Ballymena (11,875) and Derry (45,164) – amounted to less than 31 per cent of the population of Belfast City in 1926 (415,007), which at that time was the largest urban centre on the island.²⁹ We might speculate that the existence of schools, junior, and workplace football from as early as the 1880s would eventually sustain senior football in the provincial towns of Newry, Portadown, Coleraine and Derry.³⁰

Chapter two detailed the FAI's ambition to be an association more representative of the game throughout Ireland than the IFA had proven prior to 1921. Yet, in the first season that followed the partition of Irish football, the Dublin dominance of the League of Ireland (all eight teams) in 1921/2, was greater than the Belfast-centricity of the Irish League (as, noted, seven of eight teams). Thus it is clear that the FAI's commitments to change were challenged from the outset, as the foundation of the new association in the south effectively witnessed one dominant city replace the other within a reduced jurisdiction. To a considerable extent, this vindicates Toms' contention that

²³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Oct. 1923.

²⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 1 Sept. 1924.

²⁵ *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 Sept 1927.

²⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 Aug. 1928.

²⁷ *Irish Independent*, 23 Aug. 1929.

²⁸ IFA annual report 1929, Minutes of Extraordinary and Annual General Meetings of the IFA, 1910-1982 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4916/2/2/1)

²⁹ Population of County Boroughs, urban districts and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1926, xxviii.

³⁰ Garnham, *Association football and society*, pp 23, 49.

‘the history of soccer in Ireland is intimately linked with Ireland’s urban working class’.³¹

Although, admittedly, still finding its feet as an independent association, and doing so in the context of a civil war that severely restricted football in much of the country,³² the FAI/League of Ireland did make incremental progress thereafter. Athlone Town FC was admitted to become the League of Ireland’s first provincial member in 1922.³³ Bray Unknowns³⁴ and Fordsons (associated with the Ford factory in Cork)³⁵ soon followed. In 1926 Dundalk³⁶ was elected to the League of Ireland and, in 1932/3, that club broke the Dublin monopoly by becoming the first provincial team to win the league championship.³⁷ By comparison, it would be 1958 before a provincial club, Ards, would win the Irish League championship in Northern Ireland.³⁸

In 1926, Dublin city, with a population of 316,693, dwarfed the next biggest cities in the Irish Free State: Cork (78,490), Limerick (39,448), and Waterford (26,647). That Cork was the location of only one League of Ireland team in 1924 is somewhat surprising given that its population was approximately a quarter of that of Dublin, and Dublin contained seven. It should be noted, however, that greater Dublin’s population was further boosted by large suburban townships. More surprising, arguably, were the locations of League of Ireland clubs in Athlone (1922), Bray (1924) and Dundalk (1926), given that in 1926 they contained a mere 2.4 per cent (Athlone), 2.7 per cent (Bray) and 4.4 per cent (Dundalk) of Dublin City’s population.³⁹ Indeed, two of Dublin’s suburban townships, Rathmines and Rathgar (39,984) and Pembroke (33,383), were more populous in 1926 than those three provincial towns combined (30,173).⁴⁰

³¹ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 12.

³² Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, pp 115-6.

³³ *Irish Independent*, 4 Nov. 1922.

³⁴ *Irish Times*, 27 Sept. 1924.

³⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 22 Sept. 1922.

³⁶ Initially ‘Dundalk Great Northern Railway FC’, shortened to Dundalk FC in 1930.

³⁷ Tynan, ‘Association football and Irish society’, p. 123.

³⁸ *Irish Times*, 3 July 1958.

³⁹ Volume 1- Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1926, table 01

⁴⁰ Athlone – 7,540; Bray – 8,637; and Dundalk – 13,996: Census of Ireland, 1926.

It seems likely that Athlone's history as a garrison town with a quite early football tradition,⁴¹ Bray's proximity to Dublin,⁴² and Dundalk FC's genesis as a works team aided their ascension to the League of Ireland.⁴³ Despite that initial provincial expansion of senior football in the south, at the beginning of the 1925/6 season *Football Sports Weekly* suggested that 'many were disappointed by the non-expansion of the league'.⁴⁴ The Dublin dominance of the League of Ireland's membership looked set to continue given that, between 1931 and 1939, Dublin Corporation erected as many new dwellings (7,246) as it had in approximately the previous four decades (between 1887 and 1931).⁴⁵ During the 1930s Waterford (1930),⁴⁶ Sligo Rovers (1934),⁴⁷ and Limerick FC (1937)⁴⁸ joined the League of Ireland. By 1936, all three – Waterford (27,968), Sligo (12,565) and Limerick (41,061) – had a greater population than either Bray or Athlone had in the census of a decade earlier. The provincial expansion between 1922 and 1937 (see map 13 below) meant that clubs from sixteen different provincial towns or cities would contest senior football across both jurisdictions (nine in Northern Ireland and seven in the Irish Free State), mitigating the initial Dublin and Belfast dominance of 1921/2. This was a commendable achievement, particularly given that over the next half century only fifteen further provincial clubs⁴⁹ would reach the level of senior league competition, and many of those achieved but brief periods of membership.

⁴¹ Garnham, *Association football and society*, pp 18, 47; Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: The case of County Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), pp 89, 130.

⁴² Tynan, 'Association football and Irish society', p. 115.

⁴³ More on works teams follows below.

⁴⁴ *Football Sports Weekly*, 29 Aug. 1925.

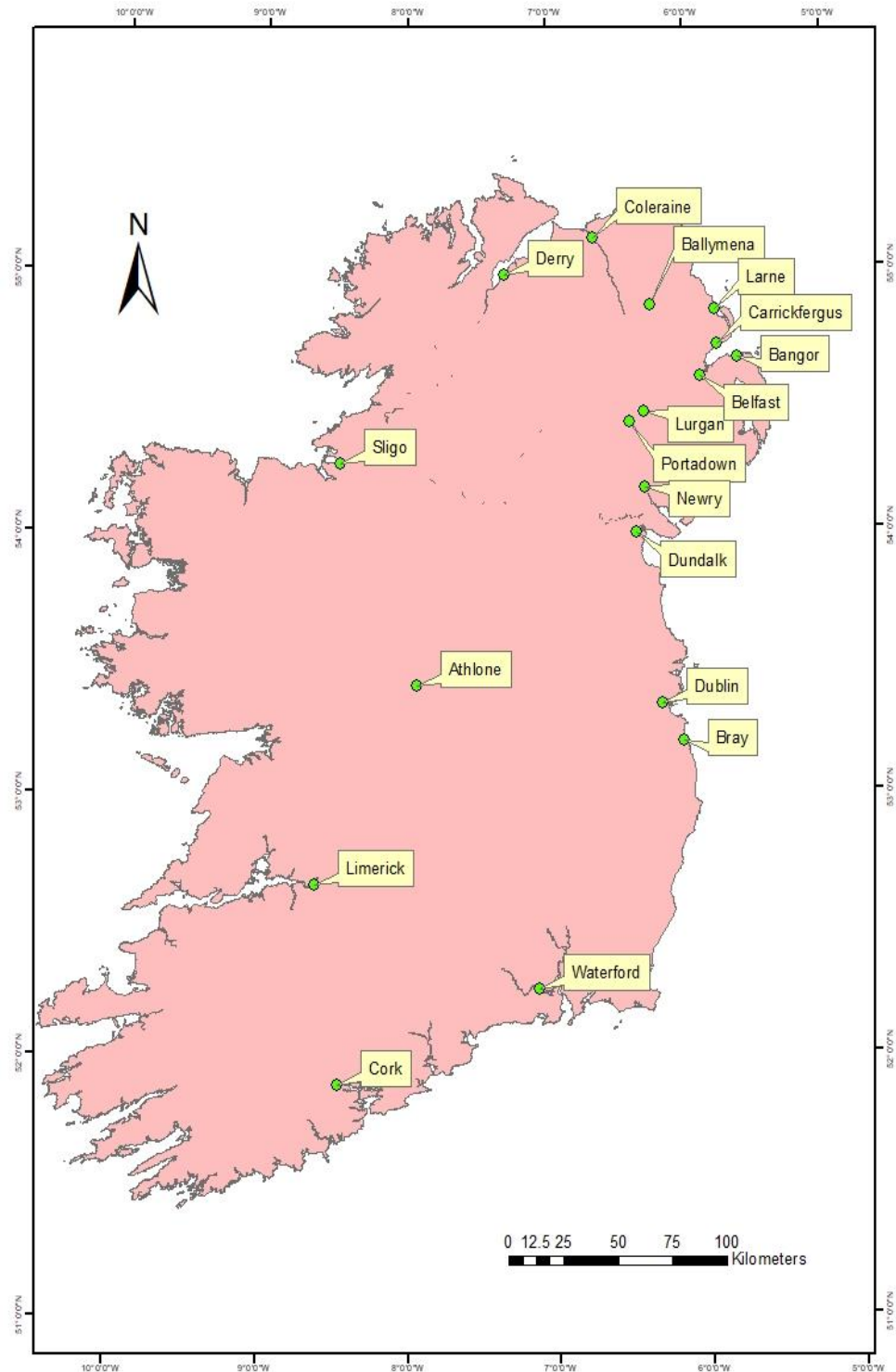
⁴⁵ Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910-1940: Shaping the city and its suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), p. 99.

⁴⁶ *Evening Herald*, 1 Nov. 1930.

⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 20 Oct. 1934.

⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 18 Dec. 1937.

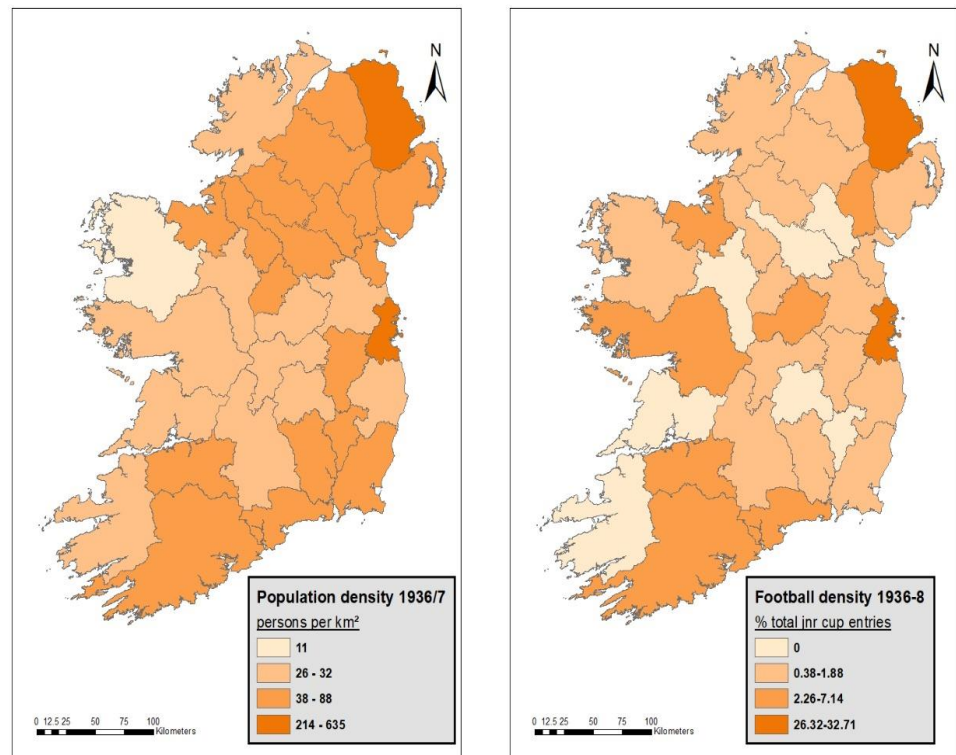
⁴⁹ Eleven in the Republic of Ireland and four in Northern Ireland including Longford Town, Monaghan United, Kilkenny City, Newcastle West, and Cobh Ramblers.



Map 13: Location of Irish League and League of Ireland participating clubs, 1921-37.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Irish Independent*, 4 Nov. 1922; *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Oct. 1923; *Cork Examiner*, 1 Sept. 1924; *Irish Times*, 27 Sept. 1924; *Cork Examiner*, 22 Sept. 1922; *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 Sept. 1927; *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 Aug. 1928; *Irish Independent*, 23 Aug. 1929; *Evening Herald*, 1 Nov. 1930; *Irish Times*, 20 Oct. 1934; *Irish Times*, 18 Dec. 1937.

We now turn to junior football to ask what it reveals about the health and geography of the game during the 1920s and 1930s. Here we see that cup entries in Northern Ireland fell dramatically from 150 in 1925⁵¹ to ninety-three by 1929.⁵² Further, of eighty-one total junior cup entries in 1931, fifty-nine were located in ‘Belfast district’,⁵³ indicating the ongoing importance of that urban area to the health of the game, perhaps especially during a time of crisis. During the 1930s, the southern association made reference to football as ‘the all-popular pastime of the masses’ (1932),⁵⁴ whilst the IFA claimed that theirs was the ‘sport’(1933), then ‘game’(1937),⁵⁵ ‘of the masses’.



Map 14: Population density (1936/7), and Junior Cup Football Density (1936-8).⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Northern Whig*, 17 Sept. 1925.

⁵² *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 Oct. 1929.

⁵³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Oct. 1931

⁵⁴ FAI Junior Committee annual report, 1931-2, FAI Junior Committee minutes, Sept. 1928-Apr.1932 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/26).

⁵⁵ IFA annual report 1933; 37, Minutes of Extraordinary and Annual General Meetings of the IFA, 1910-1982 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4916/2/2/1).

⁵⁶ Volume 1 - Population, Area and Valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland 1936, table 13; Area and population, General summary report, Census of

The data above indicates a strong relationship between population density and the strength of junior football as measured by cup entries. For example, County Dublin, with a population density of 635 persons per km², was home to almost one third (32.71 per cent) of all junior cup entries from across both parts of Ireland combined (266). Whilst in the north, County Antrim, with a population density of 224 persons per km², was home to over one quarter (26.32 per cent) of all junior cup entries across the island. Within their respective jurisdictions, County Dublin provided exactly half of all FAI junior cup entries in 1938 (eighty-seven out of 174), whilst County Antrim was the source of around three-quarters of all IFA's junior cup entries in 1936 (seventy out of ninety-two). That said, we can consider at least two northern counties outliers given that their population and football densities seem out of kilter. The population density of counties Armagh (eighty-seven persons per km²) and Down (eighty-six persons per km²) in 1937 were the third and fourth highest on the island of Ireland,⁵⁷ whereas their share of the total junior cup entries was a mere 2.26 per cent (Armagh) and 1.88 per cent (Down).

The late 1930s saw an ongoing, if not precipitous, decline in junior football north of the border. The 1938 IFA junior cup draw was marked by the loss of clubs in the provincial west of Northern Ireland: clubs from Newtownbutler in County Fermanagh; from Omagh, Castlederg, Dungannon and Dromore in County Tyrone; from Portadown and Camlough in County Armagh; and from Castlewellan in County Down had all been lost since 1931.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, new clubs did appear in Ballycastle and Ballinamore in County Antrim. By contrast, after a decade of rapid growth during the 1920s, junior cup entries in the south continued to grow, albeit less markedly, from 164 in 1929,⁵⁹ to 174 by 1938.⁶⁰ Within that wider picture, counties Dublin (twenty-two), Limerick (ten) and Waterford (six) had more entries in 1938 than

Northern Ireland, 1937, p. 1; *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Oct. 1936; *Irish Independent*, 2 Nov. 1938; *Cork Examiner*, 7 Dec. 1938.

⁵⁷ For the Irish Free State this was measured for 1936 census, for Northern Ireland census was taken in 1937.

⁵⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 Oct. 1938.

⁵⁹ *Irish Independent*, 18 Dec. 1929.

⁶⁰ *Irish Independent*, 2 Nov. 1938.

in 1929, whereas Cork (seventeen), Meath (seven) and Louth (six) had fewer than in 1929.

In 1881, Connacht was described as ‘possessing low urbanisation and little manufacturing base’ when compared with the soccer hotbed of Belfast, in large part explaining the game’s slow development in the west of Ireland.⁶¹ By 1936, County Galway still ranked poorly in comparative urbanisation, containing the fifth-lowest population density of all the counties in Ireland (twenty-nine persons per km²). However, its principal town, the ‘Galway Urban district’ as it was then categorised,⁶² was home to all seven clubs that enabled County Galway to have the sixth-highest share of junior cup entries across the island in 1936-8 (2.63 per cent). A regional football columnist, ‘Criterion’, reported that ‘soccer in Galway has made wonderful headway during the past year’ (1937), the staging of a schoolboy international between Ireland and Scotland at the Galway Sportsground on Easter Sunday 1937 being ‘the most noteworthy thing of the past season’.⁶³

In Waterford, a population density of forty-two persons per km² (tenth highest overall) was similarly exceeded as that county contributed the third highest share of junior cup entries across the island (7.14 per cent). Around half of these entries were located in the city, including clubs such as Elmville and Corinthians, with the other entries originating in the outlying greater urban area, such as Butlerstown and Woodstown to the south-west of the city.

In mid-1927, the Dundalk and District [junior] Football League was described as being in a sound position both financially and from a playing standpoint.⁶⁴ In 1929, there were ten junior cup entries from Dundalk town alone, yet by 1938, County Louth as a whole contained only four, with St Patrick’s the only Dundalk-based survivor from nine years previously. Invitations for teams to compete in the district league were published in the press in 1931,⁶⁵ suggesting ongoing activity, although it is possible that Dundalk’s grassroots football was hindered rather than encouraged by the

⁶¹ Gunning, ‘Association football’, p. 613.

⁶² Volume 1 - Population, Area and Valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland 1936, table 13

⁶³ *Connacht Tribune*, 1 Jan. 1938.

⁶⁴ *Irish Independent*, 2 July 1927.

⁶⁵ *Dundalk Democrat*, 2 Aug. 1931.

exploits of the town's senior football club, culminating in Dundalk FC winning the League of Ireland in 1932. By the mid-1930s, Tynan suggests, areas such as Athlone began to re-emerge as provincial centres of the game in north Leinster,⁶⁶ illustrated in the data above, whereby Westmeath had the tenth lowest population density (thirty-one persons per km²) yet had the eighth highest share of junior cup entries across the island (2.26 per cent).⁶⁷

1945-51

Soon after the end of the Second World War, local press outlets reported junior football as having already restarted, characterised by the playing of fixtures and the resumption of administrative functions, in the North-West,⁶⁸ Mid Ulster⁶⁹ and County Antrim⁷⁰ regions of the IFA's jurisdiction in May and June of 1945.

A 'regional league' formed during the war in Northern Ireland was still operating in 1945/6 featuring five Belfast teams – Linfield, Belfast Celtic, Distillery, Glentoran and Cliftonville – in addition to Derry City.⁷¹ In a letter to the IFA in February 1946, four provincial clubs – Ards, Bangor, Portadown and Glenavon – wrote outlining their fears that the earlier progress in the game's provincial development (1922-37) was at risk:

We believe that if soccer is to flourish and to maintain its position as the national game of our province, it is essential that large provincial centres such as ours continue to have senior football ... it is to be feared that if senior football is debarred from our respective districts, soccer will in due time cease to interest those sportsmen who have accomplished much in the past to foster and promote its development.⁷²

Eventually, featuring twelve teams from eight different towns and cities of Northern Ireland,⁷³ the Irish League returned in 1947/8 when the committee

⁶⁶ Tynan, 'Association football and Irish society', p.153.

⁶⁷ A county that emerged as a site football activity during the Victorian era, see Hunt, *Sport and society*, pp 7-11.

⁶⁸ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 26 May 1945.

⁶⁹ *Portadown News*, 26 May 1945.

⁷⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 28 June 1945.

⁷¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 Dec. 1945.

⁷² Minutes of the Irish Football Association Council, 26 Feb. 1946, IFA Council Minute Book, 1944-9 (PRONI, IFA Papers D4196/2/1/5).

⁷³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Nov. 1947.

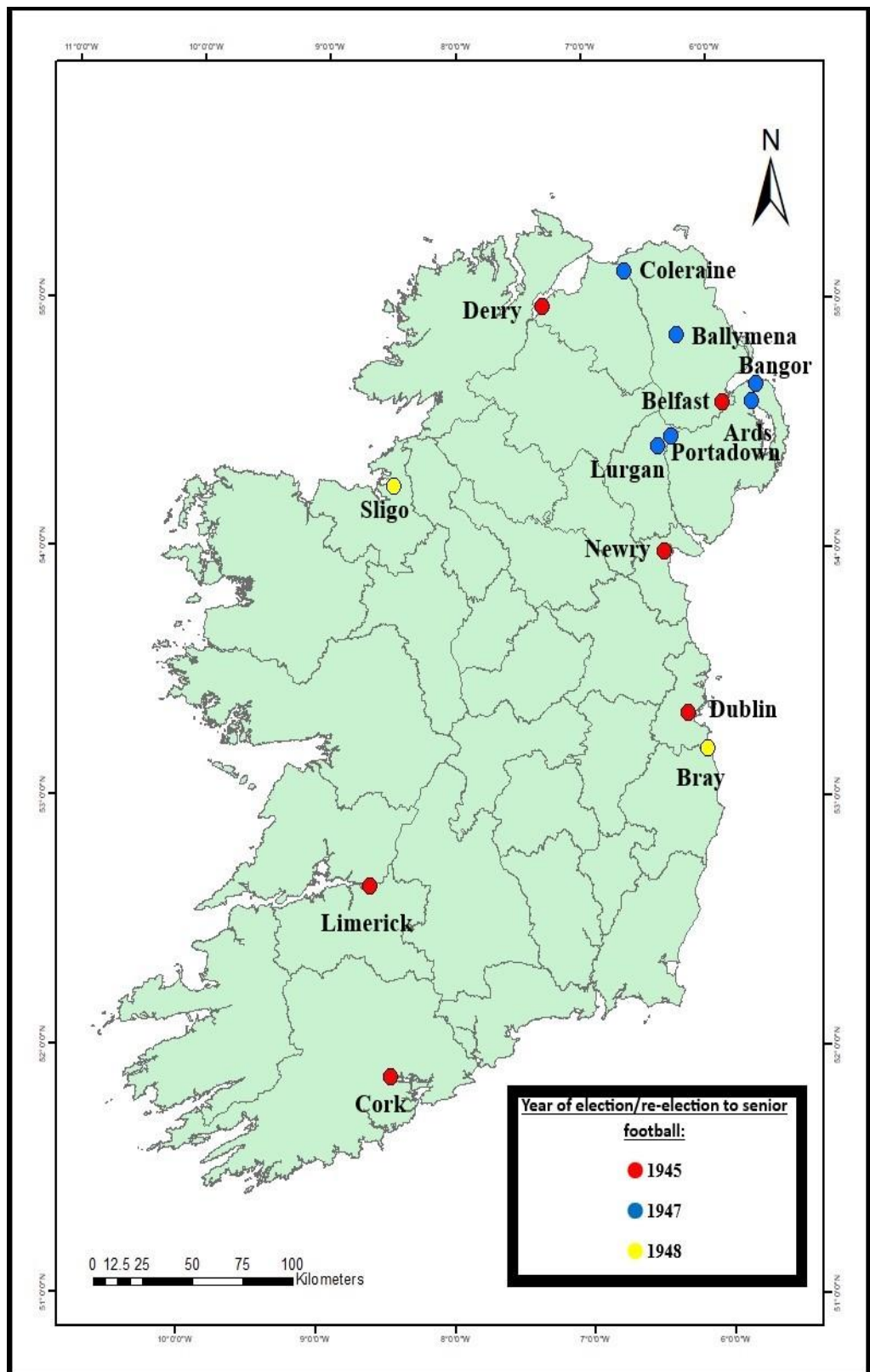
minute of August 1940 that had suspended the league during the war was rescinded.⁷⁴

In contrast, the League of Ireland's 1945/6 season featured eight teams – four from Dublin, and one each from Cork, Limerick, Dundalk and Waterford.⁷⁵ The post-war revival of senior club football in the south was complete by the 1948/9 season when two provincial clubs, Sligo Rovers and Transport FC (Bray), were elected to a League of Ireland that now contained ten clubs from seven locations and, for the first time, more provincial clubs (six) than those from Dublin (four).⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Irish Press*, 1 Mar. 1947..

⁷⁵ *Irish Independent*, 10 Dec. 1945.

⁷⁶ *Irish Independent*, 6 Dec. 1948.



Map 15: Senior league football expansion, 1945-8.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Irish Independent*, 10 Dec. 1945; *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 Dec. 1945; *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Nov. 1947; *Irish Independent*, 6 Dec. 1948.

Urban area (no. of clubs)	Population density (1951)	Urban area (no. of clubs)	Population density (1951)
Cork (one)	7,411	Coleraine (one)	2,621
Belfast (five)	6,612	Bray (one)	2,578
Dublin (four)	5,705	Portadown (one)	2,325
Derry (one)	5,629	Limerick (one)	2,262
Waterford (one)	3,534	Bangor (one)	2,125
Ballymena (one)	2,891	Sligo (one)	1,086
Newtownards (one)	2,846	Dundalk (one)	761
Lurgan (one)	2,697		

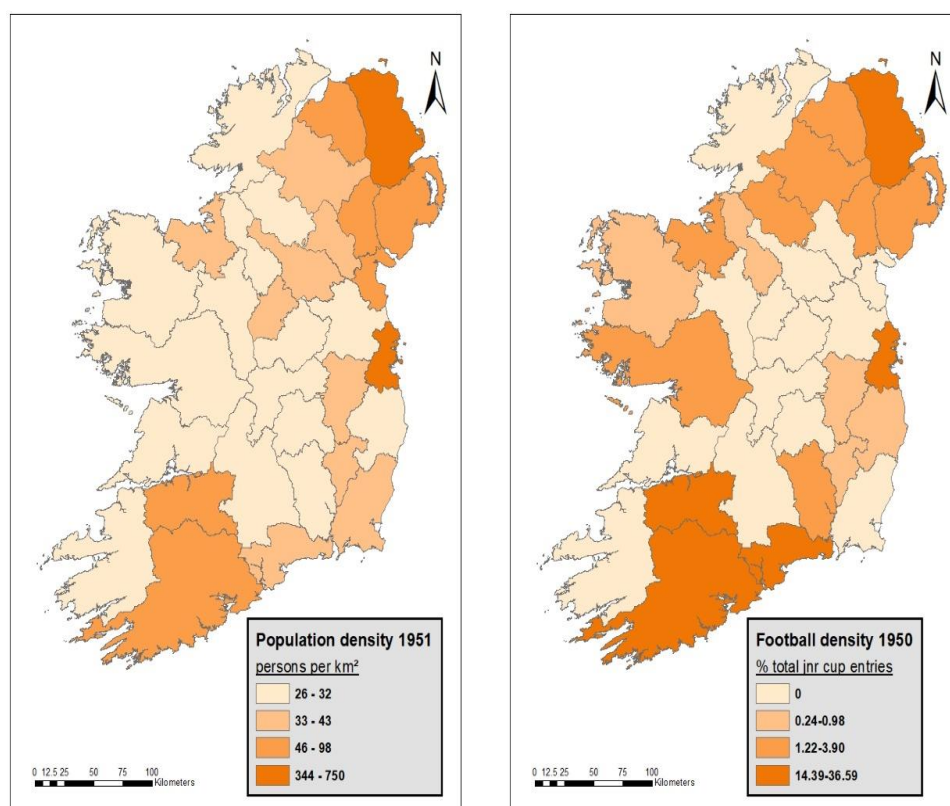
Table 11: Senior league football expansion (1945-8) and population density (1951).⁷⁸

Consequently, senior league football in Ireland would begin the second half of the twentieth century in a position where six cities and nine provincial towns (combined north and south), were represented by a club in either the Irish League in Northern Ireland, or the League of Ireland in the Republic of Ireland. Coleraine had the smallest population of those areas (10,748) when a census in both parts of Ireland was taken in 1951, whereas Dundalk had the lowest population density (805 persons per km²). Notably, eight provincial towns at that time had a population greater than Coleraine; these were Larne (11,976); Lisburn (14,778); Newry (13,264); Drogheda (15,715); Galway (20,370); Dun Laoghaire (47,920); Tralee (11,045); and Wexford (12,296). However, they did not have a senior league club. In addition, all of those towns had a greater population density in 1951 than Dundalk (761 persons per km²): Larne (2,548); Lisburn (3,213); Newry (4,736); Drogheda (2,797); Galway (982); Dun Laoghaire (2,836); Tralee (1,699); and Wexford (5,990).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1951, table 14; Population of Boroughs and urban and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951, *xxi*; *Irish Independent*, 10 Dec. 1945; *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 Dec. 1945; *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Nov. 1947; *Irish Independent*, 6 Dec. 1948.

⁷⁹ Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1951, table 14; Population of Boroughs and urban and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951.

In junior football, a strong post-war recovery between 1945 and 1950 is evident. The relationship between junior football and urbanisation between 1936 and 1938 (map 14), was once again evident in 1951 (map 16).



Map 16: Population density (1951), and Junior Cup Football Density (1950).⁸⁰

In a continuation of the traditional strength of the game in the north east, County Antrim contributed almost 37 per cent of junior cup entries in 1950. Indeed, an additional eighty junior football clubs located there in 1950 entered the cup (150),⁸¹ when compared to 1938 (seventy).⁸² Sixteen of those new or returning clubs in County Antrim had affiliated to that divisional FA in 1948-9 alone.⁸³ Significantly, a slight increase in County Antrim's population density by 1951 (238 persons per km², up from 224 persons per km² in 1937)

⁸⁰ Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1951, table 14; Population of Boroughs and urban and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951 xxi; *Irish Independent*, 20 Sept. 1950; *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 Sept. 1950.

⁸¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 Sept. 1950.

⁸² *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 Oct. 1938.

⁸³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 July 1949.

was likely concentrated in its largest urban area of Belfast (6,612 persons per km² in 1951).

Beyond Antrim, the 1950 cup draw also reveals that since 1945, the number of cup entries had increased in counties Londonderry (up three), Fermanagh (up three) and Armagh (up two). Those new clubs appeared in towns such as Armagh, County Armagh (1951 population of 9,280); Garvagh, County Londonderry (565); and Ballinamallard, County Fermanagh (258).⁸⁴ Within a decade of the acrimonious split within senior football, the evident expansion of the junior game in Northern Ireland between 1945 and 1950 disproved an allegation made by an unnamed Belfast club representative during the meeting that dissolved the Irish League in 1940, 'that provincial towns in Northern Ireland were not football minded'.⁸⁵ Perhaps more important than that growth alone, provincial clubs acquitted themselves impressively during that post-war period, winning five of the six IFA Junior Cup competitions held between 1945 and 1950 – Bessbrook Strollers (1945),⁸⁶ Lurgan Boys (1946),⁸⁷ Strabane United (1947 & 1948),⁸⁸ and Muckamore Presbyterians (1950).⁸⁹

In the south, between 1945 and 1946 alone an increase of thirty-six junior clubs affiliated to the FAI.⁹⁰ It is, therefore, little surprise that the growth in FAI junior cup entries between 1945 and 1950 totalled eighty-eight (up from 137 in 1945 to 225 in 1950). At the conclusion of the Emergency in 1945, there were eighty-six FAI junior cup entries from provincial areas. By 1950, a net-growth of thirty-one to a total of 117 FAI junior cup entries from provincial areas of the Republic of Ireland had taken place. The areas of growth included counties Cork (plus forty-six entries), Waterford (seven), Kilkenny (seven), and Limerick (five). The new or returning clubs located in provincial areas emerged from villages as well as small and medium-sized towns: in County Cork, Middleton (1951 population of 2,828), Cobh (5,711), Bandon (2,527),

⁸⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 Sept. 1950; Population of Boroughs and urban and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951, *xxi*.

⁸⁵ *Larne Times*, 17 Aug. 1940.

⁸⁶ *Northern Whig*, 30 Apr. 1945.

⁸⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 May 1946.

⁸⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 May 1947 & 17 May 1948.

⁸⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 May 1950.

⁹⁰ *Irish Press*, 7 June 1946.

and Blarney (874); in County Waterford, Portlaw (925); and in County Kilkenny, Piltown (223), for example.⁹¹

A post-war decline of twelve FAI junior cup entries from County Sligo alone between 1945 and 1950 (from sixteen to four) is notable in that it exceeded the total net-decrease of eleven from Connacht over the same period (from twenty-six in 1945 to fifteen in 1950). We might consider this to corroborate the uneven recovery of the game in the west of Ireland that was described by the Connacht FA secretary in 1948:

The secretary, Mr T.P. Brennan, presented his report. More soccer teams, he said, were affiliated to the Connacht Football Association last season than ever before. Although the game was progressing favourably in Sligo and Galway, not enough headway was being made in other districts, such as Castlerea and Roscommon, which he said was due to lack of co-operation from clubs in those areas.⁹²

1950-74

Whilst a phase of urbanisation may well have already been underway prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, an acceleration of housebuilding in urban areas of Ireland was evident following the war's end, particularly in the period between 1950 and 1970. Unsurprisingly, most of the construction in the Republic of Ireland occurred in its capital city, Dublin, or in its other cities at that time – Cork, Limerick, and Waterford. For example, in 1956 Dublin Corporation approved⁹³ the construction of 896 houses in Coolock-Raheny,⁹⁴ a scheme the *Irish Times* described as:

The restart of the provision of homes for tenants who were prepared to buy them ... most of the [Dublin Corporation] expenditure (£2,000,000) was in connection with slum clearance, but a big effort would also be made in the future for the “white collar” workers.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *Irish Independent*, 5 Oct. 1945; *Irish Independent*, 20 Sept. 1950; Volume 1 - Population, area and valuation of each DED and each larger unit of area, Census of Ireland, 1951, table 14.

⁹² *Ballina Herald*, 26 June 1948.

⁹³ *Irish Independent*, 19 Jan. 1955.

⁹⁴ *Dáil Éireann, díospóireachtaí páirliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisc oifigiúil* (official report), 15th Dáil, Vol.159 No.10, 25 July 1956 (Dublin, Stationery Office).

⁹⁵ *Irish Times*, 16 Mar. 1953.

Joseph Brady has contended that ‘Dublin became suburban during the 1930s and 1940s’.⁹⁶ The increasing pace and scale of that construction in the post-war years would eventually prove to have created fertile terrain for football as it gained new suburban outposts:

In 1951, for example, Dublin Corporation built 2,272 houses and flats, and had another 2,872 under construction. New large scale local authority suburbs were created around the city (including Ballyfermot, Finglas, Bluebell, Walkinstown, Milltown and Crumlin). Forty-nine housing schemes were undertaken by Dublin Corporation over the decade, accounting for at least half of all housing built in Dublin.⁹⁷

Reflecting this, the explanatory notes to the 1951 census of Ireland stated that:

In consequence of the rapid development that has taken place in the suburban areas adjacent to Dublin County Borough, Dun Laoghaire Borough and Cork County Borough it has been decided to complete and publish for the first time population figures relating to these suburban areas.⁹⁸

Local authorities in both urban and provincial areas drove most of the construction during this era. - In Cork City, the corporation completed on average a total of 330 houses per annum in the period between 1950 to 1961.⁹⁹ Developments at Ballynanty and Rathbane in Limerick city were completed in 1952.¹⁰⁰ Cork County Council delivered fifty-two new houses in Cobh (1953),¹⁰¹ and forty-two new house in Mitchelstown (also 1953).¹⁰² 216 houses were completed in Waterford’s suburb of Ferrybank (1953) while¹⁰³ Wexford Corporation completed 128 new houses at Bishopswater in the same year.¹⁰⁴ In 1954, for example, fifty-four new houses were completed by Kells Urban Council in County Meath¹⁰⁵ and 400 houses were approved for construction in

⁹⁶ Joseph Brady, *Dublin, 1930-1950: The emergence of a modern city* (Dublin, 2014), p. 201.

⁹⁷ Ruth McManus, ‘Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 111C (2011), p. 267, <http://doras.dcu.ie/21554/> [accessed 14 Nov. 2021].

⁹⁸ Explanatory notes, Census of Ireland, 1951.

⁹⁹ Michael Gough, ‘Socio-economic conditions and the genesis of planning in Cork’, in M.J. Bannon (ed.), *The emergence of Irish planning* (Dublin, 1985), pp 307-62, cited by McManus, ‘Suburban and urban housing’, p.258.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Times*, 5 June 1952.

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 1953.

¹⁰² *Irish Times*, 6 June 1953.

¹⁰³ *Irish Times*, 15 Jan 1953.

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 28 July 1953.

¹⁰⁵ *Irish Times*, 28 Jan. 1954.

Galway (1954).¹⁰⁶ Donegal County Council had constructed 271 houses in Letterkenny by September 1959.¹⁰⁷

In Northern Ireland, the 1950s and 1960s also witnessed house-building projects in urban areas. The immediate post-war years, however, were dominated by the extension of the British welfare state to the region, with developments such as the Education Act (1947) and the National Health Act (1948).¹⁰⁸ Consequently, the scale of building was not as extensive as that in the Republic of Ireland, though the 1951 census of Northern Ireland noted the existence of two cities – Belfast and Derry – in addition to nine municipal boroughs and twenty-four urban districts in the provincial towns of Northern Ireland.¹⁰⁹

However, the greater Belfast urban area did witness some development during the 1950s. Within the city limits, projects included: - eighty-eight flats and thirty-two houses in the Antrim Road area of North Belfast (1951);¹¹⁰ 110 houses in the Andersonstown Park scheme (1955);¹¹¹ forty-four houses in the Whiterock and Springfield areas(1957);¹¹² and sixty houses at a site off the Shankill Road that had been destroyed during the Belfast Blitz in 1941.¹¹³

In 1955, Belfast Corporation ‘agreed in principle to building houses outside the city boundary’¹¹⁴ in response to a shortage of suitable sites for development, and this resulted in tenders for the erection of seventy-eight houses in Knocknagoney in 1956.¹¹⁵ In 1959, the Northern Ireland government cited this new estate as an example of the ‘intensive housing and industrial development on the outskirts of the city’ as a result of the failure of Belfast

¹⁰⁶ *Tuam Herald*, 14 Aug. 1954.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Times*, 3 Sept. 1959.

¹⁰⁸ Loughlin, *The Ulster question*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁹ Explanatory notes, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951.

¹¹⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 March 1951.

¹¹¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 Jan. 1955

¹¹² *Northern Whig*, 9 May 1957.

¹¹³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 Apr. 1952.

¹¹⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 Aug. 1955.

¹¹⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 Nov. 1956.

Corporation to extend the city limits to obtain building ground for housing schemes.¹¹⁶

In Northern Ireland's other city, arguably, the most ambitious construction was attempted. In 1953 the *Londonderry Sentinel* reported that Londonderry Corporation had delivered 2,112 new houses in only eight years.¹¹⁷ Elsewhere, borough councils oversaw numerous housebuilding schemes - including 155 houses in Lurgan (1950);¹¹⁸ approximately 260 houses in Larne (1956-7);¹¹⁹ 137 houses and eighty-four flats in Bangor (1960);¹²⁰ and forty-one houses and eighteen flats in Ballymena (1962).¹²¹

Significantly, it was from those newly constructed residential areas of Belfast, that the shoots of junior football activity soon followed. For example, the press informs us of 'Whiterock United' taking part in a Junior Shield competition in October 1956.¹²² By the end of the decade, Whiterock United reached the semi-final of the IFA junior cup,¹²³ losing out to Belfast rivals St Patrick's Y.C.¹²⁴ Later, in the nearby Shankill ward of the city, so too was junior football making progress. 'Lower Shankill Old Boys' won the IFA junior cup in 1965.¹²⁵

¹¹⁶ Cabinet conclusions, (3) Belfast boundary extension in relation to the city's housing problem [opposition], 28 Oct. 1959 (Gale, Northern Ireland: A Divided Community, 1921-1972 Cabinet Papers of the Stormont Administration, CAB 4/807).

¹¹⁷ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 22 Aug. 1953.

¹¹⁸ *Portadown News*, 15 Apr. 1950.

¹¹⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 Mar. 1956; *Belfast Telegraph*, 21 May 1957.

¹²⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 Oct. 1960.

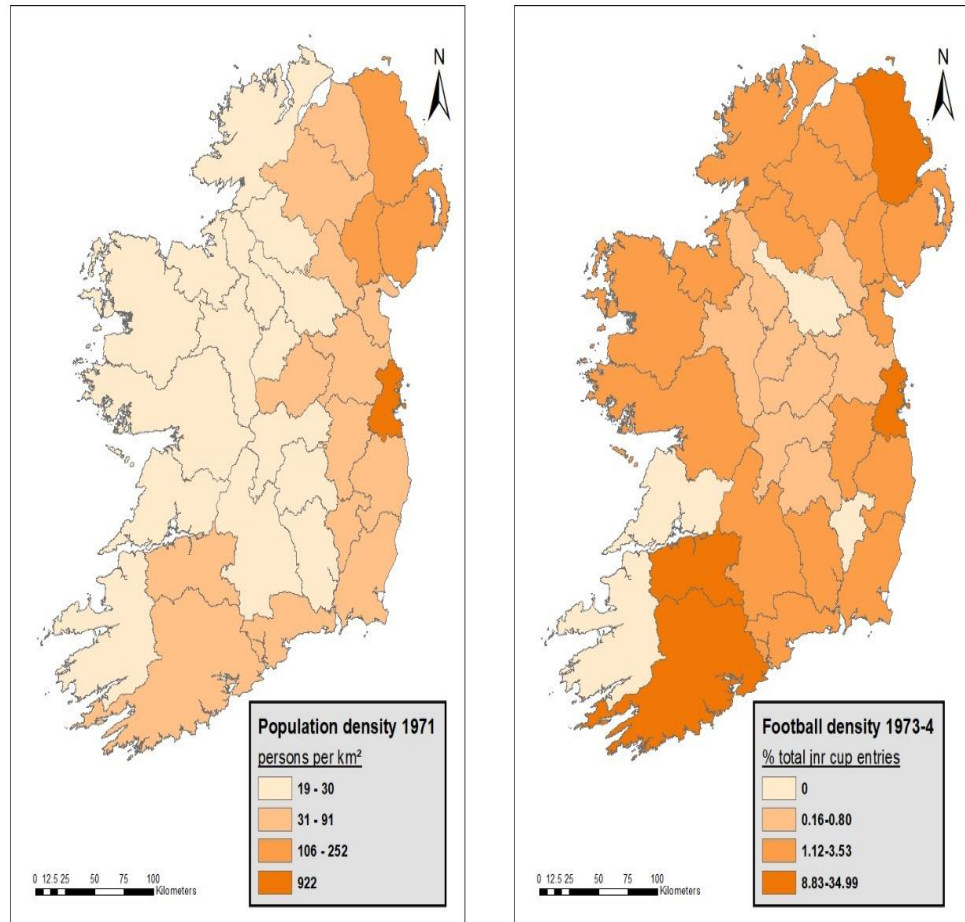
¹²¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 Jan. 1962.

¹²² *Northern Whig*, 5 Oct. 1956.

¹²³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 Apr. 1959.

¹²⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 8 May 1959.

¹²⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 22 May 1965.



Map 17: Population Density (1971), and Junior Cup Football Density (1973-4).¹²⁶

The data above (map 17) reveals that whilst County Antrim had contributed over 36 per cent of all junior cup entries across both parts of Ireland in 1950-1, in 1973-4 that declined to around 14 per cent even though its population density was increasing (252 persons per km² in 1971 as opposed to 238 persons per km² in 1951). The increasing population density of counties Armagh (from ninety-one persons per km² in 1951 to 106 persons per km² in 1971), Down (from ninety-eight to 127 persons per km²), and Londonderry (from seventy-five to eighty-eight persons per km²), was roughly proportional to increased IFA junior cup entries located in those counties. In Armagh, there was an increase of five (from six in 1950 to eleven in 1974), in Down, an

¹²⁶ Volume 1 – Population, Census of Ireland 1971, table 08; Area, buildings for habitation and population, Census summary tables, Census of Northern Ireland, 1971, p. 1; *Irish Press*, 27 Sept. 1973; *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 Sept. 1974.

increase of seven (from eight in 1950 to fifteen in 1974), and in Londonderry, an increase of three (from eleven in 1950 to fourteen in 1974).¹²⁷

More significant, arguably, was the growth of the urban area between the outer reaches of West Belfast and the town of Lisburn, about eight miles to the south-west of Belfast City, which began around 1951. The local press reported on the number of homes constructed or under construction at that time: Dunmurry (ninety); Lambeg (fifty-six); Glenavy (forty-two),¹²⁸ and later in the decade this included larger projects such as the erection of 380 houses at Milltown, Lisburn (1958).¹²⁹ By 1958, the growing Belfast-Lisburn urban area was proving to be fertile terrain for the development of football with Dunmurry Rec and Lambeg football clubs performing ‘giant-killing feats’ in the latter rounds of the IFA intermediate cup. In 1959 we learn that a football club in Glenavy was also participating in junior football leagues in the Lisburn area.¹³⁰

Dunmurry would stun one of the traditional Belfast heavyweights, Glentoran, in the Intermediate Cup semi-final played at Windsor Park in December 1958,¹³¹ before losing the final to Larne by three goals to one, played at Grosvenor Park in January 1959.¹³² As a result of house building beyond the city limits of Belfast that encroached on the limits of the Lisburn Municipal Borough, the population density of Lambeg (1,608 persons per km²) in 1971, for example, was greater than that of senior football towns such as Dundalk or Sligo in 1951. Crucially, the success of junior football clubs in the greater Lisburn area was signposted as paving the way for future senior football activity. As the *Lisburn Standard* put it in late 1958:

Lambeg and Dunmurry, the football fraternity of Lisburn and district are proud of you, not only have you raised the prestige of local football, but you have stressed the point of what a fine Irish League club Lisburn could produce.¹³³

¹²⁷ Population of Boroughs and urban and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951, *xxi*; Area, buildings for habitation and population, Census summary tables, Census of Northern Ireland, 1971, p. 1; *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 Sept. 1950; *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 Sept. 1974.

¹²⁸ *Lisburn Standard*, 2 Feb. 1951.

¹²⁹ *Lisburn Standard*, 21 Nov. 1958.

¹³⁰ *Lisburn Standard*, 17 Apr. 1959.

¹³¹ *Lisburn Standard*, 19 Dec. 1958.

¹³² *Lisburn Standard*, 9 Jan. 1959.

¹³³ *Lisburn Standard*, 28 Nov. 1958.

In the south, the location of junior cup entries reflected the result of the enormous scale of urban and suburban development over the previous four decades. By 1973-4 (map 17) around 43 per cent of all FAI junior cup entries were in County Dublin (218 of 501). We might consider this to have been aided by an increase in that county's population density between 1951 and 1971 (from 750 persons per km² in 1951 to 922 persons per km² in 1971).

The population of County Dublin in 1971 was 852,219. This included what we might describe as 'Dublin City',¹³⁴ containing 66 per cent (567,866) of the county's population, and the Dun Laoghaire Borough area, containing 6 per cent (51,881) of the county's population. The remaining 27 per cent of the county's population (232,472) included that which we might describe as 'suburban Dublin', first defined by the census of 1951. By 1971, the 'Dublin North suburbs' (population 19,416), 'Dublin South suburbs' (92,466) and 'Dun Laoghaire suburbs' (45,208)¹³⁵ meant that suburban Dublin represented 92 per cent (157,090) of suburban Republic of Ireland in 1971 (170,204).¹³⁶

That growing suburban Dublin proved fertile terrain for the seemingly organic development of junior football, aligns with the development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin at that time. Between 1961 and 1971 the population of Dublin City and County grew by 133,887 – from 718,332 to 852,219. Ireland was becoming, in statistical terms, a more urban society and the Gaelic Athletic Association had to take cognisance of this fact as Dublin became a place of suburban dwellers.

Among the new GAA clubs in the new suburban areas of Dublin was the Robert Emmets Club in Walkinstown Upper (1969). Among those who received a new lease of life through a process of amalgamation was Crumlin in 1970 when St Columbas and St Agnes clubs merged.¹³⁷

As it was for the GAA, so too for soccer. Within six years of Dublin Corporation's invitation to tender for the construction of 112 houses and an

¹³⁴ What the census defined as the 'County Borough', was 'the greater part of the built-up areas of the city and its boundaries [that] was subject to periodic extensions to keep pace with the spread of building', Explanatory notes, Census of Ireland, 1971.

¹³⁵ Appendices, Census of Ireland, 1971.

¹³⁶ This also included the 'Cork suburbs', 'Limerick suburbs' and 'Waterford suburbs'.

¹³⁷ William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-2000, vol.2 1960-2000* (Dublin, 2005), pp 515-7.

E.S.B. electricity substation in West Finglas in 1955,¹³⁸ the Dublin press reported on ‘the new football spirit’ taking hold in Finglas. This would be vindicated when ‘West Finglas United’ participated in the Leinster Junior League in 1961,¹³⁹ and later also the FAI Junior Cup in 1963¹⁴⁰ and 1964.¹⁴¹

Elsewhere, Cork Corporation approved plans for 150 houses in addition to the 100 that were already under construction at Ballyphehane in the south of Cork City in 1949, and resolved to acquire land for the erection of another 250 homes there in 1950.¹⁴² Football soon followed. Some of the earliest press records pertaining to ‘Ballyphehane United AFC’ date to 1953.¹⁴³ Whilst football activities in the new suburban area of Cork included reports of schoolboys’ football in 1954,¹⁴⁴ and later a football ‘street league’¹⁴⁵ in addition to local cup competitions in Cork¹⁴⁶ in 1960. The earliest record of a FAI Junior Cup fixture involving Ballyphehane United was a 1964 round one fixture versus Cobh Ramblers,¹⁴⁷ in which Cobh triumphed by four goals to one.¹⁴⁸

During the 1950s and 1960s, Irish government policies included the building of affordable housing,¹⁴⁹ the attempt to encourage a wider distribution of new industries,¹⁵⁰ and the increased provision of social amenities.¹⁵¹ This direction of government resources undoubtedly contributed to making provincial towns a more attractive destination, first to those migrating from rural areas. Eventually, that provincial investment aided those towns in

¹³⁸ *Irish Press*, 18 Apr. 1955.

¹³⁹ *Evening Herald*, 28 Feb. 1961.

¹⁴⁰ *Evening Herald*, 19 Nov. 1963.

¹⁴¹ *Irish Independent*, 16 Oct. 1964.

¹⁴² *Irish Times*, 12 Jan. 1949.

¹⁴³ *Evening Echo*, 5 Oct. 1953.

¹⁴⁴ *Evening Echo*, 25 May 1954.

¹⁴⁵ *Evening Echo*, 13 May 1960.

¹⁴⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 5 Mar. 1960.

¹⁴⁷ *Irish Independent*, 16 Oct. 1964.

¹⁴⁸ *Evening Echo*, 5 Nov. 1964.

¹⁴⁹ *Dáil Éireann, díospóireachtaí páirliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisc oifigiúil* (official report), 17th Dáil, Vol.196, No.17, 24 July 1962 (Dublin, Stationery Office).

¹⁵⁰ *Dáil Éireann, díospóireachtaí páirliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisc oifigiúil* (official report), 14th Dáil, Vol.129, No.8, 28 Feb. 1952 (Dublin, Stationery Office); see also Vol. 142, No.10, 5 Nov. 1953.

¹⁵¹ *Dáil Éireann, díospóireachtaí páirliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisc oifigiúil* (official report), 16th Dáil, Vol.179, No.6, 25 Feb. 1960 (Dublin, Stationery Office).

becoming a base for senior league football,¹⁵² and it is to that level of the game we now return to conclude this section.

1980-90

The forced migration to Lisburn of Distillery FC was the first major development in senior football during the 1980s (see map 18 below illustrating all developments). One of Belfast's traditional heavyweights, Distillery had abandoned their home at Grosvenor Park in West Belfast in 1971¹⁵³ as a result of plans to construct 'a new ring road through part of their ground'.¹⁵⁴ Having spent almost a decade ground-sharing in Belfast, by 1980, and following an acrimonious dispute with local residents and councillors, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that Distillery had spent £350,000 'to bring senior football to Lisburn'.¹⁵⁵ Thus, the junior football foundations laid in the late 1950s and early 1960s (discussed above) had finally proved to be the basis of senior football in Lisburn as had been envisaged. By 1991, Lisburn had sustained a decade of senior football in an urban area that had a population density of 1,144 persons per km²,¹⁵⁶ its population having increased by 185 per cent between 1951 and 1991 (from 14,778 to 42,110).¹⁵⁷ Elsewhere, the admittance of Carrick Rangers and the return of Newry Town to the Irish League in 1983,¹⁵⁸ would be the first provincial additions to senior football in Northern Ireland since Ballymena United's election in 1947.¹⁵⁹

We might consider the addition of a second tier to senior football in the Republic of Ireland in 1985 an attempt to include more provincial clubs, and on a more permanent basis. That restructuring saw Sligo Rovers relegated¹⁶⁰ from

¹⁵² For example, the election of both Athlone Town and Finn Harps (Ballybofey, County Donegal) to the League of Ireland in for the 1969/70 season, *Derry Journal*, 17 June 1969.

¹⁵³ This was at a time when events in their locality due to the Troubles included serious rioting that followed the introduction of internment without trial and the Ballymurphy massacre (9-11 Aug. 1971).

¹⁵⁴ *Irish Independent*, 28 Jan. 1971.

¹⁵⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 3 June 1980.

¹⁵⁶ Population 1981 and 1991, Census summary report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Population of Boroughs and urban and rural districts, General report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1951, *xxi*; Population 1981 and 1991, Census summary report, Census of Northern Ireland, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 31 Dec. 1983.

¹⁵⁹ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 8 Nov. 1947.

¹⁶⁰ *Sligo Champion*, 5 Apr. 1985.

the top tier of Irish football for the first time since 1948, though the club remained in the new second tier of senior football. To some extent, the new second tier of senior football would break new ground in some provincial areas of the Republic of Ireland. For the first time, the League of Ireland featured teams from Kilkenny City (E.M.F.A.), from Newcastle West, County Limerick (Newcastle United), and Monaghan (Monaghan United), alongside well-established sides such as Bray Wanderers and Drogheda United.¹⁶¹

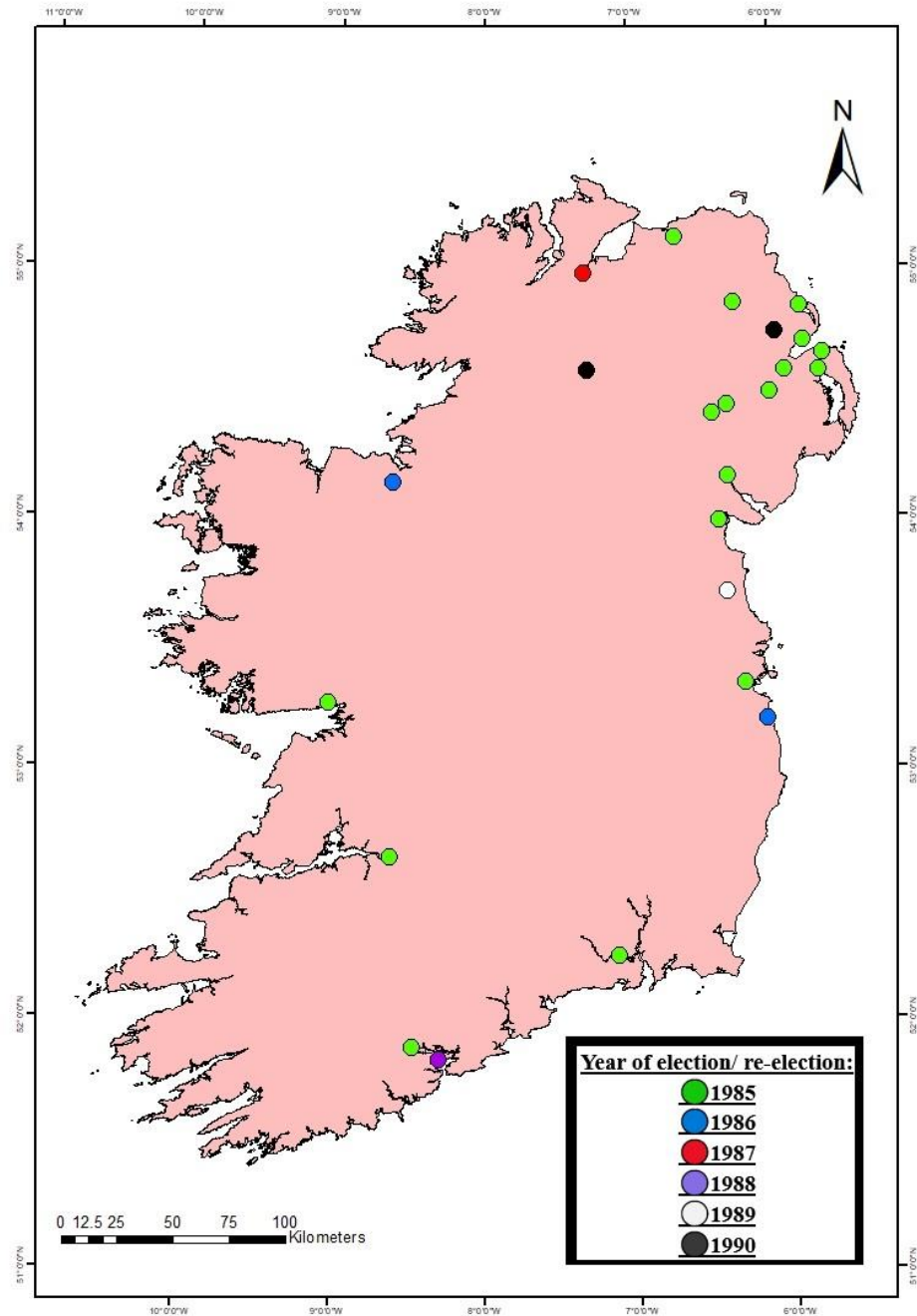
This was also an important moment as it saw Derry City re-enter senior football. Having quit the Irish League in October 1972,¹⁶² a team representing Northern Ireland's second city (Derry) joined the League of Ireland in 1985.¹⁶³ Given the link between urbanisation and the demand for football demonstrated here, it should be no surprise that support for a senior team in Derry was strong. The city was recorded as the most densely populated urban area on the island of Ireland in 1991 (6,130 persons per km²).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ *Irish Independent*, 20 Dec. 1948.

¹⁶² *Irish Press*, 14 Oct. 1972.

¹⁶³ *Irish Press*, 5 Mar. 1985.

¹⁶⁴ Population, dwellings, private households and area (wards), Census of Northern Ireland, 1991, p. 4.



Map 18: Senior league football expansion, 1985-90.¹⁶⁵

The relocation of urban senior clubs between 1980 and 1985, and the reopening and restructuring of admissions (1983-5) ushered in a final and arguably conclusive phase of provincial expansion in senior football between 1985 and 1990. Thirty-three clubs spread throughout thirty different urban areas of Ireland – in a mixture of urban, suburban and provincial locations –

¹⁶⁵ *Irish Independent*: 7 Dec. 1985, 8 Dec. 1986, 7 Dec. 1987, 5 Dec. 1988, & 18 Dec. 1989; *Ireland's Saturday Night*: 21 Dec. 1985 & 17 Nov. 1990.

furnished senior league football with its participating clubs in that five-year period. Notably, Dublin's six clubs during this era – representing almost one fifth of all of Ireland's senior clubs – were located in suburban Dublin: - Bohemians (Phibsborough); Shamrock Rovers (Milltown); Shelbourne (Harold's Cross); St Patrick's Athletic (Inchicore); Home Farm (Drumcondra); and UCD (Belfield). This concentration of clubs is perhaps unsurprising given that by the 1991 the Dublin suburbs (381,587) were more populous than any urban area on the island except for Dublin City itself (478,389). At least one club from each of the island's other six cities participated in the senior game: Belfast (four), Cork (one), Derry (one), Limerick (one), Galway (one), and Waterford (one). The remaining eighteen clubs were located, one apiece, in the provincial towns of Ireland. The average population of those urban areas, recorded in 1991, was 57,231, the average urban area size was 24.16 km², and the average population density was 2,869 persons per km².¹⁶⁶

4.3: Football's social base and its development

Chapter three considered the role that schools rugby and the professional classes occupied with regards to the social base of that game. This section, in turn, considers the social base of association football. In seeking to advance knowledge of the social base of football this section will focus on two areas. It will first assess that long-standing importance of workplace teams to football in Ireland, adding to our knowledge of one of the key mechanisms for spreading the game among the working classes. The section will then turn to the neglected impact of the growth of the women's game. This latter development is a fascinating aspect of both the growth of the game and the broadening of its social base from the 1960s. In doing so this section builds on the work of scholars such as Neal Garnham and Conor Curran, and indeed more recent articles by Martin Moore and Julien Clenet who have detailed, what Rouse described as the 'phenomena'.¹⁶⁷ Even as this section focuses on particular aspects of association football's playing base, it is important to acknowledge

¹⁶⁶ Volume 1 – Population classified by area, Census of Ireland, 1991, table 11; Population, dwellings, private households and area (wards), Census of Northern Ireland, 1991, p. 4.

¹⁶⁷ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 190.

that their scholarship on the early diffusion of football clubs throughout Ireland, following the establishment of the IFA in Belfast in 1880 illustrates a considerable degree of variety and diversity. These scholars identified teams founded in schools (Bohemians) in pubs (Shelbourne), by companies (St James' Gate), by temperance societies (Downpatrick), by a landlord's sons (Athlone), and by churches, synagogues, in local areas and amongst groups of friends.¹⁶⁸

Workplace football teams in Ireland, 1921-51

In moving to Lisburn, Distillery FC responded to social change. This was not the first time the club had done so. Founded in 1880 by the employees of Dunville's distillery,¹⁶⁹ and based at Grosvenor Park in west Belfast,¹⁷⁰ Distillery FC was the first 'workplace-based' association football club in Ireland. If Distillery was the first, then, over time, such teams became more common. In Britain, the origin of such teams in football, it is argued, occurred in the context of the wider provision of welfare in the workplace, a trend which grew during the first half of the twentieth century, whether as an antidote to trade union activity or for the purposes of promoting a fit and healthy workforce.¹⁷¹ Robert Fitzgerald found that the provision of workforce recreation in Britain was often an attempt to reduce work-disaffection or to ensure the retention of a loyal workforce.¹⁷² In Wales, the provision of leisure facilities emerged later than the initial welfare priority, which was the provision of housing for workers in the mining industry in south Wales, but it came there too.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Garnham, *Association football and society*, pp 16-20; Curran, *Sport in Donegal*, pp 44-74; Martin Moore, 'Early association football in Ireland: embryonic diffusion outside Ulster, 1877-1882', *Sport in History* 42:1 (2022), pp 24-48; Julien Clenet, 'Association football in Dublin in the late nineteenth century: an overview', *Soccer & Society* 22:8 (2021), pp 805-819.

¹⁶⁹ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p.47.

¹⁷⁰ *Northern Whig*, 22 Nov. 1880.

¹⁷¹ Steven Crewe, 'What about the workers? Works based sport and recreation in England, c.1918-c.1970', *Sport in history*, 34:4 (2014), pp 544-5.

¹⁷² Robert Fitzgerald, *British labour management and industrial welfare, 1846-1939*, (London, 1988), pp 94-6.

¹⁷³ Steven Thompson, 'From paternalism to industrial partnership: The evolution of industrial welfare capitalism in the south Wales, c.1840-1939', in Louise Miskell (ed.), *New perspectives on Welsh industrial history* (Cardiff, 2019), pp 102-25.

By the mid-twentieth century, the provision of sports clubs after the First World War began to be viewed by the British motor manufacturing industry ‘as a way of encouraging workers to identify with their employers’:¹⁷⁴ Adrian Smith has explored the Coventry-based car industry as an important site of workplace sports provision between 1920 and 1970.¹⁷⁵ If employers saw a value in, and encouraged, teams, then also evident is the initiative and agency of workers themselves in establishing workplace football ‘from below’, such as that witnessed at large factories in England, including Robinsons and J. Lyons & Co in 1919.¹⁷⁶ Terry Morris has claimed that, since the 1920s, those playing with ‘workplace teams’ were amongst the ‘tens of thousands of real amateurs’ playing the game in England.¹⁷⁷

Turning to Ireland, Mark Tynan has written that:

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.¹⁷⁸

To date, the best examination of this area of football activity in Ireland has been Toms’ study of the game in Munster, which he introduced with the contention that ‘the workplace team was a large part of the sport in its early days in the Irish League and later Free State League’.¹⁷⁹ The use of the term workplace team, as distinct from ‘works team’, is important in the Irish context. Clubs such as Distillery, Linfield and St James’ Gate were ‘among the biggest in the [early twentieth century] period’.¹⁸⁰ Although employees of factories founded these, the junior level of the game also included teams representing many other types of (non-factory) employment centre in all parts

¹⁷⁴ Tim Claydon, ‘Trade unions, employers and industrial relations in the British motor industry c.1919-45’, *Business History*, 29:3 (1987), p. 310.

¹⁷⁵ Adrian Smith, ‘Cars, cricket, and Alf Smith: The place of works-based sports and social clubs in the life of mid-twentieth-century Coventry’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19:1 (2002) pp 137–50.

¹⁷⁶ *The Link*, June 1919 (Chesterfield Central Library Cultural and Community Services, House magazine for Robinson and Sons Ltd., 052.51 3690); cited in Crewe, ‘What about the workers?’ p. 551.

¹⁷⁷ Terry Morris, *In a class of their own: A history of English amateur football* (Sheffield, 2015), p. 340.

¹⁷⁸ Tynan, ‘Association football and Irish society’, p. 210.

¹⁷⁹ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 16.

of Ireland. Consequently, ‘workplace teams’ is preferred and will be utilised in the analysis that follows. In providing an all-island picture concerning workplace teams in the post-partition era between 1922 and 1951, the era when such teams appear to have had their heyday within the realms of both senior and junior football in both parts of Ireland, this section enhances the existing historiography.

The existence of, and indeed the revealing names of, workplace football teams have been gleaned from a mining of national and local newspapers’ football coverage. The database assembled¹⁸¹ contains 192 identified teams from a total of 169 different workplaces, eight senior and 184 junior. Fifty-three of those were located in Northern Ireland, with 139 in what during this period became the Republic of Ireland. Of the total, 153 were based in Ireland’s five cities – Belfast in Northern Ireland and Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford in the Republic of Ireland. The remaining thirty-nine were distributed across a total of seventeen of Ireland’s provincial towns, ten of those in Northern Ireland and seven in the Republic of Ireland. All are listed in appendix 3.

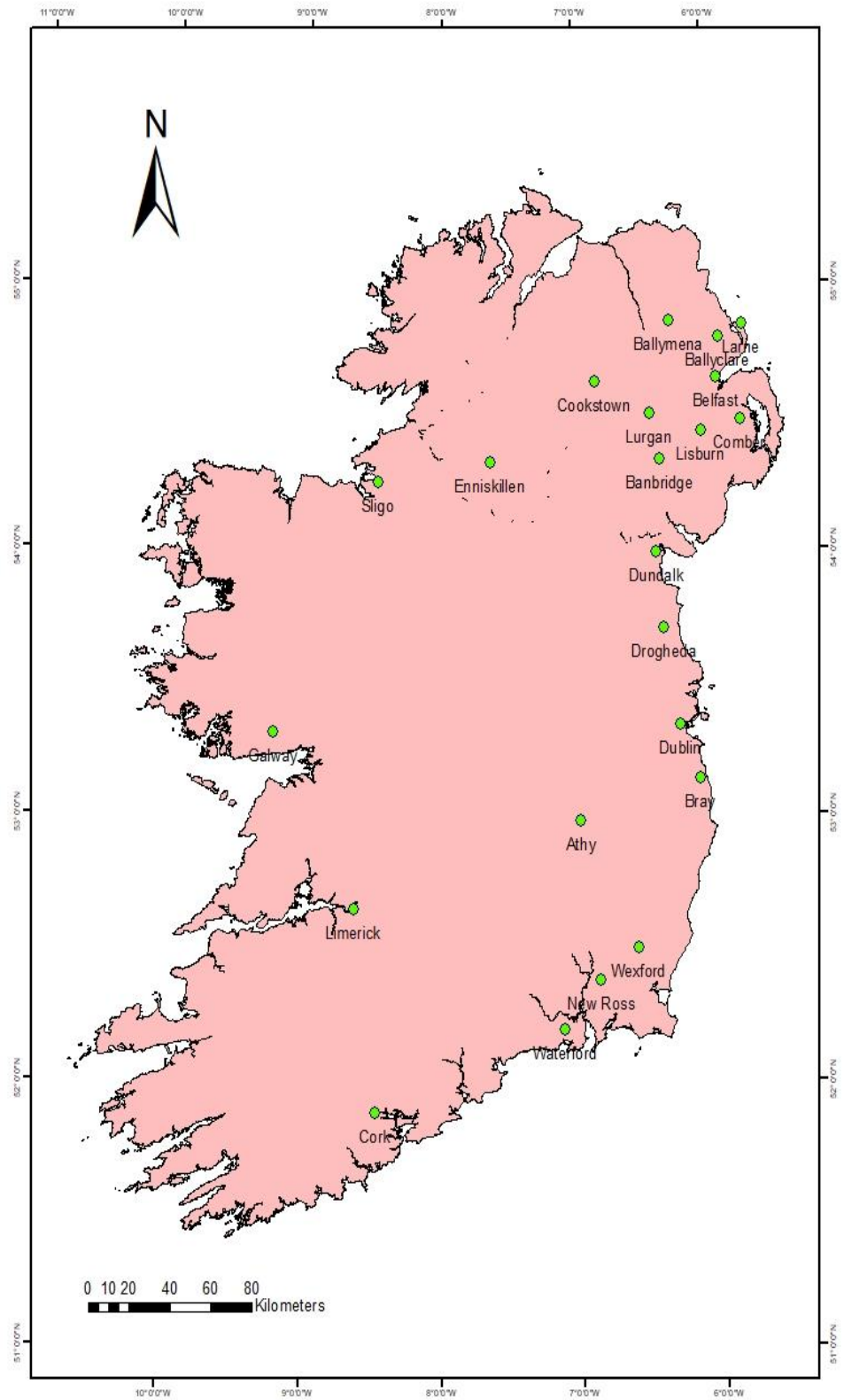
In the text that follows, the year associated with a team refers to the first reference to that team in the press (that I found); this is not necessarily the foundation year of that team but providing such dates does, I believe, assist in suggesting a pattern of development. Further, it must be noted that this is a substantive sample rather than a comprehensive listing of workplace teams in Ireland. Many such teams were short-lived and played in *ad hoc* competitions that never featured in the press or in the records of any association. Nonetheless, patterns are discernible, and the workplaces that teams emerged

¹⁸¹ Compiled from the following newspapers (1921-51): *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, *Belfast News-Letter*, *Dundalk Democrat*, *Evening Echo*, *Evening Herald*, *Freeman’s Journal*, *The Cork Examiner*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Press*, *Meath Chronicle*, *Mid Ulster Mail*, *Munster Express & Northern Whig*; 1931 Trade Directory, Ireland, findmypast.ie; Guy’s city and county Cork almanac and directory for 1930; Minutes of meetings of the junior league committee, 7 Sept. 1939- 25 Sept. 1947 (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/5); FAI Junior Committee minutes, Dec. 1923-Mar. 1954 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/21-31); also Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 47; Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 16, 118, 143-4, 156 & 171: & Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 123.

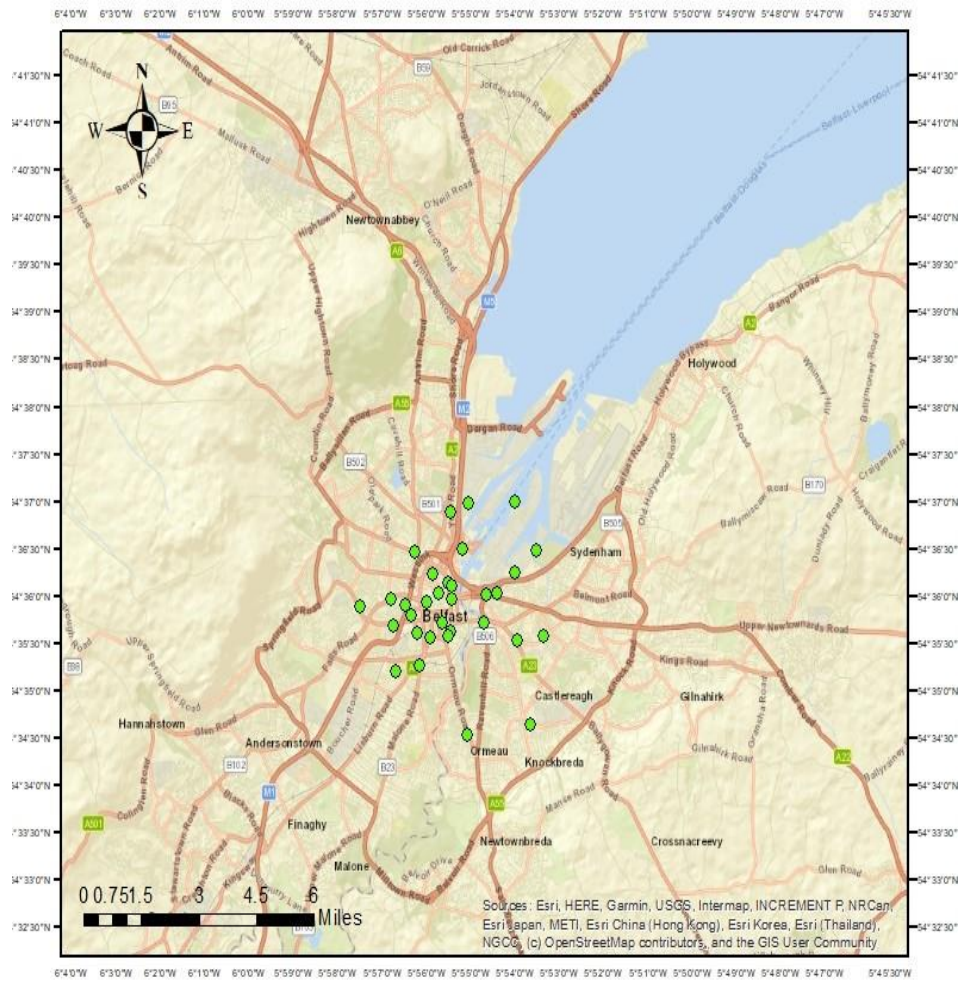
from can be categorised according to four broad sectors of employment: manufacturing/industry; retail/services; state/semi-state; and transport.¹⁸²

First, a series of maps below identify the location of those workplace teams across the cities and towns on the island of Ireland (map 19), and their locations within Belfast (map 20) and Dublin (map 21).

¹⁸² Whilst transport is usually considered as part of the services economy, it is considered as a standalone centre of employment in this study.



Map 19: Location of workplace football teams – island of Ireland.



Map 20: Location of workplace football teams – Belfast.

the 'Belfast Mercantile Academy', a school that specialised in mercantile subjects,¹⁸⁶ became a member of the IFA by 1898.¹⁸⁷

Following the split with Leinster in 1921, the Irish League season of 1921/2 featured two of Ireland's oldest clubs, both of which had 'their roots in the industrial heart of Belfast': the aforementioned Distillery FC and Linfield FC, the latter founded in 1885 by the workers at the Linfield mill of the Ulster Spinning Company.¹⁸⁸ In junior football, Belfast's industries supplied many of the workplace teams emerging in Northern Ireland over the next three decades. These included the North of Ireland Paper Mill (first mention 1929/30),¹⁸⁹ the Sirocco Iron Workplace (1931/2),¹⁹⁰ and the Belfast Ropeworks Co. (1950/1).¹⁹¹ In the case of what is arguably Belfast's most famous 'traditional' industry, shipbuilding,¹⁹² the individual sections of large industrial employers such as Harland & Wolff sustained workplace teams. Between 1938 and 1945, the Harland & Wolff 'engine works', 'boiler shop', 'machine shop', 'welders', and 'plumbers' entered separate teams in the IFA junior cup.¹⁹³ The IFA 1938 junior cup draw,¹⁹⁴ incidentally, included the Harland & Wolff Engine Works and the Short & Harland Aircraft Works, industries that, after almost a decade of economic depression, would soon be mobilised in a national war effort after September 1939.¹⁹⁵

Of Northern Ireland's teams in the manufacturing/industrial category, over 81 per cent were found in its capital, Belfast (thirty of thirty-eight), with the remainder spread throughout provincial towns such as Comber and Banbridge in County Down, Lurgan in County Armagh and Cookstown in County Tyrone. These included the workplace team of the Comber Whiskey Distillery (1929) and that of the Cookstown Bacon Factory (1939).

¹⁸⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 Feb. 1885.

¹⁸⁷ Brodie, *100 years*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 Oct. 1929.

¹⁹⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Oct. 1931.

¹⁹¹ *Northern Whig*, 7 Sept. 1950.

¹⁹² Cronin, *Irish history*, p. 295.

¹⁹³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 Oct. 1938 & 5 Oct. 1939; *Northern Whig*, 27 Sept. 1945.

¹⁹⁴ *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 Oct. 1938.

¹⁹⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 20 Dec. 1939.

The survey of newspapers conducted also uncovered a range of teams in manufacturing/industrial centres of employment in the south, sixteen more such teams that have been uncovered in the north (fifty-four in the south as opposed to thirty-eight in the north). That manufacturing or industrial teams were found predominantly in the cities is perhaps unsurprising. This further affirms what the previous section has already demonstrated, that urbanisation was closely linked to the development of grassroots club football. Despite what Neal Garnham described as the ‘almost complete lack of an industrial sector’ in Dublin prior to partition,¹⁹⁶ that city would be the location of around 27 per cent of all workplace teams on the island (twenty-three of eighty-four) that emerged from a manufacturing/industrial centre of employment. It is possible that the shift in the Irish Free State’s wider economic policy during the 1930s played some part in sustaining certain centres of employment and therefore workplace football. For example, the Fianna Fáil government elected in 1932 attempted to increase Irish industrialisation through the Control of Manufactures Acts (1932-4),¹⁹⁷ incentivising industry that would prioritise the domestic market through quotas and tariff protection, an effort described as an attempt to create an ‘indigenous manufacturing sector’.¹⁹⁸ Cormac Ó Gráda has noted that ‘most businessmen wanted to set up in cities such as Dublin and Cork [and these] got a majority of the new plants – 616 out of 1,072 in a count carried out by the Department in 1948’.¹⁹⁹

Indeed, around 76 per cent (sixty-one of eighty) of Leinster’s workplace teams were to be found in Dublin. This figure was even higher for that period which overlaps with Tynan’s study, the inter-war period (1918-39). Then, around 77 per cent were found in Dublin (thirty of thirty-nine). In fact, three of the most prominent senior clubs to compete either in the first or second season of the League of Ireland in 1921/2 were teams of this kind. St James’s Gate, home of the Guinness brewery, and Jacobs FC, of the Jacobs biscuit factory, were there at the beginning.²⁰⁰ Of course, junior football in Dublin was

¹⁹⁶ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 199.

¹⁹⁷ Control of Manufactures Act, 1932 (1932, no. 21) (29 Oct. 1932); Control of Manufactures Act, 1934 (1934, no.36) (13 Sept. 1934).

¹⁹⁸ Ó Gráda, *A rocky road*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ Ó Gráda, *A rocky road*, pp 21-3; 111-2.

²⁰⁰ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, p. 123.

the locus of the majority of Leinster's workplace teams. The latter included teams representing Brooks Thomas & Co. building supplies (1924/5),²⁰¹ the Imperial Tobacco Co. (1929/30),²⁰² Smith & Pearson iron workplace (1938/9),²⁰³ the Liffey Dockyard shipbuilders (1945/6),²⁰⁴ and Fry Cadbury chocolate manufacturers (1950/1).²⁰⁵

A further thirty of the identified manufacturing/industrial teams in the south were spread across Cork (eleven), Waterford (six), Sligo (three), Limerick (two), Dundalk (two), Drogheda (two), and Wexford, New Ross, Navan and Athlone (one each). These included Carroll's boot factory in Dundalk (1939), and 'Eagle Rovers', the workplace team of the Eagle Sparking plug factory²⁰⁶ in Drogheda (1946).

In Munster, the most famous example of a manufacturing/industry workplace team was Fordsons FC, based in Cork, which rose to the top of senior league football in the Irish Free State during the interwar period. As Toms stated:

The impact of a successful workplace team, such as Fordsons, cannot be overstated in soccer's development in Cork. Fordsons FC provided Cork with something which it had until then lacked: a team set up around a place of work, giving it a huge support base, that rose through the divisions to play at the top level like other workplace teams in Dublin and Belfast had done before. Here was a team that thousands of people in the city could rally around as their representatives on the field.²⁰⁷

Elsewhere in Munster, it appears that regional leagues that catered solely to workplace teams sustained a healthy concentration of manufacturing/industry teams at a junior football level. In August 1931, an eight-team mid-summer league featured seven workplace teams from Waterford. These included Hearne & Cahill boot manufacturers, McDonnell's margarine manufacturers, and Downey & Co. drapery, three of the seven Waterford workplace teams that were joined by the Graves & Co. construction

²⁰¹ *Evening Herald*, 20 Dec. 1924.

²⁰² *Irish Independent*, 18 Dec. 1929.

²⁰³ *Irish Independent*, 2 Nov. 1938.

²⁰⁴ *Irish Independent*, 5 Oct. 1945.

²⁰⁵ *Irish Independent*, 20 Sept. 1950.

²⁰⁶ *Drogheda Independent*, 31 Aug. 1946.

²⁰⁷ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, pp 118-9.

firm from nearby New Ross, County Wexford.²⁰⁸ The development of workplace football in Waterford occurred at a time of rising unemployment, ‘with around 2,000 men and women idle in the city’.²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, the workplace team base was strong enough that an inter-league match between the workplace league and the more established Waterford & District [junior] league was possible: the local press printed the teams on the day prior to the game, played on Sunday, 16 August 1931.²¹⁰

Of those identified workplace football teams on the island that can be categorised as having emerged from ‘retail/services’ centres of employment (fifty-seven in total), fifty-two were located in the Republic of Ireland and five were found in Northern Ireland. In the case of the latter, four of those five were found in Belfast, among them Inglis & Co. bakers (1929) and Eason books wholesaler and distributor (1930), whilst the only provincial retail/services workplace team identified in Northern Ireland was that of the Ballyclare Gymnasium (1938).

If the figures cited above almost certainly under-represent the strength of retail/services teams in Northern Ireland, then we might consider the strength of southern workplace football in such settings to have been, at least partially, sustained by the growth in what the census of Ireland categorised as the ‘commercial occupations’ and ‘services’ centres of employment. Between 1926 and 1951, that workforce grew by around 10.6 per cent (from 490,144 to 542,161).²¹¹ In addition, it is possible that the existence of at least three regional workplace leagues catering predominantly to retail/services workplace teams, sustained the game’s strength in those centres of employment in the Republic of Ireland.

The first of those was founded in Cork, where the regional press reported that the organisers’ aim was to set up what was first described as a ‘warehouse league’ in November 1932. Toms has written that this venture was eventually transformed into the ‘inter-house league’ in 1934, however, a report

²⁰⁸ *Munster Express*, 31 July 1931.

²⁰⁹ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 171.

²¹⁰ *Waterford Standard*, 15 Aug. 1931.

²¹¹ Census of Ireland, 1926 & 1951; CNL1: Population at work by industrial group, county, sex and year (1926-51), <https://data.cso.ie/#> [accessed 1 July 2021].

in the *Evening Echo* suggests that it was already called that in January 1933. Matters of naming aside, in its first season the league had fifteen teams across two sections, one playing its matches on Wednesday and one playing on Saturday, and these included the Cash's, Roches and Munster Arcade department stores, in addition to 'fishmerchants', 'hairdressers' and Burton's clothiers & outfitters.²¹² The *Evening Echo* Friday football columnist, 'Shandon', recorded that:

It is pleasing to see the interest in these meetings is growing fast from week to week. The keenness displayed by the teams and their supporters is evidenced by the deep spirit of friendly rivalry with which the games are looked forward to and promising players noted, while comments on the various teams and their prospects can be heard wherever football fans congregate.²¹³

That workplace football in urban areas could, as in the case of Cork in 1933, thrive during an era of economic depression is intriguing. This suggests that economic trends alone did not determine football's development.

The second such workplace league, catering to the retail/services centre of employment, was that of the 'Dublin and District printing house league', which was formed in late 1938.²¹⁴ Its first series of fixtures commenced in January 1939. Initially a ten-team league, one of its entrants, 'Bailey, Son & Gibson', a printing merchant located in Dolphins Barn, entered the FAI junior cup in 1939.²¹⁵ The other nine participants, including the workplace team of the Irish Carton Printers, and that of Mellifont Press publishers, appear to have competed in this league only at this time.²¹⁶

The third of these leagues, that at least partially catered to, or sustained, retail/services as a centre of workplace football, accounts for eleven of a total of twelve workplace teams identified in Connacht between 1921 and 1951. Centred on Sligo, it was a summer workplace league, known as the MacArthur Cup, and was played for in the town in the summer of 1946. Of eleven teams

²¹² 1931 Trade Directory, Ireland, findmypast.ie; Guy's city and county Cork almanac and directory for 1930.

²¹³ *Evening Echo*, 17 Feb. 1933.

²¹⁴ Minutes of the Dublin and District printing house league committee, 29 Nov. 1938-10 Nov. 1940 (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/59).

²¹⁵ *Irish Independent*, 20 Oct. 1939.

²¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 5 Jan. 1939.

from Sligo town that entered the FAI junior cup in 1945/6, five had previously competed in the MacArthur Cup.²¹⁷ They were Hanley's furniture warehouse, 'Higgins K.S' provisions merchants, Egan's auctioneers, Meldrum's hardware store and McArthur's confectioners.²¹⁸

Of the twenty-five workplace teams identified as emerging from state/semi-state centres of employment in Ireland between 1921 and 1951, nine were found in the north. Across the period from 1921 to 1951, Northern Ireland's share of the total state/semi-state workplace teams was around 36 per cent (nine of twenty-five). This was not too different from the northern percentage of the island's population at the censuses of 1926 (29.7 per cent), 1936/7 (30.1 per cent), and 1951 (31.6 per cent).²¹⁹

The first workplace team that newspaper sources suggest emerged from the state/semi-state sector in the period under review was that of the Royal Irish Constabulary in Ballymena (1922). Later, the 1926 census of Northern Ireland had listed 9,017 persons in that state employed in 'public administration' – a categorisation that included those working in the civil service, local authorities and the police force. During the next decade, the newspaper sources examined revealed only two workplace teams from these centres of employment in Northern Ireland, those associated with Royal Mail in Belfast (1930) and the Lurgan Welfare office of the Civil Service (1934). By 1951, the public administration workforce in Northern Ireland had more than doubled to 19,944. This was reflected in increased references to such teams in the press: in the case of my survey, six further state/semi-state workplace teams were identified for the intervening period (1934-51). These included the workplace teams of Queen's University (1938), the staff of the youth detention centre at Malone Training School (1939), and the Gas Works in Belfast (1945). Despite that enlargement of the state/semi-state workforce in the north, the growth of workplace teams in that sector remained modest.

²¹⁷ *Sligo Champion*, 27 July 1946.

²¹⁸ 1931 Trade Directory, Ireland, <https://www.from-ireland.net/trade-directory/?searchterm=bailey%2C+son+%26+gibson> [accessed 1 July 2021].

²¹⁹ Population, Census of Ireland: 1926, 1936 and 1951; Population, Census of Northern Ireland: 1926, 1937 and 1951.

Early examples of teams associated with the state or semi-state sector in the south included those associated with the civil service and post office in Dublin, and the Customs and Excise office in Waterford (all 1924). Sixteen in total have been identified for the period between 1921-51. ‘Contrary to popular opinion’, Bielenberg and Ryan have written that the first semi-state companies established in the Irish Free State emerged in 1927. One of those was the Electricity Supply Board (ESB),²²⁰ which went on to have workplace teams located in Cork (1933), Dublin (1938), and Sligo (1945). Other examples included teams associated with the drainage of the River Barrow in Athy, County Kildare (1929),²²¹ the semi-state Gas Co. in Dublin (1929),²²² the civil service in Cork (1933), and the Dublin Port and Docks Board and the Air Corps of the Defence Forces in Dublin (both 1945).

Of the eighteen workplace football teams that were identified as emerging from centres of employment associated with the provision of transport, only one was found in Northern Ireland. That was the workplace team associated with the Great Northern Railway in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh (1929). The other seventeen were associated with the provision of transport in the Republic of Ireland. This was to include three senior clubs, notably the Dublin-based Midland Athletic FC. As mentioned, this was the workplace team of the Midland Great Western Railway, and competed in the League of Ireland for two seasons between 1922 and 1924.²²³ Dundalk Great Northern Railway FC (later Dundalk FC) was elected to the League of Ireland in 1926²²⁴ while Transport FC located in Bray, County Wicklow joined the League of Ireland in 1948.²²⁵

In junior football, workplace teams included those associated with various elements of the transport sector. In the existing historiography, Toms informs us that the Great Southern Railway workplace team competed in the Waterford Mid-Summer League also (1931),²²⁶ and this was part of a wider

²²⁰ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 11.

²²¹ A public works scheme set up following the passing of the Barrow Drainage Act, 1927 (1927 no.26) (28 May 1927).

²²² Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 71.

²²³ *Irish Independent*, 30 Sept. 1922.

²²⁴ *Dundalk Democrat*, 26 June 1926.

²²⁵ *Irish Press*, 29 June 1948.

²²⁶ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p. 171.

trend. Also from the railway sector, the newspapers reveal the existence of workplace teams in Drogheda (1924), in Dublin (1924, 1929) and Dundalk (1929); from trams, we learn of workplace teams in Cork (1924) and Dublin (1936). From passenger ferry services, workplace teams were participating in Cork (1924) and in Dublin (1929).²²⁷

Aer Lingus is a prominent example of a state entity, arising from the increasing state interventionism of the 1930s.²²⁸ Founded in 1936,²²⁹ Aer Lingus was to become a key provider of transport services and an employment-based site of football activity. A workplace team representing the company took part in a friendly against Navan Town in early 1949,²³⁰ in advance of appearing in the Dublin district of the FAI junior cup in 1950.

The strength of workplace football in the south's transport sector was underpinned, at least in part, by its sizeable workforce of 45,973 in 1926, although this had risen only modestly by 1951 (49,254).²³¹ During the 1930s, rail transport went into decline, partly as a result of uneconomic branch lines being closed,²³² but mostly due to road transport experiencing a relentless expansion between 1922 and 1938.²³³ The expansion of the road network at the expense of rail transport combined with a wartime revival in rail freight services owing to the curtailment of petrol supplies,²³⁴ may have contributed to the establishment of a semi-state public transport provider, *Córas Iompair Éireann* (C.I.E.), in 1944.²³⁵ It later became a fully nationalised state entity in 1950.²³⁶

Within one year of its establishment, there were workplace football teams associated with C.I.E. transport depots located in Dublin, Galway and Sligo (all 1945). The team from Dublin entered the Leinster Junior Challenge

²²⁷ *Evening Herald*, 20 Dec. 1924; *Irish Independent*, 18 Dec. 1929; *Irish Independent*, 12 Nov. 1936.

²²⁸ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, pp 99-100.

²²⁹ Air Navigation and Transport Act, 1936 (1936 no.40) (14 Aug. 1936).

²³⁰ *Meath Chronicle*, 19 Feb. 1949.

²³¹ Volume 2 – Occupations, Census of Ireland, 1926; table 01; Volume 03 – Occupations, Industries and industrial status, Census of Ireland, 1951, table 01.

²³² Railways (miscellaneous) Act, 1932 (1932, no.3) (28 Jan 1932).

²³³ Michael O’Riain, *‘On the move’: Coras Iompair Eireann 1945-1995* (Dublin, 1995), p. 18

²³⁴ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 15; See also, Peter Rigney, *Trains, coal and turf: Transport in emergency Ireland* (Dublin, 2010).

²³⁵ Transport (No.2) Act, 1944 (1944, no. 21) (8 Dec. 1944).

²³⁶ Transport Act, 1950 (12/1950), 17 May 1950.

Shield competition for 1945/6,²³⁷ whereas the Galway depot entered the FAI junior cup in 1945/6.²³⁸ In addition to the FAI Junior Cup, the Sligo branch of C.I.E. was one of eleven Sligo workplace teams that comprised the McArthur Cup competition, noted previously. Gunning has written that ‘soccer was more important in urban Connacht than its rural outlines’.²³⁹ This study has confirmed that, in the case of Sligo, workplace football teams were crucial to that urban centre’s football life.

That around 80 per cent (153/192) of the workplace teams uncovered in this study, dating from the period 1921 to 1951, were located in Ireland’s five cities generally reinforces the existing assumed relationship between club football and urbanisation in Ireland, a relationship analysed in the previous section. Holt has written that the game’s development in Britain was ‘successful ... because it was convenient and simple, and therefore well suited to the physical constraints of industrial cities and the timetable of factory life’.²⁴⁰ In the case of Ireland, if urbanisation was important, then factory life may have been less so. It is noteworthy that around 55 per cent (99/177) of the workplace teams identified here were found in employment sectors other than manufacturing or industry.

Women’s football in Ireland

So far, this study of workplace football has revealed the diversity of employment centres within that layer to the game’s base in Ireland, a base that had its roots in the 1880s and peaked in the mid-twentieth century. A noteworthy development during the second half of the twentieth century was the broadening of football’s constituency to incorporate the emergence and growth of women’s football.

The development of a formalised administration to govern women’s football in the Republic of Ireland – the Ladies Football Association of Ireland (LFAI), ‘under the auspices of the Football Association of Ireland’, - did not

²³⁷ Minutes of meetings of the junior league committee, 7 Sept. 1939- 25 Sept. 1947 (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/5).

²³⁸ *Irish Independent*, 5 Oct. 1945.

²³⁹ Gunning, ‘Association football’, p. 624.

²⁴⁰ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p.155.

occur until 1973,²⁴¹ and in Northern Ireland - the Northern Ireland Women's Football Association (NIWFA) – until November 1976.²⁴² However, women playing association football matches in Ireland can be dated to at least as early as a flurry of activity that occurred during the mid-1890s. For example, the Belfast press reported colourfully on how the Cliftonville ground was full to witness an exhibition by 'lady footballers' in June 1895.²⁴³ According to the *Northern Whig*, it was 'not an ordinary football crowd',²⁴⁴ while the *Irish News* considered it 'a tribute to the overmastering power of curiosity'.²⁴⁵ In the following year, the touring 'British Ladies' team played exhibitions against a local boys team in Derry (St Columbs),²⁴⁶ then later a local men's GAA team in Wexford (St Patricks).²⁴⁷

During the first half of the twentieth century, women's football activity in Ireland was sporadic. There is some evidence that, as in Britain, the First World War saw women contest football matches, drawing large crowds in aid of football charities.²⁴⁸ Occasionally, touring teams from Britain, including Rutherglen FC in 1927, created a splash,²⁴⁹ while the *Dublin Evening Mail* recorded a game between women of the North Strand and St George's parishes played at Clontarf in Dublin in April 1949.²⁵⁰

The pace of change increased during the 1960s, when the emergence of an indoor soccer league for women's teams in the Drogheda area²⁵¹ preceded both the foundation of the LFAI and the onset of women's international fixtures. The Republic of Ireland ladies faced Wales in May 1973,²⁵² and

²⁴¹ *Tipperary Star*, 10 Nov. 1979.

²⁴² <http://www.irishfa.com/ifa-domestic/leagues/northern-ireland-womens-football-association>, [accessed 21 Apr. 2022].

²⁴³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 June 1895.

²⁴⁴ *Northern Whig*, 20 June 1895.

²⁴⁵ *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 20 June 1895.

²⁴⁶ *Derry Journal*, 1 June 1896.

²⁴⁷ *New Ross Standard*, 27 June 1896. *Wicklow People*, 27 June 1896.

²⁴⁸ Helge Faller, 'Part of the Game: The First Fifty Years of Women's Football in Ireland and the International Context', *Studies in Arts and Humanities*, 7:1 (2001), pp 59-60.

²⁴⁹ Helena Byrne, 'Where are we now? A review of the research on the history of women's soccer in Ireland', *Sport in History*, 39:2 (2019), p.173.

²⁵⁰ *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 April 1949.

²⁵¹ Helena Byrne, 'How it all began: the story of women's soccer in sixties Drogheda', *Soccer & society*, 18:5-6 (2017), pp 708-29; see also Ann Bourke, 'Women's Football in the Republic of Ireland: Past Events and Future Prospects', *Soccer & Society*, 4:2 (2003), pp 162-81; Katie Liston, 'Women's Soccer in the Republic of Ireland: Some Preliminary Sociological Comments', *Soccer & Society*, 7:2 (2006), pp 364-84.

²⁵² *Munster Express*, 11 May 1973.

France in October of that year.²⁵³ In the north, a Northern Ireland women's team was actually contesting international fixtures, such as that versus Scotland in November 1974,²⁵⁴ prior to the establishment of the NIWFA. The Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland women's teams contested an international fixture at Tolka Park, Dublin in September 1977.²⁵⁵ By 1978, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that [whilst] 'football is usually considered a man's sport ... more and more women are accepting the challenge to score goals'. There were by then sixteen women's teams affiliated to the NIWFA: one of those, perhaps fittingly, was the 'Suffragette's women's football team in Belfast'.²⁵⁶

Between 1973 and 1977, a variety of women's football competitions emerged across Ireland, north and south. They ranged from leagues and cups for women's club teams, tournaments for workplace teams comprised solely of women, and tournaments for workplace teams comprising a mixture of men and women. For example, in November 1977 the Gaynor Cup final, a new annual competition for women's teams in the Republic of Ireland, was contested by Cork Celtic and Castletownbere at Flower Lodge in Cork.²⁵⁷ Earlier that year, in June, a workplace ladies soccer league hosted by University College Cork was reported to be reaching a 'thrilling climax, [as] the goals continue to come in abundance'. Among the ladies workplace teams listed in the semi-finals fixtures for each section were 'Murphy's Brewery', 'Allied Irish Bank' and the 'Post Office Telephonists'.²⁵⁸ In the same month, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that an in-house competition run by Ulster Bank in Northern Ireland was in its third year. This was 'a football competition where the normal "men only" rules have been given the boot', as 'to their credit, the bank officials have organised a mixed tournament where the boys and girls will come out to play – together'.²⁵⁹

During the 1980s, workplaces continued to be an important site of women's football activity. 'Pulse Engineering' and 'Bank of Ireland' were

²⁵³ *Munster Express*, 5 Oct. 1973.

²⁵⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 Nov. 1974.

²⁵⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 21 Sept. 1977.

²⁵⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 Feb. 1978.

²⁵⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 19 Nov. 1977.

²⁵⁸ *Evening Echo*, 1 June 1977.

²⁵⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 June 1977.

among the teams listed in the Galway Ladies Soccer League fixtures in June 1983.²⁶⁰ The game was also beginning to establish a foothold in Irish Universities and further education colleges. What was reported as the 'Dublin Colleges Ladies Soccer League' featured teams from 'St Patricks', UCD, 'Carysfort', Maynooth, Rathmines and the 'Coll[ege]. Of Catering'.²⁶¹ By early 1983, the teams competing for the 'Guinness Perpetual Trophy' inter-varsities competition at Belfield, were 'UCD, St Pat's, Carysfort, Maynooth, NIHE (Dublin), UCG and Thomond College, Limerick'.²⁶² Fixtures listed in the sporting press included those between women's teams in county Laois in 1985,²⁶³ and in counties Galway²⁶⁴ and Kilkenny²⁶⁵ in 1989. Further, the civil service appears to have been an increasingly important locus of teams. In 1990 a national competition, 'the Civil Service Ladies Soccer League', existed and,²⁶⁶ according to the *Evening Herald*, civil service teams constituted twenty-nine of the fifty total women's football teams in Dublin.²⁶⁷

In 1973, the year of the LFAI's establishment, Sheard and Dunning accurately concluded that sports in Ireland, and in particular rugby union, could be characterised as a 'male preserve'.²⁶⁸ Indeed, a comparable administration tasked with the developing of women's rugby in Ireland, the Irish Women's Rugby Football Union, was not established until 1993.²⁶⁹ Katie Liston's broader contention that the growth of women's sport during the 1960s and 1970s was linked to broader social changes in women's lives, is an important consideration in relation to the examples of women's participation in football at all levels in Ireland outlined above:

²⁶⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 3 June 1983.

²⁶¹ *Irish Independent*, 2 Mar. 1982.

²⁶² *Irish Independent*, 25 Jan. 1983.

²⁶³ *Leinster Express*, 15 June 1985.

²⁶⁴ *City Tribune*, 2 June 1989.

²⁶⁵ *Kilkenny People*, 18 Aug. 1989.

²⁶⁶ *Evening Herald*, 14 June 1990.

²⁶⁷ *Evening Herald*, 19 Jan. 1990.

²⁶⁸ Sheard, K. and Eric Dunning, 'The rugby football club as a type of "male preserve": some sociological notes', *International Review of Sport Sociology* 8:3 (1973), pp 5-24.

²⁶⁹ *Irish Times*, 12 Jan. 1994.

‘Women strove to achieve equality in the workplace, education, health, social welfare, at home, before the law,’ she wrote, ‘and in the way they were portrayed as athletes.’²⁷⁰

Interestingly, increasing female participation in workplace football activity occurred at a time when female participation in the wider workforce in the Republic of Ireland declined by 11 per cent between 1960 (324,848) and 1976 (287,867).²⁷¹ Nonetheless, we should consider the examples outlined as both part of a process Liston described as representing a shifting of the ‘sport-gender nexus’ in the Irish context,²⁷² and also as part of the broadening of the social base of association football in Ireland. Evidently, however, women’s football is not the only example of a factor that contributed to the widening the social base of football from the late 1960s. And, again, paralleling chapter three, it is to one of those we turn our attention, the effects of the end of the GAA’s ban.

Did the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games affect football?

In a similar vein to the preceding chapter (on rugby), our consideration of the potential broadening of the playing base of association football concludes with some reflections on the effects of the lifting of the GAA’s ban in 1971. Archival affiliation statistics for this period are only available for the Republic of Ireland. They allow for an exploration of those trends for a six-year prior to the year the ban was lifted (1966-71), and a thirteen-year stretch that followed (1976-88). Those are presented below, first in relation to FAI schoolboy team affiliations (fig.14), and club affiliations through its provincial subdivisions (fig.15).²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Katie Liston, ‘Honour and shame in women’s sports’, *Studies in arts and humanities*, 7:1 (2021), p. 11.

²⁷¹ Total gainfully employed, aged 14 years and over (female), Statistical Abstract of Ireland, 1960 & 1976 (Dublin, The Stationery Office, Pr.5492; Prl.6787).

²⁷² Katie Liston, ‘Established outsider relations between males and females in the field of sports in Ireland’, *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14:1 (2005), p. 67.

²⁷³ This period included an Ulster FA of the FAI, established in 1977 whereas clubs from that area ‘affiliated directly prior to the FAI prior to then, *Donegal News*, 5 Nov. 1977.

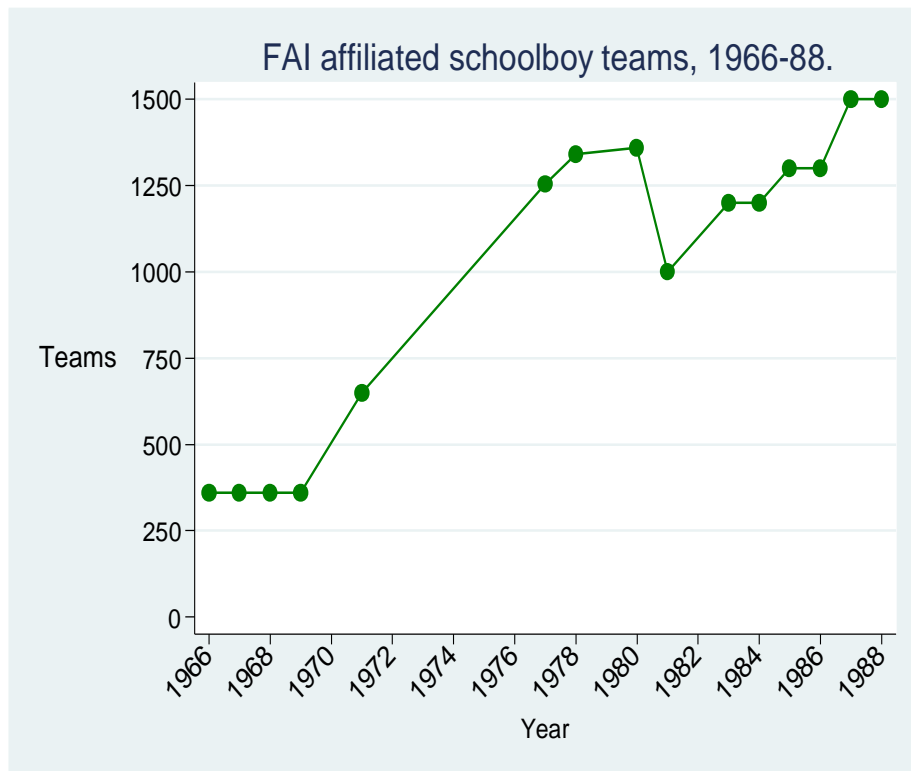


Fig. 14: Schoolboy teams affiliated to the FAI, 1966-88.

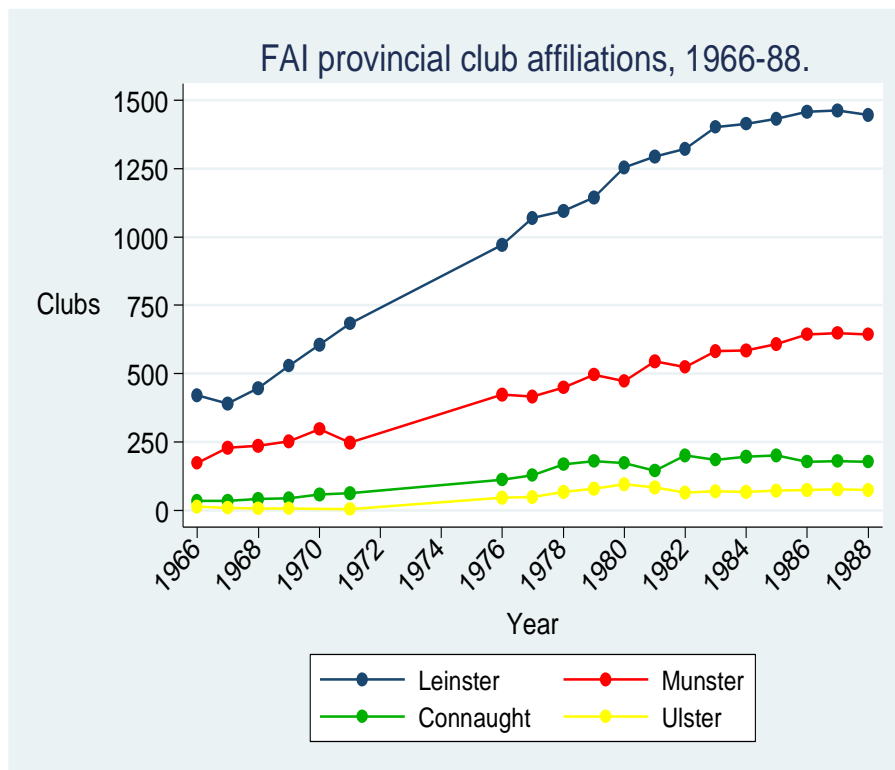


Fig. 15: Club affiliation to FAI provincial subdivisions, 1966-88.

The lifting of the ban both reflected and contributed to changing attitudes toward soccer. Assessing the extent to which the lifting of the ban contributed directly to the growth in football is a not a straightforward matter, however. For instance, in the months prior to its ending, at least one scathing newspaper report claimed:

The divisive influence of the “Ban” in Irish society is something that has never been subjected to sociological study but there can be no doubt that it has caused more unnecessary ill than any other single directive from a major national organisation ... all because of the vested interest of a small, entrenched officialdom masquerading under the guise of noble nationalistic aspirations.²⁷⁴

Whether correlation or causation, the data above does suggest that the health of schoolboys’ football in the Republic of Ireland, aside from a dip between 1980 and 1981, improved considerably in the years after the lifting of the ban. However, it is noteworthy that the number of schoolboy teams had already risen by around 80 per cent in the years prior to the ending of the ban (from 360 teams in 1965 to 650 by 1971). Thereafter, however, schoolboy teams more than doubled, to around 1500 by 1988. Similarly, in club football, affiliations to FAI provincial FAs were already on the rise in three provinces between 1965 and 1971: in Leinster (421 to 684); in Munster (173 to 247); in Connacht (33 to 63). Following the removal on the ban, it is clear club affiliations rose in all provinces: in Leinster (from 970 in 1976 to 1,446 in 1988); in Munster (from 424 to 644); in Connacht (from 112 to 178); and in Ulster (from forty-six to seventy-four). Thus, from the year prior to the ban’s removal in 1970, to the end of the period in which affiliation statistics are available in 1988, FAI club affiliation more than doubled (from 959 in 1970 to 2,342 in 1988).

There is no doubt that the removal of the ban had political and cultural significance. Indeed, some of the qualitative commentary that followed its ending now sought to attach a political import to the ban’s removal. This was evident when playwright and novelist John B. Keane wrote in the *Evening Herald*, that ‘I regard the removal of the ban as the first real step towards the

²⁷⁴ *Southern Star*, 6 Feb. 1971.

reunification of Ireland'.²⁷⁵ The residual influence of, and resentment of, the once dominant irredentist orthodoxy is evident in a newspaper report of 1973:

The infamous 'foreign games' ban disappeared some time ago but the spirit of it lingers on. It was allegedly unpatriotic to indulge in foreign games, but Kevin Barry played rugby and it didn't dampen his patriotism. Soccer, or to give it its correct title 'Association Football', is now truly an international game, the time to end old bitterness is now.²⁷⁶

There were also references to how it affected who played the game of soccer. By 1986, a local newspaper covering a junior football cup final in Fermoy, Co. Cork, noted that six prominent local GAA club players were now also representing the local soccer club.²⁷⁷ Reflecting on the impact of the ban ending in the *Irish Times* in 2001, Sean Moran claimed that one of the consequences was that 'many of its [GAA's] most traditional schools have fallen to soccer in the intervening years whereas the middle class rugby fortresses have remained as impenetrable as they ever were'.²⁷⁸

Evidently, as in the case of rugby, the affiliation data presented indicates that the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games did coincide with an acceleration in football participation in the Republic of Ireland. Moreover, the qualitative evidence indicates that, whilst some residual political overtones remained when conversations about sporting affiliation took place, there was a greater engagement with association football both in schools and by GAA players in parts of the country where Gaelic games had been dominant prior to 1971. Nonetheless, it is clear that other factors strongly influenced that trend also. These include the urbanisation described in an earlier section and other factors such as economic trends, the impact of television coverage, and the publicity that football gained from international competition which will be discussed in the sections below.

²⁷⁵ *Evening Herald*, 21 April 1971.

²⁷⁶ *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 12 Jan. 1973.

²⁷⁷ *Kerryman*, 25 July 1986.

²⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 19 Mar. 2001.

4.4: Football in Ireland and economic trends.

Dublin and Belfast, the primary hubs for senior and junior football activity since 1922, contained the largest and most diversified workforces in Ireland, workforces which, as we have seen, were an important site of football activity. All of this has been elucidated in a manner not undertaken to date, but how did football's development in Ireland relate to periods of both economic growth, that we might expect would have a positive impact on that game, and periods of economic decline, that we might expect to have a negative impact on that development? This section considers the health of football as it related to economic performance, particularly booms and busts.²⁷⁹ It does so for the same eras considered in relation to rugby in the previous chapter. - Those were, first, the Great Depression defined as the years between 1929 and 1938; second, the post-war period defined as that between 1945 and 1960; and third, the period between 1964 and 1980.

The Great Depression (c.1929-38)

Given the notable decline in club affiliations evident at the beginning of the 1930s (see section one, fig. 11), an exploration of how club football in Ireland interacted with the Great Depression would appear to be a worthwhile undertaking. Given that David Toms has written of the era that 'revenue, its creation and its availability was a serious issue for the game', how did football fare in such uncertain times?²⁸⁰ The limited availability of archival affiliation data, and scarce qualitative commentary accompanying the annual reports of the football associations, necessitates our approaching the analysis in two phases: the first (1929-31) deals only with the affiliation trends of the IFA in Northern Ireland; the second (1931-37), includes the affiliation trends within the FAIFS jurisdiction in the Irish Free State. That said, even for that period a health warning seems necessary. It is important that we do not unthinkingly reading affiliation figures as an absolute measure of the health of the game and that we are aware of the possibility of errors or contradictions in the recording

²⁷⁹ Richard D. Wolff and Michael D Resnick, *Contending economic theories: Neoclassical, Keynesian and Marxian* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 195.

²⁸⁰ Toms, *Soccer in Munster*, p.131.

of the figures. For example, the Connacht FA reported the ‘splendid’ affiliation of twenty-nine clubs during its 1934-5 season,²⁸¹ although the FAIFS listed only sixteen in affiliation from that association,²⁸² indicating that occasional administrative anomalies did occur.

Chapter three described the scale of unemployment in both parts of Ireland prior to and after 1929. The relationship between football in Ireland and wider social and economic trends is, as in the case of rugby, not straightforward. Prior to 1929 IFA club affiliation was already experiencing ‘a slight falling off,’²⁸³ whereas in the south the Leinster FA was said to have assisted ‘the parent body [FAIFS] to achieve their object in popularising the game throughout the whole country’ in 1928.²⁸⁴ After 1929, the effects of the Great Depression impacted football in Northern Ireland greatly. It is not a stretch to suggest that a collapse in affiliations by 1931 (amounting to a decrease of 162 clubs over two years),²⁸⁵ marked a crisis more severe than their split with Leinster a decade earlier (then involving a loss of sixty-seven clubs).²⁸⁶

The 1930 IFA report attributed the ongoing decline in the number of junior clubs to ‘the prevailing state of unemployment’.²⁸⁷ In September 1930, the minutes of the IFA emergency committee reveal that its Mid Ulster FA (MUFA) had only four affiliated teams at the beginning of the 1930-1 season,²⁸⁸ three of which were senior clubs competing in the Irish League and Irish Cup competitions: Glenavon, Portadown and Newry Town.²⁸⁹ Only five years earlier, the MUFA had fifty-nine clubs affiliated.²⁹⁰

The 1931 AGM of the North West Football Association (NWFA), based in Derry, Northern Ireland’s second largest urban area, recorded only

²⁸¹ Minutes of the Connacht FA AGM, 17 July 1935 (UCDA, Connacht Football Association Committee Minute Book, 1928-38, P243/1).

²⁸² Minute book of the Senior Council, 1932-7 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/21).

²⁸³ *Northern Whig*, 6 May 1927.

²⁸⁴ Leinster Football Association annual report, 1928, Leinster Football Association Council minute book, 1927-32 (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/27).

²⁸⁵ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries’ names and addresses, seasons 1931-41, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²⁸⁶ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries’ names and addresses’, 1921/2’, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²⁸⁷ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 8 May 1930.

²⁸⁸ Minutes of Irish Football Association Emergency Committee, 2 Sept. 1930, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²⁸⁹ *Northern Whig*, 15 Sept. 1930.

²⁹⁰ *Lurgan Mail*, 10 July 1926.

eight affiliations from that divisional association.²⁹¹ Two of the teams from that district that continued to affiliate were, of course, Derry City (formed in 1928 and elected to the Irish League in 1929)²⁹² and Coleraine (formed and elected to the Irish League in 1927).²⁹³ In addition, seven junior clubs were affiliated to what was effectively a local league titled as the ‘Derry & District Football Association’ in 1931. This included six clubs from that city: Shamrock Rovers, Barn Swifts, Drumhughill Hibs, Richmond; Rovers United, and Wellington Rovers.²⁹⁴ The seventh club affiliated to the league was Merville United, located in County Donegal in the Irish Free State, which might explain why it, unlike the six Derry teams, was not affiliated to the NWFA.

The IFA recorded no affiliations to the Fermanagh & Western FA (FWFA) for the 1931-2 season,²⁹⁵ although the Belfast press reported that a FWFA AGM had taken place in August 1931.²⁹⁶ Later that year, the Belfast press reported ‘destitution’ in that area’s main town, Enniskillen,²⁹⁷ owing to growing unemployment.²⁹⁸ This might suggest that affiliation fees must have been a burden during the economic crisis. For example, affiliation to the NWFA for the 1932-3 season cost clubs in that area 10 shillings, while the entry fee to the intermediate league was a further 20 shillings.²⁹⁹ In these circumstances, paying further fees to the IFA may have appeared a cost too far to clubs. If the IFA’s administrative control over its outlying districts loosened due to the wider economic crisis, a football columnist in the Belfast press, ‘Incog’, had little patience with the financial difficulties that may have stymied affiliation to the IFA:

No divisional association should be allowed to give a season’s grace beyond the period when the IFA say subscriptions should be paid. My own idea is that if a club’s subscription is not paid to the IFA then the club is not in membership.³⁰⁰

²⁹¹ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries’ names and addresses, 1931-2, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²⁹² *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 June 1929.

²⁹³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 June 1927.

²⁹⁴ *Derry Journal*, 13 July 1931.

²⁹⁵ List of clubs affiliated with secretaries’ names and addresses, 1931-2, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

²⁹⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 28 Aug. 1931.

²⁹⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 Dec. 1931.

²⁹⁸ *Fermanagh Herald*, 12 Dec. 1931.

²⁹⁹ *Derry Journal*, 12 Aug. 1932.

³⁰⁰ *Northern Whig*, 15 Sept. 1931.

Looked at another way, however, it appears that the IFA’s regional associations and affiliate leagues exercised greater autonomy, outside the usual constraints and formal processes, to ensure that the game survived a difficult period. Indeed, the IFA annual report of 1930 commended ‘the officials of the Divisional Associations for the efficient manner in which they discharged the various duties devolving upon them’.³⁰¹

One might even be forgiven for doubting whether the continuing economic depression affected the game in Northern Ireland beyond 1931, if one relied upon the IFA report of 1933 that referred to ‘the continued prosperity of the game’.³⁰² The report was, however, misleading. The IFA’s archival affiliation data (table 14) indicates that such pronouncements constituted an effort to portray a healthier state of affairs than could be justified by the facts.

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
County Antrim	83	92	97	90	91	104	92
Mid Ulster	4	11	18	20	11	13	10
North West	8	12	12	11	12	12	11
F&Western	0	3	4	1	2	1	1
Total	95	118	131	122	116	130	114

Table 12: Irish Football Association regional affiliations, 1931-37.³⁰³

Given the importance of the urban heartlands described in previous sections, it is interesting that the County Antrim FA – with its core strength centred on the greater Belfast area – did gain an additional nine clubs between 1931 and 1937. More notable, arguably, was that affiliation to the IFA’s three provincial subdivisions also rose between 1931 and 1937: in Mid Ulster (six

³⁰¹ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 8 May 1930.

³⁰² IFA annual report and accounts, 1933, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/2/1).

³⁰³ IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1).

clubs); in the North-West (three clubs); and in Fermanagh & Western (one club). But the 1937 position merely reversed *some* of the damage the IFA suffered in that initial two years of turmoil between 1929 and 1931. Remember, in 1927 affiliations to the IFA had stood at 274.

Interestingly, it was not until after 1931 that the associations in the south afforded greater prominence to the wider economic picture when they discussed the development of the game. For example, in 1932 the Leinster FA reported that their senior challenge cup final had not been a financial success owing to a ‘grave industrial depression prevailing in Dublin’.³⁰⁴ However, worse was to follow for that association. In 1933 they recorded that fifty-one clubs had been lost since the previous year (they took fees from 369 clubs in 1933 as opposed to 420 in 1932), whilst ‘match receipts’ listed in the annual statement of accounts had decreased by almost 55 per cent (from £2,676 to £1,216).³⁰⁵

Fortunately, a small but useful affiliation dataset for the FAIFS can be gleaned from its archives for the years between 1932 and 1937, suggesting that the wider economic trends of this era affected club football both less dramatically and differently in the Irish Free State.

	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Leinster	420	369	387	n/a	369	384
Munster	78	85	103	n/a	70	47
Connacht	19	15	16	n/a	30	28
Total	517	471	507	n/a	471	460

Table 13: FAIFS and provincial club affiliations, 1932-7.³⁰⁶

Leinster FA affiliation in 1927 (which had stood at 330), was lower than in any of the years between 1932 to 1937. In Munster, meanwhile, the seventy-six

³⁰⁴ Leinster Football Association annual report, 1932, Leinster Football Association Council minute book, 1932-36 (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/28).

³⁰⁵ Leinster Football Association annual report, 1933, Leinster Football Association Council minute book, 1932-36 (UCDA, Records of the Leinster Football Association, P239/28).

³⁰⁶ Minute book of the Senior Council, 1932-7 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/21).

affiliated clubs in 1929³⁰⁷ had grown to 103 by 1934. From there, however, Munster lost thirty-three clubs by 1936 (from 103 to seventy) and a further twenty-three clubs in the following year (from seventy to forty-seven). Between 1934 and 1936, Leinster lost eighteen clubs (from 387 to 369), before recovering much of that ground by 1937 (384 clubs). The evidence that the Munster and Leinster FAs struggled in the mid-1930s, in particular, would appear to bear out analyses, including that of Mary Daly, which suggest that the economic effects of the great depression in the case of the south were exacerbated from 1932 by the economic war that followed Fianna Fáil's coming to power.³⁰⁸

That said, before the dip, Munster FA affiliations increased between 1932 and 1934 (from seventy-eight to 103) despite the prevailing unemployment in its key urban base of Cork.³⁰⁹ We might even consider that the successful inter-house [workplace] league in Cork (1933) served a socioeconomic function to alleviate the stress of wider unemployment in the city, even as it bolstered Munster FA club affiliation. Given that the Connacht FA had only been established in September 1928, with twenty-three affiliated teams,³¹⁰ it was a commendable administrative achievement that the new body survived the economic trends described above. This is also true given the self-inflicted damage when that association's secretary misappropriated the association's accounts in August 1932,³¹¹ an act for which the FAIFS would suspend him from all administration duties.³¹²

Evidently, the game's development in both parts of Ireland between 1929 and 1937, was not as straight-forward as the picture presented in IFA, Leinster and FAIFS annual reports in that era. By the summer of 1929, we know of the existence of at least 661 affiliated association football clubs in

³⁰⁷ *Southern Star*, 13 July 1929.

³⁰⁸ Mary E. Daly, 'The Irish Free State and the Great Depression of the 1930s: the interaction of the global and the local', *Irish economic and social history*, 38:1 (2011), pp.19-36; J.P. Neary and C. Ó Grada, 'Protection, economic war and structural change: The 1930s in Ireland', *Irish historical studies*, 27:107 (1991), pp.250-63; Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p.51.

³⁰⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 1 Oct. 1932.

³¹⁰ Minutes of the Connacht FA, 9 Sept. 1928 (UCDA, Connacht Football Association Committee Minute Book, 1928-38, P243/1).

³¹¹ Minutes of the Connacht FA AGM, 12 Aug. 1932 (UCDA, Connacht Football Association Committee Minute Book, 1928-38, P243/1).

³¹² Minutes of the Connacht FA, 16 Oct. 1932 (UCDA, Connacht Football Association Committee Minute Book, 1928-38, P243/1).

Ireland, 257 of those affiliated to the IFA in Northern Ireland,³¹³ and 404 affiliated to the FAIFS in the Irish Free State.³¹⁴ By 1937, we know of at least 574 affiliated football clubs in Ireland – 114 in Northern Ireland and 460 in the Irish Free State.³¹⁵ To simply compare the situation in 1929 to that in 1937, amounting to the loss of eighty-seven clubs, north and south, would be a simplistic measurement however, masking the fact that a considerable decline in the game occurred initially in Northern Ireland, and later in the Irish Free State, before losses were partially offset by a modest recovery. This should lead us to, at least, nuance what Tynan has written in relation to the south in this era:

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.³¹⁶

Football in Northern Ireland during the Great Depression era really was ‘destructively impacted’, to borrow Tynan’s phrase. This was especially so in the crippling early years of the crisis. Given that the economies that emerged from the partition of Ireland, north and south, were very different, the impact of a global economic shock was never likely to be even in an Irish context.

The IFA may have remained rooted to its articles of association and the normal structures of its governance. As such, it expected active clubs to affiliate. This attitude was reflected in elements of the Belfast press, which published commentary critical of divisional associations due to the non-payment of IFA affiliation fees by clubs. However, this study suggests that subdivisions of the IFA, and their clubs, engaged a ‘survival mode’ of sorts between 1929 and 1937, a necessity due to the direct impact of the wider economic trends. In not keeping up the regular affiliation processes and structures, and instead favouring unofficial district competitions, provincial

³¹³ IFA annual report and accounts, 1929, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/2/1).

³¹⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 Aug. 1929.

³¹⁵ Minutes of Irish Football Association Emergency Committee, 7 September 1936, IFA Emergency Committee Minute Book, 1909-43 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/4/3/1); Minute book of the Senior Council, 1932-7 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/21).

³¹⁶ Tynan, ‘Association football’, p. 142.

subdivisions such as Mid Ulster and the North West ensured that regular activity, and arguably the game itself, made it through this challenging period.

Post-war (c.1945-60)

In a previous section we considered the period between 1945 and 1951, focusing on the relationship between football and urbanisation in Ireland. Stretching that timeline to encompass the post-war era, as defined in the previous chapter (c1945-60), the archival data allows for an exploration of how football developed in the Republic of Ireland while concentrating on the broader economic context. The FAI junior committee minute books contain a useful annual report for that level of the game alone. These recorded the total annual affiliation of junior clubs to that body between 1945 and 1958 (fig. 16) — comprising clubs that entered the FAI junior cup and clubs participating in junior football competitions at a local and regional level rather than a national level.



Fig. 16: FAI junior affiliation, 1945-58.³¹⁷

³¹⁷ Junior Committee Minutes (Feb. 1945- July 1958) (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/30-3).

The data above reveals that junior football made a strong recovery in the south post-1945. Club affiliations had more than quadrupled by 1949 (to 597 clubs from 115 in 1945), progressing to a highpoint of 729 affiliated junior clubs in 1953, before retreating somewhat and stabilising between 1956 (602 junior clubs) and 1958 (607).

In Munster, the regional press contended in 1946 that junior football in the province was ‘booming’,³¹⁸ and the Munster FA celebrated its silver jubilee in 1947.³¹⁹ FAI junior cup entries in that province increased by fifty-nine (from thirty-two in 1945 to ninety-one in 1950) - including an increase of forty-six teams in County Cork; eight in County Waterford; and five in County Limerick. It is likely that the phase of post-war housing construction noted in an earlier section aided football’s recovery in the urban centres of Munster. However, despite financial aid for the state in the form of the European Recovery [Marshall] Plan,³²⁰ this was an unspectacular era in economic terms and this was worsened by problems such as petrol shortages in 1947, for example.³²¹ Although overall unemployment did at least fall from 9.3 per cent in 1947 to 7.3 per cent in 1951,³²² census data indicates that the workforce in counties Cork, Limerick and Waterford was, at best, stagnant, or at worst, in slight decline.³²³

As had been the case when the southern association was finding its feet and putting in place the foundations of a provincial structure, it appears that the traditional strength of Leinster was deployed to encourage the game’s recovery in both Munster and Connacht post-1945, with the *Evening Echo* reporting in 1947 that:

³¹⁸ *Munster Express*, 25 Jan. 1946.

³¹⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 12 May 1947.

³²⁰ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p. 16.

³²¹ *Cork Examiner*, 19 Feb. 1947.

³²² Kennedy, Gilbin and McHugh, *The economic development*, p. 58.

³²³ Census of Ireland, 1946 and 1951; CNL1, population at work, <https://data.cso.ie/> [accessed 7 July 2021].

The requests of the Munster and Connaught Football Associations for a junior interprovincial championship have been referred to the Leinster Football Association Junior Committee. Let us hope that the Leinster authorities will be agreeable to a project that is bound to prove a financial attraction and is bound to move the game in the right direction generally.³²⁴

It appears that the Connacht FA, established in Athlone, County Westmeath (Leinster) in 1928,³²⁵ temporarily folded during the war years. A meeting at the Imperial Hotel, Castlebar in October 1946 served ‘to re-open the Connacht Football Association’ as well as to consider applications from clubs outside the province for affiliation: from Longford and Athlone, County Westmeath (both Leinster), and from Killybegs, County Donegal (Ulster).³²⁶ Flexible provincial boundaries undoubtedly contributed to the Connacht FA AGM in 1948 recording that more teams affiliated ‘than ever before’.³²⁷ By 1952, its AGM recorded ‘soccer in the province was in healthy and progressive state’ that included fourteen new affiliated clubs in the previous year.³²⁸ Despite the Republic of Ireland being in a horrendous economic situation in the mid-1950s, the Connacht FA AGM of 1957 reported the association’s financial status as ‘reasonably good with a slight improvement on the previous season’s position’.³²⁹

In the north, the post-war economy was also in a terrible state and this would prove challenging terrain for reviving and developing the game in the provincial divisions under IFA jurisdiction. What James Loughlin described as ‘economic progress during the artificial conditions of wartime’,³³⁰ did not persist long into the post-war era. A downward trend in shipbuilding employment was already being reported by June 1946,³³¹ compounded by shortages of raw shipbuilding materials in 1947,³³² and the reportedly high and uncertain cost of shipbuilding’ in 1949.³³³

³²⁴ *Evening Echo*, 12 Dec. 1947.

³²⁵ Minutes of the Connacht FA, 9 Sept. 1928 (UCDA, Connacht Football Association Committee Minute Book, 1928-38, P243/1).

³²⁶ *Western People*, 5 Oct. 1946.

³²⁷ *Ballina Herald*, 26 June 1948.

³²⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 June 1952.

³²⁹ *Sligo Champion*, 22 June 1957.

³³⁰ Loughlin, *The Ulster question*, p. 29.

³³¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 June 1946.

³³² *Belfast Telegraph*, 21 May 1947.

³³³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Apr. 1949.

In the north-west, the 1954 AGM noted that a new council elected to that body had succeeded in 'trying to get the association back to how it had been pre-war', since when 'it had been in a rut'. This included a gate for the NWFA senior cup final, which was represented as a record, despite the IFA president, F.J. Cochrane, asserting that the NWFA had been 'having a difficult time with other forms of football and other sport'.³³⁴ Notably, the local Derry & District Football Association reported on 'a successful and prosperous' season in 1954.³³⁵ In senior football, Derry City played their part in an unprecedented financial boost to the IFA during the harsh economic reality of the 1950s in Belfast. Their 1954 Irish cup final versus Glentoran required a second replay before Derry City triumphed. The trilogy of games drew a combined 91,000³³⁶ spectators to Windsor Park, generating £2,187 in gate receipts for the IFA during an era when annual gate receipts from that competition declined, despite inflation, by almost 12 per cent (from £662 in 1947 to £583 in 1963).³³⁷

In Mid Ulster, its 'frontier team',³³⁸ Newry City, unsuccessfully applied for readmission to the Irish League in 1947.³³⁹ That footballing setback likely compounded the economic situation in the town and its environs, which was dire in the post-war era. For instance, in 1948, the Northern Ireland Parliament discussed that the 1,740 persons registered as unemployed in the town was in large part due to the closing of Warrenpoint shipyard, with local MPs urging the Minister for Labour, Brian Maginness, to direct new industries to the area.³⁴⁰ Without its senior status, Newry Town spent the post-war era at the level of intermediate football, although they did at least manage to win the IFA intermediate cup in 1958, following a victory over Glentoran by four goals to nil in a replayed final at Windsor Park.³⁴¹

³³⁴ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 25 May 1954.

³³⁵ *Derry Journal*, 18 June 1954.

³³⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 Dec. 2008.

³³⁷ IFA annual report and accounts, 1947-63, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/2/1).

³³⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 3 May 1926.

³³⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Feb. 1947.

³⁴⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 30 June 1948.

³⁴¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 Feb. 1958.

In 1947, the IFA annual report claimed:

Football the world over is obtaining a bigger grip on the people than ever, and, in presenting this, the 66th Annual Report, your council is in the happy position of being able to say the clubs of the association are sharing in the post-war boom.³⁴²

Given the state of affairs in part of Mid Ulster, we might expect that boom to have centred upon a continued dominance by the Belfast urban area. However, the devastation that a poorly performing economy visited upon Belfast's traditional industries was also evident in an inadequate provision of playing fields in that city. Upon the opening of the new Orpen Park playing fields in the Finaghy area of Belfast in 1951, the *Belfast Telegraph* contended that there were 'fewer open spaces in Belfast than in most cities',³⁴³ and a Northern Ireland government report in 1954 concluded that 'Belfast is a black spot among cities for its scarcity of open spaces'.³⁴⁴ This affected junior football directly as up to eighty of the IFA's approximately 200 affiliated junior clubs in Belfast relied on public parks for their playing of matches.³⁴⁵ In the Northern Ireland parliament, Labour party MP David Bleakley (Belfast Victoria constituency) claimed that 'Belfast has 40 such fields available under municipal facilities, while Sheffield has 51, Leeds 85, Edinburgh 98, and Bristol 102'.³⁴⁶

Lacking the facilities that all senior clubs enjoyed, the feasibility of some of Northern Ireland's junior football clubs was probably more dependent on local government and council authorities for the provision of playing fields than they were on the governing body, affiliation to which cost money without bringing them closer to a pitch on which to play the game. Belfast Corporation, it appears, was dealing with crippling financial constraints in 1956, and one can

³⁴² IFA annual report and accounts, 1947, Minutes of Extraordinary & Annual General Meetings and annual report & accounts of the IFA, 1910-82 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/2/1).

³⁴³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 June 1951.

³⁴⁴ Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report of Northern Ireland Child Welfare Council, 1954 (PRONI, Records of the Cabinet Secretariat, CAB/9/B/266/2).

³⁴⁵ Playing Fields in and about Belfast. A report of the youth committee, 1957 (PRONI, Ministry of Education, SO/1/A/381).

³⁴⁶ *The parliamentary debates, official report, fourth session of the eighth parliament of Northern Ireland, 6 Elizabeth II, House of Commons, volume 42* (1958), 29 Apr. 1958.

imagine that councillors did not prioritise football pitches in such circumstances:

The recommendation of Belfast Corporation Finance Committee to curtail rate-borne schemes involving capital expenditure until there was a decrease in the present high rate of interest on borrowed money was adopted by the City Council yesterday.³⁴⁷

In 1957, the Youth Committee of the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education produced a report on the shortage of playing fields in and around Belfast. Notably, whilst laying out the stark reality that the IFA had 213 affiliated clubs in the Belfast area yet the city had only fifty-five private pitches amongst them, it linked the shortage not only the financial pressures affecting local authorities noted above, but also to themes such as increased urbanisation considered in an earlier section. In addition, the report underlines some of the assumptions held the historical character of association football – that is of an urban game:

The growing need for playing fields in Northern Ireland is a direct consequence of the increasing urbanisation and industrialisation of the province. In an agricultural community there is often no sharp differentiation of between work and leisure activities; there is, however, a definite distinction between these two kinds of activities in an industrial community ... The majority of the houses in the rural districts have been built close to the Belfast boundary so that the environs of Belfast are becoming increasingly urbanised in character ... In 1951 Belfast had the highest density of population in the United Kingdom.³⁴⁸

To their credit, and in response to the ‘great urgency’ the report’s publication created,³⁴⁹ in October 1959 Belfast Corporation approached the Ministry of Education regarding the possibility of grant assistance towards the purchase of land to develop thirty-seven playing fields at Mallusk, Glengormley to the north of the city boundary:

³⁴⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 2 Mar. 1956.

³⁴⁸ Playing fields in and about Belfast: A report of the youth committee for Northern Ireland, 1957 (PRONI, Ministry of Education files, ED/15/35).

³⁴⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 Apr. 1958.

The Lord Mayor, Alderman Robert Kihinan, said that although Belfast had the worst acreage for playing fields of any city in the United Kingdom, boys would happily travel any distance to play football and were already doing so every weekend.³⁵⁰

The provision of such facilities was also a matter for discussion in the Republic of Ireland. In 1956, *Dáil Éireann* amended long-standing legislation - Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Act, 1890³⁵¹ - to include new provisions for ‘playing fields, parks or open spaces’.³⁵² Debates from as early as 1949 signalled that legislators, including Labour T.D. for Limerick Michael Keyes, supported the ‘provision for playing fields’ in areas of Dublin that were experiencing rapid suburban development, such as Walkinstown and Crumlin.³⁵³ If playing field provision was on the mind of some policy-makers, in a time of fiscal constraint, supply did not meet demand. For example, when three Drogheda schoolboys were prosecuted at a local court for playing football in the street in 1955, the father of one of the defendants claimed that ‘there was no playing fields in the locality’.³⁵⁴ In the following year, ‘a proposal that goalposts be erected’ – costing £20 for soccer and £10 for GAA – ‘to facilitate the youth in playing football was rejected by Athlone Urban Council’.³⁵⁵

Given the shortage of, or the financial difficulty posed by providing, more suitable playing fields, evident north and south during the 1950s but particularly in Belfast, it was the commendable efforts of junior football associations and leagues across Ireland which ensured the troubling economic trends on both sides of the border during the post-war era did not seem to affect football activity as had been the case during the 1930s.

³⁵⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 Oct. 1959.

³⁵¹ Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, (1890, no. 70).

³⁵² Housing (Amendment) Act, 1956 (31/1956), 25 July 1956.

³⁵³ *Dáil Éireann, díospóireachtaí páirliminte* (parliamentary debates); *tuairisc oifigiúil* (official report), 13th Dáil, Vol.116, No.1, 7 June 1949 (Dublin, Stationery Office).

³⁵⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 15 Oct. 1955.

³⁵⁵ *Offaly Independent*, 28 Apr. 1956.

1964-80

If we turn to the period 1964 to 1980, an economic context in which rugby club affiliation rocketed,³⁵⁶ we find that club football in the Republic of Ireland blossomed too. Affiliations increased within the context of the improving economic picture of the 1960s and continued to grow. It may be a coincidence but from the mid-1960s the number of football clubs grew rapidly in parallel to at least one key economic indicator – the Republic of Ireland’s GDP per capita, adjusted for inflation and measured in 1990 US Dollars (figs 17-18).

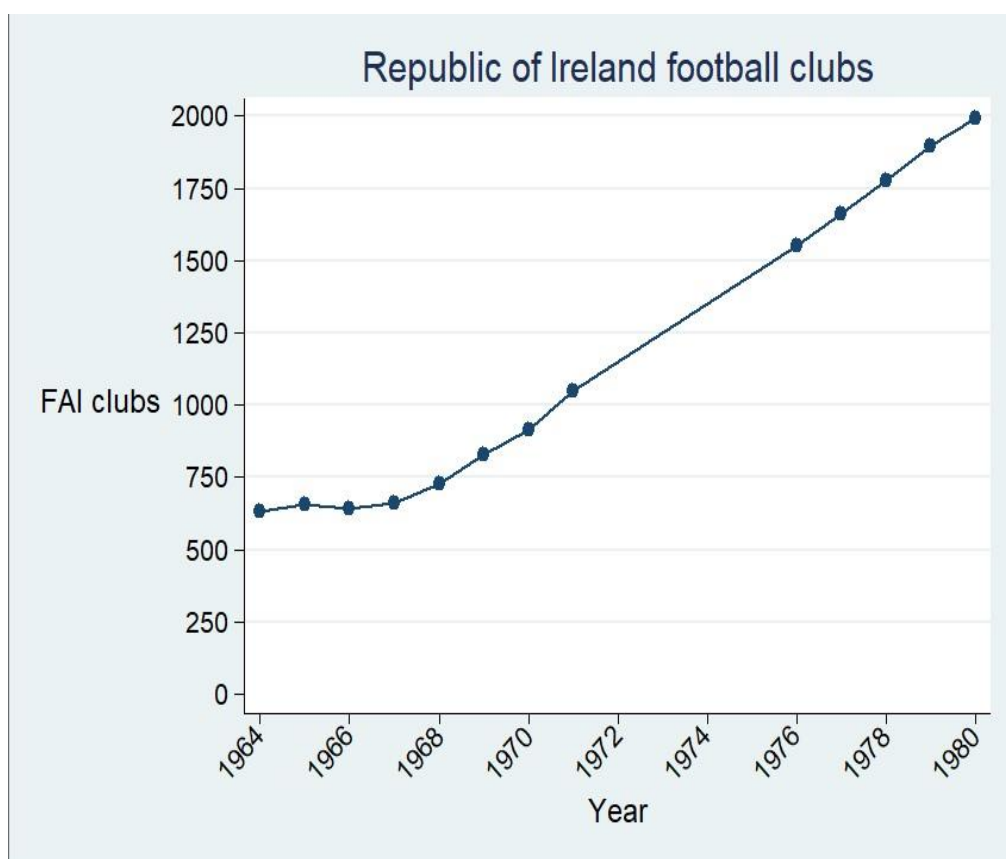


Fig. 17: Republic of Ireland affiliated football clubs, 1964-80.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ See Brian Girvin, ‘Economic policy, continuity and crisis in de Valera’s Ireland 1945-61’, *Irish*

Economic and Social History 38 (2011), pp 36-53.

³⁵⁷ FAI annual report, 1964-71, Minute book of the senior council, June 1965-June 1971 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/22).

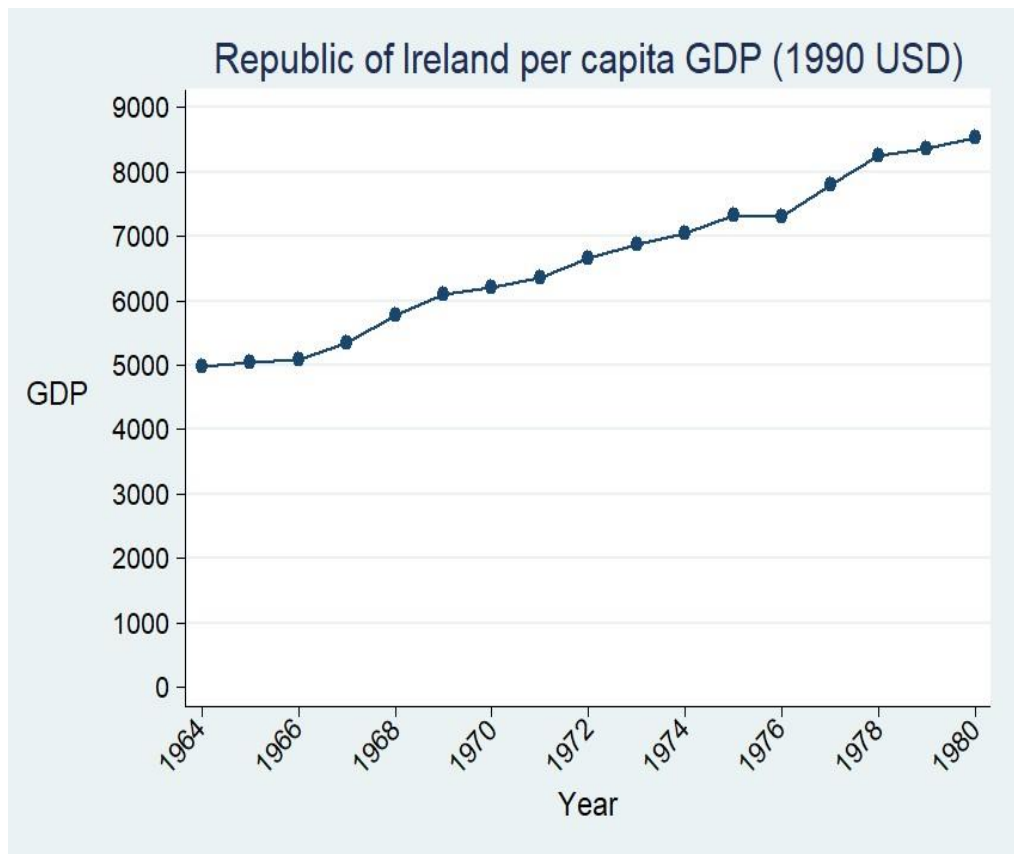


Fig. 18: Republic of Ireland GDP per capita, 1964-80.³⁵⁸

The data above reveals that GDP per capita increased by 71.2 per cent between 1964 and 1980 (from \$4,986 in 1964 to \$8,541 in 1980). Given that this corresponded with FAI affiliated clubs more than trebling in that time (from 631 in 1964 to 1993 in 1980), one might be tempted to construct a direct link between the two measurements. Significantly, however, economic scholars have concluded that GDP per capita was not designed to be a measure of national well-being.³⁵⁹ Moreover, it is notable that within an overall growth of 1,362 clubs between 1964 and 1980, the growth at provincial level suggests that Leinster was still the dominant heartland of the game, adding 868 clubs in this time (1255 in 1980 as opposed to 387 in 1964).

³⁵⁸ Maddison project database 2013, <https://www.rug.nl/ggdc/historicaldevelopment/maddison/releases/maddison-project-database-2018?lang=en> [accessed 30 May 2022].

³⁵⁹ Robert Costanza, Maureen Hart, Stephen Posner and John Talberth, 'Beyond GDP: The need for new measures for progress', paper presented at the Institute for sustainable solutions, Boston University, Jan. 2009, <https://www.bu.edu/pardee/files/documents/PP-004-GDP.pdf> [accessed 3 Oct. 2021].

The net growth was less marked in Munster, an increase of 277 clubs (472 clubs in 1980, up from 195 in 1964), with an increase of thirty-one clubs alone in Munster occurring between 1969 and 1970 despite what was reported to be ‘an acute shortage of referees’ in the Cork area.³⁶⁰ In Connacht, the game’s development represented an increase of 133 clubs in this time (172 in 1980 as opposed to thirty-nine in 1964), although we learn that its urban heartland drove much of that growth, at least in the 1971-2 season when it was reported a ‘Galway-powered’ administration was elected at the AGM of the Connacht FA in June 1971.³⁶¹

It is also notable that, in this era, regional newspapers record a considerable upturn or revival in workplace football activity, in what had then become known as ‘inter-firm soccer’.³⁶² These took the form of league competitions between teams representing local or regional businesses. The popularity of such initiatives was clear when the AGM of ‘the inter-firm soccer council’ in Limerick in 1973 found it necessary to cap the number of teams allowed to enter the competition for the season beginning in April of that year.³⁶³ The ‘Bank of Ireland Cup’ final in Kilkenny in June 1977 is a notable example of this football activity,³⁶⁴ contested by ‘pre-tournament favourites’, Mahon & McPhillips (an engineering firm)³⁶⁵ and ‘the determined, hard-hitting factory team’, Padmore & Barnes (shoe manufacturers).³⁶⁶ In 1982, an eleven-team inter-firm league in County Tipperary featured teams listed as ‘Comb Factories’, ‘Ind. Factories’, ‘Creamery’ and ‘Local Govt.’³⁶⁷

The presence of engineering firms in Kilkenny and numerous factories in County Tipperary partaking in competitive football between 1977 and 1982 might indicate that the Buchanan report (1969) had been successful. Aimed at dispersing industrial development throughout the country,³⁶⁸ especially beyond the Dublin area, the report’s findings had been implemented in 1972, initially

³⁶⁰ *Evening Echo*, 5 June 1970.

³⁶¹ *Connacht Sentinel*, 22 June 1971.

³⁶² *Limerick Leader*, 14 Mar. 1973.

³⁶³ *Limerick Leader*, 14 Mar. 1973.

³⁶⁴ *Kilkenny People*, 10 June 1977.

³⁶⁵ *Irish Farmers Journal*, 8 Jan. 1977; *Drogheda Independent*, 12 Apr. 1974.

³⁶⁶ *Irish Independent*, 2 Nov. 1977.

³⁶⁷ *Nenagh Guardian*, 22 May 1982.

³⁶⁸ See Patrick Walsh and Ciara Whelan, ‘The importance of structural change in industry for growth’, *Journal of the statistical and social inquiry society of Ireland*, 29 (2000), pp 1-33.

promoting greater concentrations of industry for the Cork and the Limerick/Shannon region in particular.³⁶⁹ In the case of Padmore & Barnes shoemakers of Kilkenny, we might consider their growth to have been tied to the wider opening and growth of the southern economy in this era. In 1972, their exports were valued at £1.5 million per year, whereas only five years previously it was claimed they ‘did only a very minimal export trade’.³⁷⁰ Such examples indicate that centres of manufacturing employment, linked to Irish urbanisation, continued to interact with association football activity, although now occurring during an era of economic prosperity in the Republic of Ireland.

However, as the previous chapter detailed, numerous economic and political crises engulfed the Republic of Ireland during this period. So this is not a straight-forward story of parallel economic and football prosperity. It is possible that the growth in club affiliations — between 1964 and 1971 and between 1976 and 1980 — demonstrate correlation rather than causation. A combination of other social or political factors during this period almost certainly aided that acceleration of FAI club affiliations. As was considered in the previous chapter, the impact of social change during the 1960s and 1970s deserves some further consideration. How that might these factors have interacted with football? Once again, we first turn to the impact of television on football in Ireland.

4.5: Football in Ireland, television and international engagement.

As in chapter three, this final section of chapter four considers the effects of television and the prospects of the game at international level upon football in Ireland. Robert Savage has described television as ‘a destabilising force that helped undermine a conservative consensus that had taken deep root in both jurisdictions’ [of Ireland].³⁷¹ Arguably, one of the sectors to Irish society that television changed profoundly was sport.³⁷² Did the Irish audiences who saw

³⁶⁹ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An economic history*, p.23; N. Brennan and P. Breathnach, ‘The spatiality of Irish manufacturing linkages in the Celtic Tiger era’, *Irish geography*, 42 (2009), pp 7-22.

³⁷⁰ *Irish Independent*, 16 Mar. 1972.

³⁷¹ Robert J. Savage, ‘Broadcasting on the island of Ireland’, *Cambridge history*, vol. iv., pp 553-76.

³⁷² Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 300.

more football play more football? Further, did seeing Irish teams compete, and occasionally win, on the international stage, the most prestigious level of the game, boost the game overall?

Following the Second World War, and similar to how the rugby authorities in Britain and Ireland had first responded to the advent to televised matches, the English Football League responded with similar caution:

The Football League management committee have decided that television transmission of league games shall not be allowed, and they have informed the B.B.C. that they can not proceed with their plans for televising the Charlton-Chelsea match next Saturday.³⁷³

By 1951, however, that tide was evidently already beginning to turn, when ‘a special committee on broadcasting set up by the [English] Football Association’ would allow, if agreed by the other home nations, ‘broadcasting and television within limits, to continue without detriment to any section of the game’.³⁷⁴ The Football League lifted its ban on ‘the broadcasting of commentaries during the progress of a game’ in August 1951.³⁷⁵

The first football game in Ireland to be broadcast on television was, unsurprisingly, an international game held in Belfast between [Northern] Ireland and Italy in January 1958. Malcolm Brodie reported that ‘all except the opening ten minutes of the game will be televised ‘live’ by the B.B.C. to all parts of the United Kingdom and, through the Eurovision link, to Italy and Belgium’.³⁷⁶ A victory by two goals to one, in which it was reported how ‘television heightened the drama’,³⁷⁷ ensured Northern Ireland qualified for the 1958 FIFA World Cup in Sweden, and that international engagement was reported around the world such as in a daily newspaper in Lahore, Pakistan.³⁷⁸ With qualification assured, a wider conservative ethos within football circles in Northern Ireland is evident in that *Ireland’s Saturday Night* reported how the

³⁷³ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 Oct. 1947.

³⁷⁴ *Dundee Courier*, 2 Aug. 1951.

³⁷⁵ *Mid Ulster Mail*, 1 Sept. 1951.

³⁷⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 8 Jan. 1958.

³⁷⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 Jan. 1958.

³⁷⁸ *Civil & Military Gazette (Lahore)*, 17 Jan. 1958.

News of the World newspaper was polling its Northern Ireland readers ‘should they[Ireland] play in the World Cup even if it means Sunday football?’³⁷⁹

Later that year, all of Northern Ireland’s games at the World Cup were broadcast by the B.B.C. in both radio and television.³⁸⁰ Upon their return, the Northern Ireland government at Stormont hosted the team at a dinner to celebrate their achievement of reaching the quarter-final, where they would eventually lose to France by four goals to nil.³⁸¹

On that occasion of that event, IFA secretary William Drennan claimed:

we are now graded among the best in the world, and as well as giving a boost to British football, the team won the admiration of all Sweden. They were certainly a grand advertisement for Northern Ireland.³⁸²

Some months later, at an event at Belfast Rotary Club, the *Belfast Telegraph* carried a report concerning an address made by IFA President Harry Cavan in which he linked television international engagement to the game’s popularity:

The advent of television had also done much to bring the game to the notice of the larger public. Through television the game had become increasingly popular. He revealed that in the last World Cup series, the finals of which were played in Sweden, 54 nations took part. That indicated quite clearly that soccer was an international game in every sense of the word; it was the national sport of Britain.³⁸³

Whilst the qualitative commentary above clearly indicates that the advent of television and international success brought football to a larger audience and increased its popularity, regrettably there exists no archival club affiliation data pertaining to Northern Ireland to corroborate those links. However, and whilst no notable international success would emerge for football in the Republic of Ireland until the late 1980s, football club affiliation statistics and television license ownership statistics are available. From this, it is possible to explore the impact that the advent of television alone had on football activity there between 1965 and 1976 (fig.19).

³⁷⁹ *Ireland’s Saturday Night*, 25 Jan. 1958.

³⁸⁰ *Ballymena Observer*, 6 June 1958.

³⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 20 June 1958.

³⁸² *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 June 1958.

³⁸³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 Nov. 1958.

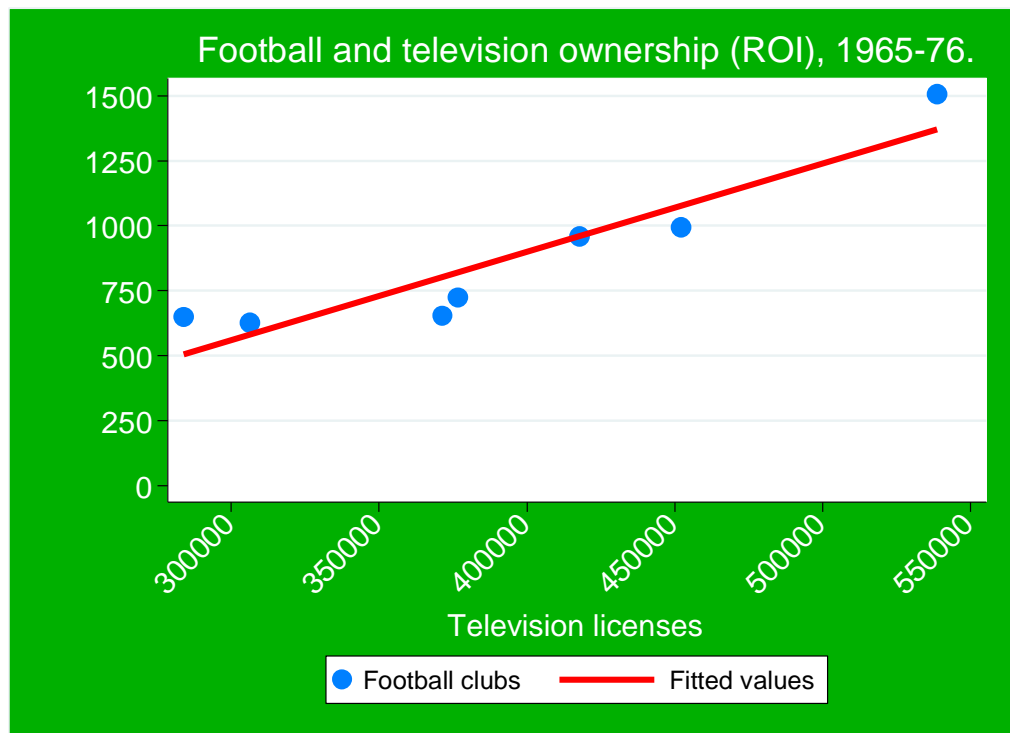


Fig. 19: Two-way linear prediction showing the relationship between television ownership and FAI club affiliation in the Republic of Ireland, 1965-76.³⁸⁴

The data above demonstrates a positive correlation between television ownership and the number of FAI affiliated football clubs in the Republic of Ireland. Writing in 1976, Colm McCarthy and June Ryan contended that ‘since television licensing was introduced in [the Republic of] Ireland in the early nineteen-sixties, the number of sets has increased from under 100,000 to over half a million, a compound annual growth rate in excess of 15 per cent’.³⁸⁵ This data corroborates that analysis, with there being in 1976 an additional quarter of a million television sets licensed in the country than in 1965 (254,924). In the same period, the number of clubs affiliated to the FAI in the Republic of Ireland more than doubled (from 649 in 1965 to 1,506 in 1976).

In that intervening period, there can be little doubt as to the impact of television on the coverage of football in Ireland, north and south. Television provided Irish audiences with much increased access to association football, and association football that was both of a high standard and glamorous. For

³⁸⁴ Distribution of radio and television licenses by county and province, Statistical Abstract of Ireland, 1963-76 (Stationery Office, Dublin, Pr. 9587-Pr.1.6787).

³⁸⁵ Statistical Abstract of Ireland, cited in, Colm McCarthy and June Ryan, ‘An econometric model of television ownership’, *Economic and social review*, 7:3 (1976), p. 265.

example, the televising of the 1966 world cup final between England and West Germany was said to have had the effect whereby ‘soccer was broadcast into every nook and cranny in this island; clubs sprang up in almost every parish’.³⁸⁶

Television also brought into Irish homes the success of Glasgow Celtic and Manchester United in winning consecutive European Cups in 1967³⁸⁷ and 1968³⁸⁸ respectively. It enhanced the stature and visibility of Irish players, north and south, who played professional football in England, such as George Best³⁸⁹ and John Giles.³⁹⁰ This effect was turbocharged from 1964 by the beaming of *Match of the day* — the BBC’s flagship football highlights programme — into Irish households, north and south, on a Saturday evening.³⁹¹

At least one non-football-related impact of Northern Ireland qualifying for the 1982 World Cup in Spain was, according to Roberts, the tournament games in June of that year serving as a temporary distraction to the context of sectarian conflict at home:

The sectarian murder rate had been running at one every three days before the tournament yet in the two and half weeks between the team’s first and last games, the Troubles claimed only one fatality³⁹².

As he had been in 1958, Harry Cavan was the IFA president on the occasion of the 1982 world cup. In the months following the tournament, that which included a stunning defeat of the host nation by a goal to nil and reaching the second round,³⁹³ the Lord Mayor of Belfast hosted the squad at a civic luncheon. . The *Belfast Telegraph* reported Cavan as having told those present that ‘representatives of other countries has asked how Northern Ireland, with its small population, could achieve such a high standard’.³⁹⁴

The same newspaper compared the team’s parade through the centre of Belfast prior to the mayoral reception at the City Hall to a previous significant

³⁸⁶ *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 31 May 2002.

³⁸⁷ Advertised as being televised live on RTE, *Evening Herald*, 24 May 1967.

³⁸⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 May 1968.

³⁸⁹ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 127.

³⁹⁰ Described as ‘the outstanding midfield man in Europe’, *Daily Mirror*, 28 Dec. 1970.

³⁹¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 July 1969.

³⁹² Roberts, *Gunshots and goalposts*, p. 202.

³⁹³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 June 1982.

³⁹⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 Nov. 1982.

international sporting engagement, reporting ‘it was a scene reminiscent of the day a decade ago when golden girl Mary Peters brought back an Olympic gold medal to the province [Northern Ireland]’.³⁹⁵

When Northern Ireland again qualified for the World Cup four years later in 1986,³⁹⁶ hosted by Mexico, it is notable that a midweek horse racing meeting on the southern side of the Irish border, in Sligo, was reported to have been impacted by the draw of the televised coverage of Northern Ireland’s group stage fixture versus Algeria:

The sun came out, but the crowds didn’t. That was the scene at Sligo races on Tuesday night as a combination of uncertain weather conditions and live World Cup coverage led to a drop in attendance figures at the first night of the June meeting.³⁹⁷

In October 1987, the Republic of Ireland defeated Bulgaria by two goals to nil at Lansdowne Road. This ensured that when Scotland defeated Bulgaria in November, the Republic qualified for the final of a major tournament for the first time, the European Championship, hosted by West Germany in the summer of 1988.³⁹⁸

Notably, in early 1988 live television coverage of association football was already being cited as a cause for association football, allegedly, squeezing Gaelic games in some rural or provincial areas of Ireland, and not just in the major urban centres:

When the GAA got rid of rule 27, the foreign games ban, a lot of people thought that was the final solution, but they didn’t reckon that in the eighties they were going to find confrontation on another issue ... The influence of TV soccer has been so powerful that every parish in the country has at least one, if not two, soccer clubs, and Gaelic football plays an out of tune second fiddle.³⁹⁹

In their opening game of Euro 88, on 12th June, the Republic of Ireland stunned England in Stuttgart, winning by a goal to nil. For one Irish newspaper, the chance to contrast the perceived behaviour of the Irish and English fans was as important as the result. ‘Irish on the town, English on the rampage’ read

³⁹⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 Nov. 1982.

³⁹⁶ *Ireland’s Saturday Night*, 23 Nov. 1985.

³⁹⁷ *Sligo Champion*, 6 June 1986.

³⁹⁸ *Irish Independent*, 15 Oct. 1987.

³⁹⁹ *Tuam Herald*, 13 Feb. 1988.

the front page of the *Cork Examiner* although,⁴⁰⁰ as chapter five will demonstrate, the Irish football spectator was not immune from disorderly or violent behaviour. In mid-June 1988, the annual meeting of the Connacht Youth Football Association took place in the context of ‘Ireland’s involvement in the European Championships’. Then, the Secretary’s annual report confidently claimed, ‘there would be definite interest in the game and this upsurge should most obviously be recouped at underage level’, and he urged ‘all districts to make advantage of this unique situation’.⁴⁰¹

However, this was not to be a unique situation. In November 1989, the Republic of Ireland qualified for the FIFA World Cup for the first time following a victory over Malta by two goals to nil. The tournament was to be held in Italy in the summer of 1990. . The *Irish Independent* described how during the final qualifier ‘the country had ground to a halt to watch the match on television’, and that the achievement had secured ‘a unique place for Jack’s [Jack Charlton, team manager] soccer superstars in the heart of the nation’.⁴⁰²

In early 1990, a letter written by a female contributor to the *Irish Times*, titled ‘Only a game’, stated that ‘I regard grown men chasing a piece of leather up and down a grassy surface as a boring, childish and inconsequential activity’.⁴⁰³ But the country had come to disagree. As Northern Ireland had done thirty-two years earlier, the Republic of Ireland would reach the quarter-final on their first appearance at a world cup, although the on-field progress was accompanied by something far more significant, according to Rouse:

The mere fact of the success of the team pales beside the extraordinary scenes that accompanied its progress. For key matches during those years, the Irish team — manned not just by men born in Ireland, but also second – and third – generation players born in England and Scotland — inspired a popular devotion that was unprecedented.⁴⁰⁴

The role that television played in projecting that international engagement into millions of Irish households was evident by the conclusion of that tournament. Indeed, a Dublin newspaper reported that ‘one of the

⁴⁰⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 13 June 1988.

⁴⁰¹ *Sligo Champion*, 17 June 1988.

⁴⁰² *Irish Independent*, 16 Nov. 1989.

⁴⁰³ *Irish Times*, 8 Jan. 1990.

⁴⁰⁴ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 307.

interesting things to emerge from the TV figures from the World Cup was that both here and in Britain the numbers of women watching increased as the tournament went on to match those of men watching'.⁴⁰⁵

Thus, in the case of Northern Ireland in 1958, 1982 and 1986, and in the case of the Republic of Ireland in 1988 and 1990, the qualitative evidence has demonstrated, at the very least, the combined potential of the advent of television broadcasting of football matches and of high-profile international engagement. There is no doubt that when television and international success occasionally merged between 1958 and 1990, both football administrators and the sporting press, north and south, perceived or foresaw that this would constitute a boost to the domestic game.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter are based on the accumulation and analysis of a range of quantitative data. A first and fundamental base upon which this chapter is built is extensive data on the affiliation of association football clubs in Ireland between 1922 and 1990, to both the IFA and the FAI, and to their respective subdivisions. That data was compiled, in the first instance, from the associations' records. In addition, this chapter presents and makes use of crucial data (gleaned from newspaper sources) relating to the number and location of clubs that entered the junior cup competitions of the two 'national' associations. Combined, these indicators represent an important means of measuring the changing health of the game across the period examined.

This chapter has utilised that base to present the spatial and temporal patterns that emerged from that overarching exploration of the health of the game. In doing so, three key themes that are to some extent inter-related emerged: urbanisation, workplace football and economic trends. Each of these affected the preponderance and dispersion of association football clubs. On its own, the compiled data on both affiliation and cup entries constitutes a valuable contribution to the existing historiography. More than that, for the first time in the historiography, data-based patterns of affiliation and

⁴⁰⁵ *Sunday Tribune*, 27 July 1990.

participation across space and time, covering the whole island, have been presented here. Finally, the thematic analysis that followed, one which at all times compared north to south, threw further important light on Ireland's football history.

In section two, the first of a series of analytical sections, the extent to which urbanisation in Ireland, north and south, interacted with the development of the game, in this instance measured by IFA/FAI junior cup entries, was explored. That section demonstrated that following the IFA's split with the Leinster FA, both bodies consolidated their respective urban heartlands of Belfast and Dublin during the interwar period. This was especially evident in the realm of junior football, in which areas of higher population density produced the overwhelming concentration of junior cup entries. See, for example, junior cup entries as measured here between 1936 and 1938. Rather more provincial expansion was achieved in the realm of senior football, both north and south, between 1921 and 1937 when several provincial clubs were elected to both the Irish League and the League of Ireland.

The crisis of the Second World War saw both associations effectively retreat to their traditional urban heartlands. In senior football, this restricted provincial participation in the Irish League and League of Ireland for much of the period between 1940 and the resumption of regular league football on both sides of the border by 1947/8. Post-war junior football, as measured by junior cup entries in 1950, was propped up by the densely populated heartlands of Belfast and Dublin. Most teams entering the cups were located in these cities.

Thereafter, the rapid construction of housing projects in both parts of Ireland led to the creation of new urban and suburban communities, and junior football activity soon followed. This ensured that by the 1970s, IFA and FAI junior cup entries were less concentrated in Belfast and Dublin, but that dispersal remained strongly attached to urbanisation, in this case to new areas of increasing population density. Interestingly, during the 1980s we start to see the development of football in some of those new urban and suburban areas grow to the point at which the sustaining of senior football became possible. A renewed phase in the expansion of senior football in both the Irish League and League of Ireland witnessed new teams that were predominantly located in the

provincial towns of Ireland. In some cases, these towns were more densely populated than Ireland's cities.

Next the chapter turned to its second thematic area, an exploration of developments pertaining to three layers of the social base of football in Ireland. The first of these was a concentrated study of the existence of workplace football, north and south. In this case the analysis rested on the construction of a large, though not comprehensive, sample of workplace teams gleaned from newspaper archives. The data gathered is concentrated on what appears to have been the heyday of such activity, the decades between 1921 and 1951. That research revealed 192 teams that might be divided into four broad categories: manufacturing/industry; retail/services; state/semi-state; and transport. Once again, most of these teams were located in the urban areas of Ireland where such centres of employment were in higher concentration. The survey uncovered a considerable amount of football activity in such workplace settings. Crucially, the data suggests that in some instances this branch of football was an outlet for employees that served an important social function during eras of economic depression. This function mitigated, at least to some extent, against the kind of decline one might expect at times of depression.

Section three extended its analysis of the social base of the game beyond their heyday of workplace football to examine the extent that the emergence of women's football and the ending of the GAA ban allowed the game to evolve and expand. Administrative bodies and regular competition in women's football emerged in both parts of Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s. While the evidence suggests, as in the case of rugby, the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games further accelerated the growing number of clubs affiliating to the FAI in the Republic of Ireland.

The chapter's third theme (section 4) concerned the role that wider economic trends played in shaping the preponderance and dispersal of affiliated football clubs. This was explored in relation to three periods: 1929-38, 1945-60, and 1964-80. During the first of those periods, club affiliations collapsed in Northern Ireland between 1929 and 1931, before stabilising thereafter. Notably, the provincial expansion of the Irish League that had occurred during the 1920s was not reversed, although further gains were put on hold throughout the 1930s. Evidence gleaned from newspapers suggests that

during that economic crisis the IFA's regional subdivisions occasionally admitted to their district junior football competitions teams from the jurisdiction of the IFA's rival national association. This might suggest that official football in Northern Ireland was willing to bend its rules to see out the crisis.

In the south, it proved helpful to separate the immediate effects of the Great Depression up to mid-1932, from the effects of a self-inflicted and disastrous economic war with Britain that lasted until 1938. In doing so, it appears that the Great Depression did not have anywhere near the same destructive impact on football in the Irish Free State as it had on football in Northern Ireland. Rather, it was the later economic shock that seems to have impacted upon the game's development in the south, underlining to some extent the different orientation of the two national economies. Notably, the destructive impact on southern agriculture, by far that economy's largest sector, coincided with a measurable decline in football club affiliations from provincial areas of the Irish Free State between 1932 and 1937.

During the post-war period, football first recovered the losses incurred during the war years. In senior football, this was evidenced by an almost complete recovery of provincial participation in the Irish League and the League of Ireland. The example of Newry Town, however, illustrates that more work was required regarding this aspect of the game's recovery. Frozen out of the Irish League in 1940, senior football in Newry went into hibernation during the post-war era. It is possible, however, that the poor performance of both national economies during this period, which was epitomised by a dire economic situation in Newry, prolonged the stagnation of the 'frontier team' (Newry Town FC) within the realm of intermediate club football in Northern Ireland. Their readmission to senior league football would not occur until 1983. However, it would be occasional exploits of provincial clubs such as Derry City, in winning the competitions that Linfield usually dominated as a result of their financial might, that gave the finances of the IFA a much-needed boost in otherwise austere times.

In the south, the post-war explosion of junior football activity in almost every region of the FAI's jurisdiction, seems to have flown in the face of the dire economic situation in which the Republic found itself by the mid-1950s.

Later, between 1964 and 1980, FAI club affiliation in the Republic of Ireland rocketed. While part of that period saw economic growth in the south (1964-73), the economy was subsequently (1973-80), beset by economic instability. Taken together, this evidence indicates that economic trends are not necessarily straight-forward predictors of football's health.

The fourth theme (section 5) has gone some way to explaining what other factors could have underpinned football's growth. It found that, similar to rugby, football club affiliation in the Republic of Ireland increased significantly in tandem with a rise in television ownership between 1965 and 1976. The broadcasting power of the BBC, providing as it did a weekly connection between Irish households and the exploits of prominent Irish professional footballers in England via *Match of the day*, undoubtedly contributed much to interest in, and growth of, the game. The trend whereby television and interest in Irish achievement combined to raise the profile of the game had then begun many years prior to historic achievements of the Republic of Ireland international team at the 1988 European Championships in Germany and the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Italy. In what was a significant moment for the once foreign game, the Charlton team captured the public imagination in a way the GAA had arguably never done. It was television that, for the vast majority of Irish people, was the means by which they connected with this international engagement. Though equivalent quantitative data is not available for Northern Ireland, it seems that the achievements of Billy Bingham's team in reaching two World Cups, and the television coverage of that, also promoted the growth of the game.

Chapter 5: Football spectator violence in Ireland, 1921-90.

Introduction

In his 2020 book *This Sporting Life*, Robert Colls reminded us that ‘Sport has always carried a violent charge: violence can be a sport in itself’.¹ If this seems true, then so too does Emma Griffin’s contention that ‘the past two centuries have witnessed an unmistakable redrawing of the place of violence in sport’: a re-drawing that has involved the increased deployment of mechanisms for the control of violence (for example rules and referees), and a retreat from violence, in sport.² In recent decades, among the residual forms of violence associated with sport, football spectator violence has attracted much attention in the international literature.

The broad question of violence and sport in Ireland has received some attention. Mirroring Griffin’s comments, James Kelly has identified the early nineteenth century as a transitional era when a violent sporting tradition amongst the wider population in Ireland was replaced during the nineteenth century by the imposition by the ‘middling sort’ of sports with codified rules.³ This process was a long one. Neal Garnham has shown that the violent sporting tradition embodied by blood sports survived longer in Ulster than at first might appear to be the case, and certainly well beyond the point when cock-fighting and bull-baiting became illegal.⁴

In an Irish context the relationship between violence and modern codified sports has been examined by Paddy Dolan and John Connolly who argued there has been the decrease of both on-field and spectator violence associated with hurling, particularly during the second half of the twentieth

¹ Robert Colls, *This Sporting Life: Sport and Liberty in England, 1760-1960* (Oxford, 2020), p. 277.

² Emma Griffin, ‘Violence in sport, 1800-2000’ in Louise Edwards, Jay Winter and Nigel Penn (eds), *The Cambridge world history of violence, volume IV. 1800 to the present* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 207.

³ Kelly, *Sport in Ireland*, p. 236.

⁴ Garnham, ‘The survival of popular blood sports’, pp 107-26.

century.⁵ In the case of soccer, Brendan Power has written of the mixed results of attempts by church associations such as the Boys Brigade to manage Irish boys' behaviour through football at the turn of the twentieth century⁶ while Liam O'Callaghan has expertly documented the important role of violence within rugby in Munster, and particularly in Limerick, between 1927 and 1942.⁷

This chapter will focus on spectator violence and association football. The attention afforded to this subject in an Irish context is surprisingly scant. Before turning to it, however, it is necessary to briefly address the issue of rugby and violence. In his work on *Rugby in Munster*, Liam O'Callaghan has demonstrated that violence 'was part of the flavour of Munster, and particularly Limerick, rugby.' He demonstrates this by citing a range of violent incidents, involving players but also spectators, during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Ultimately, he argues that this violence grew out of a particular brand of manliness that was encouraged in the context of the robust brand of the game and fierce parochial rivalries that characterised Limerick rugby. Though complex questions of class and masculinity were also involved, given that the working-class club Young Munster were more often blamed for violence than other clubs. Crucially, O'Callaghan prefaced that statistical overview by identifying the origins of the interaction between rugby, amateurism, class and masculinity:

The Victorian concept of amateurism, which went far beyond the mere economic relationship between a particular sport and its players, owed much of its origins to Muscular Christianity and provided the practical blueprint for the manner in which gentlemen should play and consume codified sport.⁸

Moreover, Tony Collins has described how different class-related conceptions of masculinity were an important layer of English rugby's great split of 1895.⁹

⁵ Paddy Dolan and John Connolly, 'The civilizing of hurling in Ireland', *Sport and Society* 12:2 (2009), pp 196-211.

⁶ Brendan Power, 'The functions of association football in the Boys Brigade in Ireland, 1888-1914' in William Murphy and Leanne Lane (eds), *Leisure and the Irish*, pp 41-58.

⁷ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, pp 125-31.

⁸ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 113, and for the general discussion, pp 111-40.

⁹ Tony Collins, *Rugby's great split: Class, culture and the origins of rugby league football* (Abingdon, 2006), p. 125. Cited by O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, p. 114.

Rouse points out that rugby in Ireland consolidated its image as the game for the middle-classes by pointing a disdainful finger toward the fighting that allegedly characterised soccer matches. Rightly sceptical, he contends that, despite the rhetoric, ‘there was no neat divide’ between violent association football matches and a rugby marked by restrained, disciplined manliness: ‘there were many soccer matches played without incident at all – and, anyway, evidence came freely, too, of violence in rugby matches’.¹⁰ A fixture between Trinity College Dublin and Blackrock College and College Park in Dublin in December 1922,¹¹ is one Rouse has identified as a ‘notorious incident’ of a rugby game in the affluent suburbs of south Dublin that attracted violence (or the threat thereof), something, he writes, to which ‘the minutes of the Leinster Branch of the IRFU frequently attest’.¹² An extreme example, albeit during an extreme time of civil war, comes from those very records:

the Blackrock touch judge informed the referee that he had a revolver with him and that he would plug him (the referee) if he attempted to give a wrong decision against Blackrock.¹³

In the public domain, the *Irish Times* match report on the fixture made no mention of such an incident, instead devoting its analysis to the ‘open character’ of all games held in the capital over the weekend:

Trinity, who have been kept busy during the past fortnight, were well tested by Blackrock College in the College Park, but superior pace and smartness behind the scrum enabled them to pull off a very evenly-contested game by 1 goal and three tries to nil.¹⁴

Crucially, this illustrates what Rouse has referred to as a ‘cultural gap’ existing between the rugby establishment and junior rugby in Limerick, a game usually played on Sunday and which ‘was renowned for its violence, with unruly scenes a regular occurrence’.¹⁵ Nowhere was that ‘gap’ more evident than in the pages of the *Irish Times*. Significantly, whilst in 1922 that newspaper did not carry a report on the threat of violence on that most middle-

¹⁰ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 216.

¹¹ A fixture listed that morning in the Dublin press – *Freemans Journal*, 2 Dec. 1922.

¹² Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 299.

¹³ Minutes of the Leinster Branch of the IRFU, (UCDA, uncatalogued), 12 Dec. 1922.

¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 4 Dec. 1922.

¹⁵ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 271.

class of occasions at College Park, in 1929 they cited the threat of on and off-field violence, in its denouncing of a push for Sunday rugby in Munster and Connacht:

As we gather, the Irish Rugby Union is convinced that the extension of its [unreadable] to Sunday rugby would be injurious to the game's prestige, dignity, discipline and moral influence. Too often Sunday games which bring large crowds from many districts are attended by disorders on and off the field; the rulings of referees are disputed by eager partisans; sometimes the local public houses, opened *ad hoc*, do a roaring trade.¹⁶

Spectator violence at rugby then was not unknown. The culture of the sport, however, may have acted to limit it. It certainly acted to restrict the reporting of such violence, usually associating it, in negative terms, with 'popular' forms of the game. Violence at association football, on the other hand, was more widely reported upon.

Consequently, this chapter's primary concern is to provide the reader with the first study that seeks to reckon with the issue of spectator violence at association football matches in Ireland (spectator violence) over a long period, and with the purpose of revealing patterns. It does so based on a sample of 101 incidents of spectator violence at association football matches in Ireland, gleaned from a survey of the newspaper sources. Twenty-five of those incidents relate to the pre-partition period between 1896 and 1920, whilst seventy-six relate to a post-partition era (1921-90).

Richard Holt writes that the majority of recorded incidents of football disorder in Britain between 1895 and 1914 also concerned milder disturbances such as bad language and unsportsmanlike conduct.¹⁷ The work of Neal Garnham suggests that, at least in 1912, this was not the case in Belfast. This study has unearthed twenty-five such incidents occurring between 1896 and 1920, with Garnham contending that the violence accompanying Belfast Celtic's league fixture with Linfield in September 1912 was 'the most serious disturbance to date at any match in Ireland':¹⁸ that game was abandoned after serious rioting between an estimated crowd of 10,000 rival fans and the police

¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 4 Oct. 1929.

¹⁷ Holt, *Sport and the British*.

¹⁸ Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 125.

during which gunshots were fired.¹⁹ Mark Tynan contends that ‘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’,²⁰ although at least four incidents of spectator violence occurred in Dublin between February 1913 and October 1919.

The sectarian violence at football matches in Belfast between 1912 and 1920 would on occasion be reflected in contradictory reporting of those events by the Belfast press, depending on the perceived political outlook of a paper’s readership.²¹ Arguably, the prominence afforded to that spectator violence during the Irish revolutionary era has had a distorting effect on perceptions of spectator violence that occurred in the area that became Northern Ireland after 1920, leading us to assume that such violence is likely linked to the sectarian and political divisions visible in Belfast’s football rivalries. It is also a perception borne of the work of sociologists such as Alan Bairner, who identified ‘the dynamics of sectarianism’ as a feature of football spectator violence in Northern Ireland.²² For David Hassan and Philip O’Kane, one symptom stemming from the ‘lack of interaction between the two communities in Northern Ireland’ was ‘intermittent violence and discrimination within the realm of sport’.²³ On some occasions, those divisions were undoubtedly a factor but, as we shall discover, so too did the nature of spectator violence in Ireland evolve.

Spectator violence in Ireland, receiving limited attention in the Irish historiography, has received even less in the international literature on the subject.²⁴ As it emerged, much of the sociological study of football spectator violence was led by Eric Dunning, based at the University of Leicester, and

¹⁹ Roberts, *Gunshots and goalposts*, pp 1-8.

²⁰ Tynan, ‘Association football and Irish society’, p. 15.

²¹ The 1912 fixture between Belfast Celtic and Linfield being a good example, see *The Irish News*, 16 Sept. 1912 & *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 Sept. 1912.

²² Alan Bairner, ‘Soccer, masculinity and violence in Northern Ireland: Between hooliganism and terrorism’, *Men & masculinities*, 1:3 (1999), p. 284.

²³ David Hassan & Philip O’ Kane, ‘Terrorism and the abnormality of sport in Northern Ireland’, *International review for the sociology of sport*, 47:3 (2012), p. 398.

²⁴ Other than a passing mention that some violence had occurred in Ireland, in John Williams, Eric Dunning, and Patrick Murphy, *Hooligans abroad: Behaviour and control of English fans in continental Europe* (Abingdon, 1984).

described as ‘the leading light of research into the causes²⁵ [and incidence]²⁶ of football hooliganism’.²⁷ Dunning was heavily influenced by his former teacher at Leicester, the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990), and, in particular, Elias’ theory concerning ‘civilizing processes’. Elias argued that western societies had become less violent over time as an individual’s capacity to exercise violence within society was increasingly restricted by law while the social disapproval of violent behaviour (an attitude first adopted by elites and taken up by other classes) became the norm. As Dunning puts it, this resulted in the ‘gradual pacification of larger and larger spaces’. For Dunning, this theory helped to explain why sport itself had become less violent over time.²⁸ Undoubtedly inspired by Elias, Dunning’s ‘figurational’²⁹ explanation of soccer hooliganism concluded that:

soccer hooliganism is predominantly an expression of a pattern of male aggressiveness characteristically found, in the English case at least, in the ‘rougher’ sections of the working class and that one of the principal ways in which it is produced and reproduced is by the experience of living towards the bottom of the social scale.³⁰

Marxist interpretations of spectator violence have also been influential. For Marxist theorists the violence derives from the alienation of the working-class in response to elite attempts at controlling the masses through the regulation of sporting activity. For instance, German sociologist Bero Rigauer held that sport was initially a recreational enjoyment for elites, but that the increasing developments of industrial capitalism diffused these sports downward into the social hierarchy.³¹ British sociologist Ian Taylor argued that an *embourgeoisement* of football during the twentieth century was typified by its reorganisation around professionalism after the Second World War. For Taylor, the consequence of this was working-class males attempting to re-

²⁵ See Eric Dunning, Patrick Murphy and John Williams, *The roots of football hooliganism: an historical and sociological study* (London, 1988).

²⁶ Eric Dunning, *Sport matters: sociological studies of sport, violence and civilization* (London, 1999), p. 130.

²⁷ Graham Curry, ‘A football man: the contribution of Eric Dunning to the acceptance of soccer as an area for serious academic study’, *Soccer & society*, 20:6 (2019), p. 891.

²⁸ ‘Sport in the western civilising process’ in Dunning, *Sport matters*, pp 38-64.

²⁹ Dunning, *Sport matters*, p. 142.

³⁰ Dunning, *Sport matters*, p. 143.

³¹ See Bero Rigauer, *Sport und arbeit* (Frankfurt, 1969); English edition translated by Allen Guttmann, *Sport and work* (New York, 1981).

establish the traditional weekend with all its associated masculine and tribal features that were often the cause of spectator violence at football matches.³²

Much of what follows here is influenced by the work of American sociologist Jay Coakley. Coakley speculates that ‘as actions and emotional expression have become more regulated and controlled in modern societies, players and spectators view the “controlled” violence in sports as exciting’.³³ More importantly, Coakley outlines three general factors that he perceives as underpinning violence at sports events:

1. The action in the sport itself.
2. The crowd dynamics and the situation in which the spectators watch the event.
3. The historical, social, economic and political contexts in which the event is planned and played.³⁴

Those three general factors identified by Coakley are represented in the three categories that have been identified from the international literature for the purposes of analysing spectator violence at association football matches in Ireland:

1. Violence that originated in sectarian/political conflict.³⁵
2. Violence that originated in sporting action.³⁶
3. Spectator violence, the built environment and the policing of football matches.³⁷

The analysis that follows first required assembling a dataset. It amounts to seventy-six incidents of spectator violence that occurred at association football matches in Ireland for the period 1921 to 1990. Those were gleaned from newspaper archives – the *Irish Newspaper Archive*, the *Irish Times Digital Archive*, and the *British Newspaper Archive* – concerning those years

³² Ian Taylor, ‘Spectator violence around football: The rise and fall of the “working class weekend”’, *Research papers in physical education*, 4:1 (1976), pp 4-9.

³³ Jay Coakley, *Sport in society: Issues and controversies* (New York, 2001). Pp 175-6.

³⁴ Coakley, *Sport in society*, p. 221.

³⁵ This has been described as ‘the rivalries between highly identified fans of certain sports clubs’, in Ramón Spaaij, ‘Sports crowd violence: An interdisciplinary synthesis’, *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 19 (2014), p. 152.

³⁶ The appearance of the terraces at football grounds representing ‘a liminal space’ in which ‘a strong and mostly uncontrolled Emotional Energy’ was, for the most part, unregulated, see Nikolas Patsantaras, ‘Stadium football violence in Greece: A theoretical-empirical approach’, *Biology of exercise*, 10:1 (2014), p. 25.

³⁷ The adequacy or inadequacy of stadia and security arrangements was a factor in disasters that, in the most extreme and tragic examples, led to the deaths of many spectators at Burnden Park, Bolton in 1946, in Peru in 1964, and Ibrox Park, Glasgow in 1971, see Juan Luis Paramio, Babatunde Buraimo & Carlos Campos, ‘From modern to postmodern: The development of football stadia in Europe’, *Sport in society*, 11:5 (2008), pp 517-34.

and as such were found in a range of national, provincial and city newspapers, north and south.³⁸ These seventy-six events, hereafter described as ‘incidents’ of spectator violence, include only ‘incidents’ which were reported in the local, regional and national newspapers as having occurred at football stadia or smaller venues in the context of a game taking place there. These newspaper archives constitute a large source base, and provide coverage for much of the country, but it is not comprehensive. Even if it were, not all incidents of violence at football matches were reported on in the press. Nonetheless, these digitized databases are the most consistent and reliable source that allows for this kind of quantitative analysis. Further work in other newspapers, or other sources, is very likely to unearth large numbers of further incidents of football spectator violence in settings beyond the stadium, in public houses or in city centres, for example, but the work conducted here is consistent enough, and encompasses a sufficient timespan, to reveal several meaningful trends.

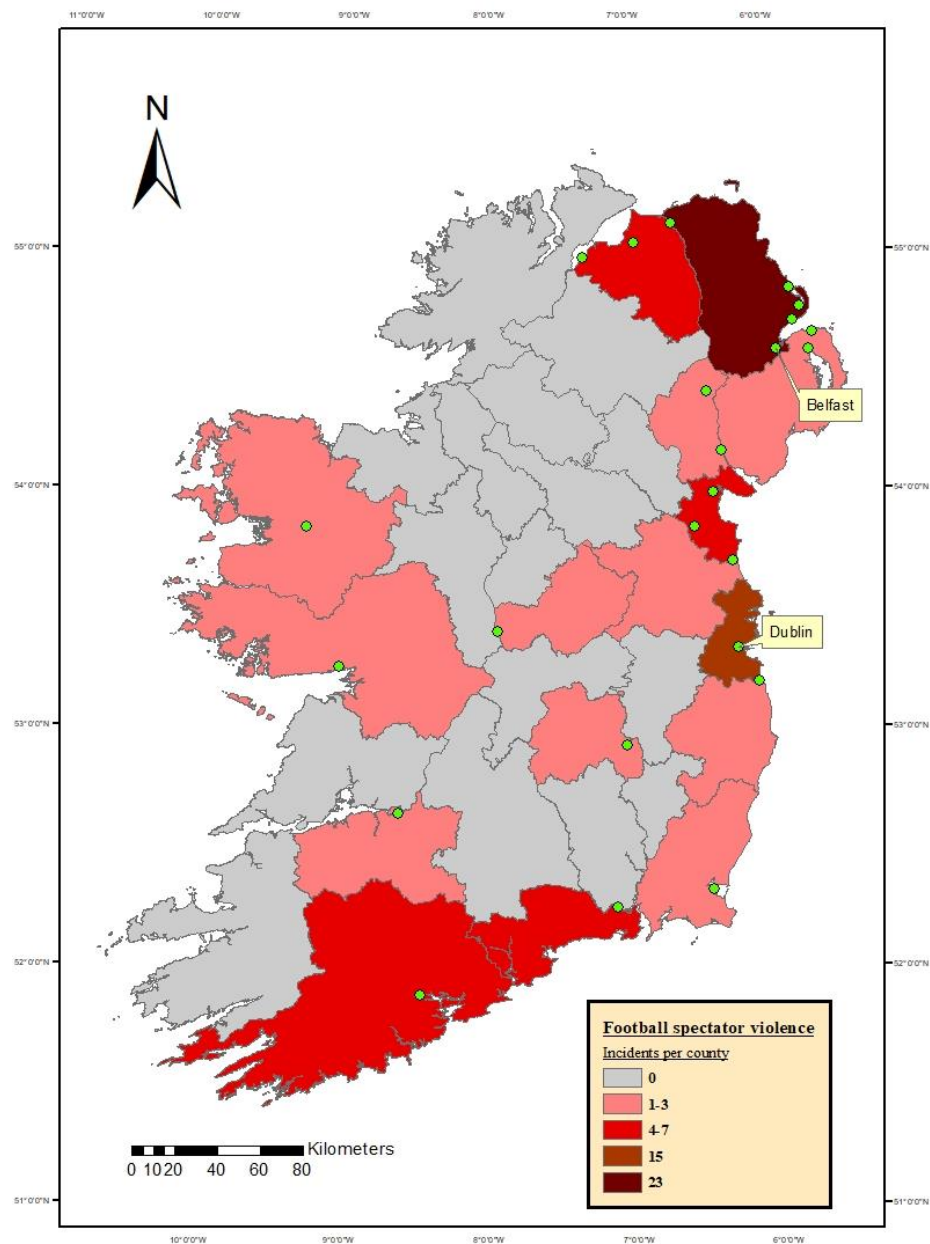
Before beginning a thematic analysis centred on types of spectator violence, it is perhaps worth identifying some temporal and geographic trends. As such, the assembled evidence of spectator violence in Ireland is presented first by decade (Fig. 20), and then by county (map 22).



Fig. 20: Number of incidents of spectator violence in Ireland, by decade.

³⁸ This includes the following publications: *Belfast News-Letter*, *Cork Examiner*, *Derry Journal*, *Evening Echo*, *Freeman’s Journal*, *Leinster Journal*, *Ireland’s Saturday Night*, *Irish Press*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times*, *Munster Express*, *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, *Northern Whig*, *Sligo Champion*, *Strabane Chronicle*, *Ulster Herald*, *Waterford Standard & Western People*.

The data reveals that the most violent decade was that of 1921-30, when twenty-five violent incidents were recorded as having occurred at football matches in Ireland. That number dipped to nineteen such incidents during 1931-40, and then more than halved to only seven occurring during 1941-50. The 1950s and 1960s were evidently the low point in football spectator violence in the period under review (five incidents apiece), before that the numbers began to increase again to seven incidents during 1971-80, and nine in the decade 1981-90.



Map 22: Incidents of spectator violence by county, 1921-90 (locations in green).

Between 1921 and 1990, we also find that counties Antrim (twenty-three incidents) and Dublin (fifteen) were by far the most frequent locations in which spectator violence occurred in Ireland. Given that these counties contained the urban centres of Belfast and Dublin respectively, the heartlands of most association football activity on the island, this should not be surprising. Counties Louth (seven) and Londonderry (seven) were the next most violent, followed by counties Cork and Waterford (four incidents apiece). Counties Armagh and Down had three incidents apiece, and one incident occurred in counties Galway, Mayo, Laois, Westmeath, Wexford, Wicklow and Limerick. No recorded incidents of spectator violence at soccer are to be gleaned from newspaper archives for the remaining seventeen counties in Ireland between 1921 and 1990.

5.1: Violence that originated in sectarian/political conflict

An inescapable starting point for any analysis of spectator violence at football matches in Ireland is crowd trouble that can be said to originate in, or at least to be linked to, wider sectarian and political conflict, if for no other reason than this form of spectator violence has gained traction in the limited existing historiography of spectator violence. For example, Florin Faje has written that in a 'highly unstable and conflict prone polity like Greater Romania', football could both dramatize 'the inherent tensions of modern nation building', as well as help to fuel 'radical affirmations of social distance and difference'.³⁹ More important to the present analysis, is that a study concerning how football has interacted with concepts of nationhood and masculinity in Costa Rica, found 'that the sense of nationhood is not a monolithic construction, but a shifting and contextual issue which fluctuates over time and according to circumstances'.⁴⁰

Intense club football rivalries in the Belfast region dominate this strand of spectator violence in Irish football and, to a considerable extent, this entire

³⁹ Florin Faje, 'Playing for and against the nation: Football in interwar Romania', *Nationalities papers*, 43:1 (2015), p. 175.

⁴⁰ Carlos Sandoval-Garcia, 'Football: forging nationhood and masculinities in Costa Rica', *International Journal of the history of sport*, 22:2 (2005), p. 212.

study of spectator violence in Ireland. For example, the famous rivalry between Linfield and Belfast Celtic had its roots in the complex political, economic and social context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Richard Holt contends that ‘Belfast Celtic were set up in (nationalist) emulation of the new Glasgow club in 1891 whilst Linfield and Glentoran upheld the Unionist cause’.⁴¹ Jonathan Magee asserted that famous rivalries, such as that between Belfast Celtic and Linfield, were ‘an important cultural identifier for both the unionist and nationalist communities from which their supporters respectively came’.⁴²

City	Senior Club (number of incidents)
Belfast	Linfield FC (16) Belfast Celtic FC (9) Glentoran FC (5) Distillery FC (3)
Dublin	Shelbourne FC (6) Bohemians FC (4) Shamrock Rovers FC (4)
Derry	Derry City (6)
Dundalk	Dundalk FC (5)
Waterford	Waterford FC (7)

Table 14: Senior clubs involved in matches where spectator violence occurred, 1921-90.

Unquestionably, the sectarian and political context of the Irish revolutionary era appears to have endured for at least another decade in that sixteen of twenty-five incidents between 1921 and 1930 that occurred in Northern Ireland. Immediately, this prompts the question as to whether that spectator violence might be related to the violent early years of that political unit’s existence to which, unquestionably, there remained a sectarian element.⁴³ Coyle has written that, within the wider context of discrimination against the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, including in areas such as

⁴¹ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 244.

⁴² Magee, ‘Football supporters’, in Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish*, p. 172.

⁴³ David Fitzpatrick, ‘Protestant depopulation and the Irish Revolution’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 38:152 (2013), p. 644.

employment and representation, '[Belfast] Celtic was the principal means of interaction between the people of West Belfast and the Unionist population'.⁴⁴ Notably, however, the violent early years of Northern Ireland's existence, were those in which Belfast Celtic did not compete in the Irish League (1921-4) following the sectarian violence that had led their March 1920 fixture versus Glentoran to be abandoned.⁴⁵

Between 1921-4, none of the incidents of spectator violence in Belfast or Northern Ireland uncovered by this study can be linked directly to sectarian/political conflict. During that team's exile, some Celtic players would find themselves taking part in football in the Irish Free State for teams such as Alton United.⁴⁶ Alton's first game under FAI jurisdiction, against another Belfast side (Hayfield) in the first qualifying round of the inaugural FAI cup in November 1921, was 'stopped shortly before full time owing to encroachment of spectators'.⁴⁷ Whilst it is difficult to establish whether those teams and spectators were divided by religion and politics, nonetheless under their proxy guise as Alton United, some Celtic players gained early experience of the forms of spectator violence that will be discussed in section two.

Barry Flynn has suggested that football in interwar Belfast was 'ghettoised with the demarcation lines between Catholic and Protestant areas plain for all to see',⁴⁸ and it is possible that the memory of spectator violence in Belfast during an era of sectarian/political conflict (1912-20), later became part of what one Belfast journalist in 1919 described as a 'peculiar sort of folk memory among the working-class Protestants and Catholics of Belfast ... who passed along their knowledge about the city to young people by telling stories about violence'.⁴⁹ In that context, a residual layer of sectarian political conflict underpinning Belfast Celtic vs Linfield fixtures after 1920 is evident.

⁴⁴ Pdraig Coyle, *Paradise lost and found: The story of Belfast Celtic* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 46.

⁴⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 Mar. 1920; Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts*, pp 15-7.

⁴⁶ Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts*, p. 44; Alton United defeated Shelbourne by one goal to nil in the FAI Challenge Cup final in March 1923, see *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 20 Mar. 1923.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the FAI Emergency Committee, 23 Nov. 1921, Minute book of the protests and appeals committee and emergency committee, Nov. 1921-Oct. 1928 (UCDA, Archives of The FAI, P137/14).

⁴⁸ Barry Flynn, *Political Football: The Life and Death of Belfast Celtic* (Dublin, 2009), p. 71.

⁴⁹ Mark Doyle, *Fighting like the devil for the sake of God: Protestants, Catholics and the origins of violence in Victorian Belfast* (Manchester, 2009), p. 1.

Following Belfast Celtic's return to the Irish League in 1924/5,⁵⁰ the three incidents of spectator violence in Northern Ireland that we can link directly to residual sectarian/political conflict, all occurred at fixtures between Belfast Celtic and Linfield at Celtic Park. Their league fixture in April 1928 witnessed the St Malachy's Catholic Pipers band parading the field at half time. The bandmaster was reported to have, 'unthinkably,' led his band on a route past the section of the ground where Linfield fans had congregated, and 'stones and bottle were thrown freely at the bandsmen'.⁵¹ Thereafter, it was claimed that 'rival crowds,' presumably Celtic supporters, 'made a rush for the stone throwers', and soon 'a large number of people were in conflict, and blows were exchanged freely'.⁵²

In April 1935, at the same venue a further clash between rival fans of Belfast Celtic and Linfield was reported on in the British press. It was claimed that 'stone throwing broke out between parties of the supporters of the teams, which for years have been traditional rivals',⁵³ and that 'the police maintained order by forming a cordon between the rival crowds'.⁵⁴ The Belfast press reported that, on this occasion, the half-time interval led 'rival factions to sing party songs' and soon 'there were several fights in progress'. Crucially, the police on duty amounted merely 'to the number of about fifteen' at a game attended by 'about twelve thousand spectators'. This led to a reserve force of police being rushed to Celtic Park during the second half.⁵⁵

In February 1937, in contrast, a County Antrim Shield fixture between Belfast Celtic and Linfield at Celtic Park saw 'a large force of police at the match' who removed rival spectators involved in scuffles on the terraces.⁵⁶ Notably, later that year, the police requested the assistance of the governing body (the IFA) with the aim of 'the prevention of any cause for ill-feeling or

⁵⁰ *Athletic News*, 11 Aug. 1924.

⁵¹ *Northern Whig*, 10 Apr. 1928.

⁵² *Derry Journal*, 11 Apr. 1928.

⁵³ *Nottingham Journal*, 23 Apr. 1935.

⁵⁴ *The Scotsman*, 23 Apr. 1935.

⁵⁵ *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 Apr. 1935.

⁵⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 Feb. 1937.

disturbance amongst supporters or spectators at all matches, especially those where sectarian feeling may be expected to exist'.⁵⁷

Between 1921 and 1939, the only incidents of spectator violence in Northern Ireland between rival fans recorded in newspapers that can be connected directly to sectarian/political conflict, were on the occasion of fixtures between these two clubs. The twenty-two other incidents of spectator violence that occurred in Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1939 are discussed in sections that follow. The role of the police, occasionally the target of, but more often responsible for the quelling of, spectator violence, comes under review in section three.

Coyle alleges that at 'the Oval, Glentoran's ground, which lay in the shadow of the shipyards, [rival fans] had a reputation for identifying Belfast Celtic supporters for later attack'.⁵⁸ The two occasions of spectator violence at Belfast Celtic vs Glentoran fixtures, in 1919 and 1920, took place at Cliftonville's ground in north Belfast.⁵⁹ These took place during a period of heightened political tensions and violence beyond the football ground. In July 1920 10,000 men, mostly Catholic, were 'violently expelled from the shipyards, the big engineering firms, and other workplaces...[and] one must bear in mind that there were only 93,000 Catholics in Belfast at the time'.⁶⁰ One English newspaper reported that a week of sectarian violence that followed over five weeks of shipyard expulsions was said to have been 'probably unmatched outside the area of Russian or Polish pogroms'.⁶¹ However, reports of violence at matches between these teams do not feature in newspaper reports after 1920.

Two incidents of spectator violence at Windsor Park, in 1948 and 1957, despite there being no obvious wider context of sectarian/political conflict at that time, sealed that ground's reputation as a major site of sectarian spectator

⁵⁷ Letter from Inspector General of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Irish Football Association, 31 Aug. 1937, IFA Council Minute Book, 1929-44 (PRONI, IFA Papers, D4196/2/1/4).

⁵⁸ Coyle, *Paradise lost and found*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts*, pp 14-5; *Portadown News*, 15 Mar. 1919; *Larne Times*, 20 Mar. 1920.

⁶⁰ Ronald Munck, 'Class and religion in Belfast: A historical perspective', *Journal of contemporary history*, 20:2 (Apr. 1985), p. 247.

⁶¹ *Western Times*, 3 Sept. 1920.

conflict in Belfast. The two incidents in question can be viewed through the lens of sectarian/political conflict, but also through the lens of additional themes to be unpacked below. At the very least, the perception of sectarian policing and/or administration was a common thread in the commentary that followed these high-profile incidents of spectator violence in Belfast.

The first incident was the final act of Belfast Celtic's history and is perhaps the most notorious incident of spectator violence in Ireland. It is certainly the most tragic for football followers in West Belfast.⁶² At the conclusion to their derby match at Windsor Park on 27 December 1948, Belfast Celtic player Jimmy Jones suffered a serious assault at the hands of Linfield fans.⁶³ Given the clubs' intense rivalry and the political and religious composition of their respective support bases, it is tempting to ascribe this act to sectarianism. Complicating the matter somewhat was the fact that Jones was a Protestant man (Church of Ireland), though it may have been this very fact that made him the target of the sectarian feeling of some who viewed him as a traitor.⁶⁴

Discussion after the incident also raised the question as to whether this was a failure of policing and, if so, what was the nature of this failing. The failure of the police on the day to protect Celtic players from spectators invading the pitch was the subject of furious exchanges in the Northern Ireland Parliament. Harry Diamond, Republican Labour Party MP for Falls, spoke on behalf of Belfast Celtic who were based in his constituency:

This is a one-million-pounds police force ... we had men brutally assaulted and their limbs broken ... no one has been apprehended in any way for this brutal assault ... The name of a right hon. Member in this House was associated with the promotion of that trouble. At private gatherings in connection with these sports clubs he led the singing of bitter sectarian songs which were an incitement to the players. I refer to the right hon. Member for Willowfield (Mr. Midgley).⁶⁵

⁶² Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts*, p. 59.

⁶³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 28 Dec. 1948.

⁶⁴ *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 2014.

⁶⁵ *The parliamentary debates, official report, fourth session of the sixth parliament of Northern Ireland, 12 George VI, House of Commons, volume 32* (1948, 49), 4 Jan. 1949.

Belfast Celtic claimed that ‘the protection afforded to the players might be fairly described as quite inadequate’,⁶⁶ and the club’s board of directors ‘wished to make the strongest possible protest against the conduct of those responsible for the protection of the players’.⁶⁷ Taken together these criticisms implied that the police were sectarian and therefore failed to protect the Celtic players. Coyle has written that, ‘soon after that infamous afternoon, the Celtic board began to offload their best players to English clubs, and everything pointing to a club that was winding up its affairs’.⁶⁸ Belfast Celtic resigned from the Irish League in April 1949,⁶⁹ from which they were never to return.

The second incident was the occasion of a World Cup qualifier between Ireland (IFA) and Italy at Windsor Park. On the morning of 4 December 1957, an *Irish Independent* columnist wrote enthusiastically, ‘I have no reservations at all in saying the occasion will provide the biggest mid-week invasion ever by soccer followers from other centres’.⁷⁰ The horizon seemed free of the kind of immediate crisis that tended to bring any sectarian or political feeling into focus at football, yet the occasion was marred by violence, an attack on Italian players by fans. This led to Murtagh Morgan, a nationalist serving as a Labour Party MP for Belfast Dock in the Northern Ireland parliament, to speculate that sectarian and political motives were present:

the fact that the poor Italian team had been blessed by a Bishop before they left Italy to play in Northern Ireland. That, of course, was fuel for the fires in Northern Ireland to resurrect the religious embers ... knowing the peculiar cannibal background of the Orange adherents in Northern Ireland, and specifically the kind of the supporters who run after the team which allegedly plays a sporting game in Windsor Park, no one could be surprised at the attitude.⁷¹

Further still, Joe Connellan, the Nationalist Party MP for South Down, would speculate that ‘the Government's silence can only be interpreted as an attempt to minimise and soft pedal the occurrence and thereby play up to the

⁶⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 28 Dec. 1948.

⁶⁷ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 28 Dec. 1948.

⁶⁸ Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts*, p. 58.

⁶⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Apr. 1949.

⁷⁰ *Irish Independent*, 4 Dec. 1957.

⁷¹ *The parliamentary debates, official report, fourth session of the eighth parliament of Northern Ireland, 6 Elizabeth II, House of Commons, volume 41* (1957, 58), 10 Dec. 1957.

prejudices of the Government supporters who were responsible for the scene'.⁷²

The *Irish Independent* carried the accusations being made by Rome's *Messaggero* newspaper, which claimed that the attack on Italian players by fans invading the field was not the only incident of concern on what would be a dark day for football in Belfast:

We do not know if the International Soccer Federation (FIFA) can allow another Italian team return to Belfast stadium ... These people, instigated by the English press, stepped down to the rank of Barbarians...an uncivilised people. They shouted 'dirty Italians' at the start of the game and booed at the Italian national anthem.⁷³

Much of the scholarship on spectator violence in the years prior to the 1970s is centred on Britain, thus likely magnifying a general tendency in Irish historiography to look to Britain as the first comparator.⁷⁴ That is also true in this case whereby Scotland, where much spectator violence was also said to have been sectarian in its origin, has proved the obvious point of comparison.⁷⁵ In fact, there are direct links. Glasgow Celtic football club has been described 'as an institution founded by and for the Irish Catholic immigrant diaspora in the west of Scotland',⁷⁶ while some of Linfield's working-class fan base, it is alleged, also migrated to Glasgow during the Irish revolutionary era:

Protestant migration from Belfast to Glasgow was renewed from 1912 when the Belfast shipbuilders Harland & Wolff opened a shipyard in Govan. This led to a growing two-way traffic of shipyard workers between the two cities, with a new wave of Ulster Protestant workers settling in Govan and surrounding districts.⁷⁷

In the context of a renewed outbreak of sectarian and political intercommunal conflict in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s, which was

⁷² *The parliamentary debates, official report, fourth session of the eighth parliament of Northern Ireland, 6 Elizabeth II, House of Commons, volume 41* (1957, 58), 10 Dec. 1957.

⁷³ *Irish Independent*, 5 Dec. 1957.

⁷⁴ For example, see N.A.J. Taylor, 'Football hooliganism as collective violence: Explaining variance in Britain through interpersonal boundaries, 1863-1989', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 28:13 (2011), pp 1750-71.

⁷⁵ David Goldblatt, *The ball is round: A global history of football* (London, 2007), p. 187.

⁷⁶ Joseph M. Bradley, 'Celtic football club, Irish ethnicity, and Scottish society', *New Hibernia review/ Iris Eireannach Nua*, 12:1 (2008), p. 96.

⁷⁷ Andrew Davies, 'Football and sectarianism in Glasgow during the 1920s and 1930s', *Irish Historical Studies*, 35:138 (2006), p. 203.

marked by increasing paramilitarization after 1970,⁷⁸ the database of spectator violence compiled by this study has unearthed only one incident that included fighting between rival fans. This occurred at Glentoran's Ulster Cup fixture versus Derry City at the Oval in August 1970, when there were 'clashes' between rival supporters leaving the ground. The fans were dispersed by the police and the army, following their deployment to Northern Ireland in 1969. It was reported the army had 'used CS gas twice'.⁷⁹

During the 1980s, the most high-profile incident of fighting between fans in Northern Ireland occurred again at Windsor Park, but on this occasion between fans of Linfield and Glentoran. The sides contested the Irish Cup final on 30 April 1983 and, having played out a 1-1 draw, Malcolm Brodie wrote of 'appalling scenes' at the full time whistle.⁸⁰ On this occasion, at least, the reaction of the authorities was swift in order to ban those who had been involved in the fighting from attending the replay the following weekend:⁸¹ four men were fined and another four received prison sentences.⁸² Given that Bairner and Shirlow have previously described the supporting of perceived Protestant football teams in Belfast, such as Linfield and Glentoran, as 'offering a context for the celebration of a wider culture',⁸³ we should consider the violence in May 1983 to have been intra-loyalist. Indeed, Hassan and O'Kane categorise such groups emerging from the Protestant community as oppositional, vying to be the true 'defenders' of the loyalist and British people of Northern Ireland.⁸⁴

The Irish experience of spectator violence, where its origins lie in sectarian or political conflict, also connects to wider trends beyond Great Britain. Indeed, one possible comparison to the sectarian spectator violence that accompanied fixtures between Belfast's 'original big two'⁸⁵ might be

⁷⁸ Desmond Bell, *Acts of Union: Youth culture and sectarianism in Northern Ireland* (London, 1990), p. 84.

⁷⁹ *Irish Times*, 25 Aug. 1970.

⁸⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 May 1983.

⁸¹ The replay of the Irish Cup final resulted in a victory for Glentoran by two goals to one, *Sunday Independent*, 8 May 1983.

⁸² *Irish Independent*, 4 May 1983.

⁸³ Alan Bairner & Peter Shirlow, 'Loyalism, Linfield and the territorial politics of soccer fandom in Northern Ireland', *Space & polity*, 2:2 (1998), p. 173.

⁸⁴ Hassan & O'Kane, 'Terrorism', p. 401.

⁸⁵ Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts*, p. 59.

found in the context of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Here, it has been said that ‘the activities of football hooligan paramilitaries during the Yugoslav Civil War are an extreme and disturbing example of the extent to which football and politics can interact’.⁸⁶ High-profile episodes of spectator violence prior to the partition of that country included that between rival fans of Red Star Belgrade (Serbia) and Dinamo Zagreb (Croatia), in Zagreb in May 1990. This occurred in the context of Franjo Tudman’s Croatian Democratic Union having defeated the Communist Party in Yugoslav parliamentary elections two weeks earlier. The Zagreb police, allegedly dominated by Serbs, prevented an all-out war between the rival fans,⁸⁷ although the event still led Uruguay to pull out of a World Cup warm-up friendly international versus Yugoslavia that was scheduled to have been played in Zagreb in June 1990.⁸⁸

Football has continued to be an arena in which the conflicts consequent of the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, have played out. The most high-profile of those to date was sparked when a drone carrying the flag of so-called Greater Albania, hovered over the Partizan Stadium in Belgrade during a European Championship qualifier between Serbia and Albania in October 2014. In the melee that followed a Serbia player snatching the flag and removing it from the drone, an Albania player was struck by a chair wielded by a Serbia fan who had invaded the pitch, and the game was abandoned.⁸⁹

We must exercise caution, however. Sectarian and political conflict was not the only factor at the heart of football spectator violence in post-partition Ireland, and we now turn to the evidence that points to the first of three additional themes that have been hitherto absent from the Irish historiography concerning spectator violence.

⁸⁶ Richard Mills, ‘It All Ended in an Unsporting Way’: Serbian Football and the Disintegration of Yugoslavia, 1989–2006, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26:9 (2009), p. 1189.

⁸⁷ Shay Wood, ‘Football after Yugoslavia: conflict, reconciliation and the regional football league debate’, *Sport in society*, 16:8 (2013), p. 1080; see also, in Simon Kuper, *Football against the enemy* (London, 1994), pp 227-36.

⁸⁸ *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 14 May 1990.

⁸⁹ *Irish Independent*, 16 Oct. 2014.

5.2: Violence that originated in sporting action

The literature suggests that the likelihood of spectator violence is often related to the activity on the field of play. The two most likely triggers in this context are violent actions by, or between, players and ‘calls made by officials’ that fans believe to be unfair or incompetent.⁹⁰ The evidence uncovered here bears this out. Table 17 categorises by the type of violent incident that occurred all seventy-six incidents from the sample that form the quantitative foundation of this study.

Type	Frequency
Spectator vs. spectator	17
Spectator vs. police	8
Players attacked by spectators	16
Referee attacked by spectators	29
Others	6

Table 15: Incidents of spectator violence in Ireland, 1921-90, by type of violence.

Attacks on players or officials, the data reveals, occurred on forty-five occasions between 1921 and 1990, thus representing around 59 per cent of all violent incidents identified. It seems very likely that all 29 attacks on referees (or 38 per cent of the violent incidents in the sample) occurred in anger at actions of those referees, while a high proportion of attacks on players seem to have been precipitated by violence on the field.

An alarming trend of attacks on referees – at least seven such incidents occurred in Ireland prior to 1921 – continued during the period under review here. The press recorded a further twenty-nine such occasions between 1921 and 1990. The earliest example in the Irish context from the pre-partition period appears to have taken place at a junior game in County Fermanagh in March 1905, between Lisbellaw vs. Enniskillen Celtic. A second penalty was given against Lisbellaw, and according to the *Fermanagh Herald*, ‘with this decision the natives would not agree, and a number of spectators burst onto the playing pitch’.⁹¹ This trend was not, of course, exclusive to association

⁹⁰ Coakley, *Sport in society*, pp 221-2.

⁹¹ *Fermanagh Herald*, 4 Mar. 1905.

football. In 1906, a hurling referee was seriously assaulted at a game in County Limerick.⁹² Nor was it unique to Ireland as, in 1908, a referee was attacked by spectators in Czechoslovakia following a game involving a touring English representative team.⁹³

Indeed, Eric Dunning has written that ‘when large crowds turn up to watch an exciting leisure event the probability is high that some of its members will abandon their self-controls and behave in disorderly and sometimes violent ways’.⁹⁴ This was not confined to football. At baseball games in the United States between

1900 and the early 1940s, crowd violence was common: bottles and other objects were thrown at players and umpires, and World Series games were disrupted by fans angered by umpires calls or the actions of opposing players.⁹⁵

Tynan asserts that ‘rising trends of supporter violence surrounding association football in the south of Ireland during the early 1920s mirrored trends that were emerging throughout Europe’.⁹⁶ In Britain during the 1920s it was players, rather than spectators, who were reported to have attacked referees (in England in 1924⁹⁷ and in Scotland in 1930),⁹⁸ however, Geoffrey Pearson suggests that this was changing during the 1930s:

behaviour on the terraces was also thought to be deteriorating in the 1930s and crowd incidents – involving pitch invasions, attacks on referees and players, and occasional confrontations between spectators and the police – were exciting some interest.⁹⁹

Elsewhere the violence directed against referees was sometimes fatal. Referees were beaten to death in Italy in 1920¹⁰⁰ and in Czechoslovakia in 1948.¹⁰¹ The closest the Irish experience came to that European trend was

⁹² *Irish Independent*, 28 Feb. 1906.

⁹³ *Irish Times*, 15 June 1908.

⁹⁴ Dunning, *Sport matters*, p. 154.

⁹⁵ On spectator violence in the United States, see Richard Scheinin, *Field of screams: The dark underside of America's national pastime* (New York, 1994).

⁹⁶ Tynan, ‘Association football and Irish society’, p. 234.

⁹⁷ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 5 Dec. 1924.

⁹⁸ *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 5 May 1930.

⁹⁹ Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A history of respectable fears* (Basingstoke, 1983), p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ Tynan, ‘Association football and Irish society’, p. 230.

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 14 Oct. 1948.

when supporters threatened to ‘hang him (the referee) to the goalposts’ at a junior match in Waterford in 1929.¹⁰²

Attacks on referees at games in both parts of Ireland were commonplace throughout the 1920s. In the north, the sending off of a Distillery player during their Irish League fixture with Linfield in November 1922¹⁰³ resulted in ‘the intimidation of the referee by a section of the spectators’ at the conclusion of the match.¹⁰⁴

In the south, the *Irish Times* reported that, at a Leinster Senior League game between Bendigo and Richmond Rovers in April 1928, the referee was a scapegoat for angry fans. A comparatively minor incident seems to have garnered an emotional response from those spectating:

The police were sent for and arrived later. The referee made a couple of mistakes. The incident of the hop of the ball, more or less, raised the temper of the crowd, who resented the decision.¹⁰⁵

In Dundalk, during a meeting between Dundalk and Bohemians in the League of Ireland in March 1928, the awarding of a penalty kick to Bohemians near the end of the match led to an assault on the referee, J.J. Kelly of Dublin, as he left the field. He was reported to have ‘bled profusely’ from a blow to the head ‘caused by a stone, or brick’,¹⁰⁶ and ‘while on the ground he was kicked as civic guards rushed to the scene’.¹⁰⁷ More on the increasing role of the civic guards will appear in the next section. Meanwhile, at Cork in November 1928, the league meeting of Fordsons and Bohemians was followed by the report that ‘some of the referee’s decision created so much resentment amongst the Cork team’s [Fordsons] followers’ that, on two occasions, it was ‘necessary [for stewards] to protect him from a large section of the crowd’.¹⁰⁸ In the following year, the FAIFS considered the issue sufficiently pressing to establish a commission to investigate and J.J. Kelly would inform the commission that, in his opinion, Dundalk supporters were ‘the most cowardly lot of blackguards

¹⁰² *Irish Times*, 12 Mar. 1929.

¹⁰³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 22 Nov. 1922.

¹⁰⁴ *Northern Whig*, 24 Nov. 1922.

¹⁰⁵ *Irish Times*, 20 Apr. 1928.

¹⁰⁶ *Irish Times*, 18 Apr. 1928.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Independent*, 2 Apr. 1928.

¹⁰⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 26 Nov. 1928.

that ever attended a football match',¹⁰⁹ the Dundalk delegates having earlier withdrawn from the commission in protest at not being allowed to cross-examine witnesses at that early stage of the inquiry. This occurred at the first meeting of that commission.¹¹⁰

So too at junior level, at games that were often local and invariably less well-publicised than senior games, it is clear that spontaneous outbreaks of uncontrolled aggression could occur within smaller crowds. Court proceedings that followed a junior game in Belfast in January 1930 between Glentoran 2nds and Linfield Rangers, included testimony from a player, Thomas Kennedy, who claimed 'one of the spectators had struck him in the face when he was proceeding to the pavilion' at half time.¹¹¹ When the referee, J. Houston, sent off a Ballycarry player in their junior game versus Cliftonville Strollers in March 1932, it was reported that 'the [Ballycarry] spectators attacked some of the players and officials of Cliftonville Strollers'. Bizarrely, the referee told a meeting of a County Antrim FA sub-committee that he had also been kicked from behind and that 'sods, eggs and what he took to be potatoes were thrown at him'.¹¹²

In the south, a Dundalk Summer League game in Blackrock, County Louth, in July 1930 between Bank Rovers and Drumcondra, 'ended in extraordinary fashion'. Upon a second Blackrock goal being scored, 'the boxing bouts spread to the spectators', with women reportedly amongst those who invaded the pitch and took part in the mobbing of the referee, who promptly abandoned the match.¹¹³ In the latter decades of this study, the coverage of spectator violence at junior football in Ireland reduces significantly, perhaps as a result of a reduction in the coverage of that level of the game. Whatever the case, the occasional attack on players and referees made it to print. For example, in Drogheda in July 1961, the semi-final of a local cup competition between Drogheda Celtic and Ardee Celtic was

¹⁰⁹ Letter from J.J. Kelly to the Football Association, London, 3 Oct. 1929, Minute book of the emergency committee and the protests and appeals committee, Oct. 1928-Jan.1932 (UCDA, Archives of the FAI, P137/15).

¹¹⁰ *Irish Times*, 18 Apr. 1928.

¹¹¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 Jan. 1930.

¹¹² *Belfast News-Letter*, 25 Mar. 1932.

¹¹³ *Evening Herald*, 19 July 1930.

abandoned as, ‘over robust tackling’ was reported to have led to a pitch invasion by spectators in which ‘from then on it was every man for himself until the referee called the proceedings to a halt with his whistle’.¹¹⁴

If one examines the literature on spectator violence in Belfast, for example the work of Coyle and Roberts,¹¹⁵ there appears to be a reluctance to examine factors other than those political/sectarian in relation to the spectator violence at Belfast Celtic vs Linfield fixtures between 1912 and 1948. However, the qualitative evidence suggests we must also consider adding a layer of sporting action to our analysis of the cause of the infamous 1948 incident at Windsor Park. During the first half Celtic player Jimmy Jones, later seriously assaulted by Linfield fans, was involved in a tussle that had (almost certainly accidentally) led to a serious injury to a Linfield player, Bryson. In a game in which ‘fouls were frequent’ and in which each team had a player sent off,¹¹⁶ there was, it appears, sufficient provocation for an audience already predisposed by the traditional tensions associated with sectarian/political conflict, to elicit an extreme emotional response.

Not only were the crowd provoked by the sporting action but, in addition, Coyle contends that ‘a public announcement at half time from Linfield’s secretary, Joe Mackey, informing the crowd that Bryson had a broken right leg, did little to calm the atmosphere’.¹¹⁷ To their credit, Linfield FC condemned the scenes at their ground and the violence perpetrated by spectators against their great rivals Belfast Celtic in 1948. Their management committee, chaired by Harry Midgley, declared the violence ‘could not be tolerated by the Linfield club... and this club’s regret of the injury to Jimmy Jones’.¹¹⁸

Section one of this chapter found that the violence that marred the international game between Northern Ireland and Italy at Windsor Park in December 1957, may have possessed sectarian motives. But sporting action, or in this case the lack thereof, appears to have been a significant factor in

¹¹⁴ *Drogheda Argus and Leinster Journal*, 29 July 1961.

¹¹⁵ Coyle, ‘Into the 30s’, pp 52-63; Roberts, *Gunshots & goalposts*, pp 1-8,14-17.

¹¹⁶ *Irish Press*, 28 Dec. 1948.

¹¹⁷ Coyle, *Paradise lost and found*, p. 81.

¹¹⁸ Linfield FC committee minutes, 28 Dec. 1948, Minute book of Linfield FC April 1944-April 1954 (PRONI, Records of Linfield Football & Athletic Club, D3852/2).

explaining the spectator violence that occurred also. Owing to travel difficulties, the Hungarian match officials assigned to the match did not make it in time for a delayed kick off. Consequently, the game was downgraded to a friendly, much to the disappointment of over 40,000 spectators in attendance, whose frustration would play a part in what one journalist described as ‘one of the craziest, toughest and yet one of the most exciting internationals I have witnessed in 25 years around and about Europe’.¹¹⁹

According to Dr Robert Nixon, a Unionist member for the North Down constituency in the Northern Ireland parliament, it appears the release of social frustration or anger caused, ironically, by a lack of competitive sporting action, was a factor. The spectators, he believed, were angered at the loss of a day’s earnings for a match that was, at short notice, reduced in status to a friendly:

the authorities did not say he [the referee] was fog-bound but that he had simply not turned up. That added fuel to the wrath of these thousands of men who had lost up to £2 in wages and paid 3s 6d or 5s to get in. They were filled with frustration when the cup match became a friendly fixture. As I say, I was incensed.¹²⁰

As a *Londonderry Sentinel* report had alluded to in 1936, even when violence did not result, that passions on the terraces were inextricably linked to on-field action. The report was of a fixture from December of that year, involving Belfast Celtic 2nds vs. Crusaders, who would later replace Celtic in the Irish League (1949). We learn from the *Sentinel* that, during this Intermediate Cup clash at Grosvenor Park, ‘in the second half the players showed signs of losing their tempers in the exciting struggle, and the tension was heightened by the attitude of sections of the crowd behind the rival goals singing party songs and creating uproar’.¹²¹

Whilst this section has identified a clear role that the emotional arousal of spectators had in explaining a worrying trend of attacks on both referees and players, the historiography stresses ‘how difficult it is to distinguish between organized hooliganism and spontaneous violence’.¹²² Nonetheless, that

¹¹⁹ *Irish Independent*, 5 Dec. 1957.

¹²⁰ *The parliamentary debates, official report, fourth session of the eighth parliament of Northern Ireland, 6 Elizabeth II, House of Commons, volume 41* (1957, 58), 10 Dec. 1957.

¹²¹ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 29 Dec. 1936.

¹²² Sandoval-Garcia, ‘Football: forging nationhood and masculinities’, p. 217.

spectators could enter the field of play so easily poses an obvious question regarding the state of the playing fields and/or stadia in which football games in Ireland were played. Equally, the increasing level of attacks on referees, in particular, necessitated an increasing police presence to control spectator conduct at football matches in Ireland. The interaction between spectator violence, the adequacy, or inadequacy, of stadia and the attendant police presence at games is where we now turn our attention.

5.3: Spectator violence, the built environment and the policing of football matches

The previous section has demonstrated how sporting action – particularly decisions made by the referee (such as sending a player off or disallowing a goal) – sparked many pitch invasions by angry spectators in both parts of Ireland. That theme is closely connected to the adequacy of stadia and the police presence required to quell disturbances or to protect referees and players when violence occurred. Thus, the adequacy, or inadequacy, of both are worthy of deeper exploration.

Level of competition	Frequency
Senior	45
Junior	23
International	4
European Club	3
Inter-league	1

Table 16: Incidents of spectator violence in Ireland, 1912-87, by level of competition.

The realm of senior football was the scene for almost double the number of reported incidents (forty-five) compared to junior football (twenty-three) across the entire period under review (1921-90). This is perhaps due to senior games attracting a larger number of spectators. This level of reporting may also reflect the fact that reporters were more often present at senior games, and so could witness and record incidents of violence. But did greater football activity result in increased levels of spectator violence? If we take 1932-7 as one example, the evidence suggests not. In those years, club affiliation to the

FAIFS averaged at approximately 485 clubs whereas affiliation to the IFA averaged at approximately 122 clubs, thus it is clear that there were higher numbers of affiliated football clubs in the south. Yet, in the same period, there were three recorded incidents of spectator violence in the FAIFS's jurisdiction, compared to eight that took place within IFA's jurisdiction. Moreover, across the entire period under review, the population of Northern Ireland was always less than half of that in the Republic of Ireland, yet the number of violent incidents was much more even, thirty-seven occurring in Northern Ireland and thirty-nine in the Republic of Ireland.

Notably, the most obvious examples in which the inadequacy of stadia was a factor contributing to spectator violence occurred at the stadiums that hosted Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland's international fixtures, Windsor Park and Dalymount Park respectively. One might assume that the stadia hosting international fixtures, given that this was the most prestigious level of competition, would be sufficient to the fundamental demands of hosting the most well-attended fixtures. Again, one might expect that the health and safety of spectators in the stands and terraces, and the attendant stewarding and policing arrangements, intended to ensure the safety of all in attendance, would be most likely to be adequate at prestigious games.

As noted in section one, the adequacy of policing at Windsor Park was a matter of controversy in the aftermath of the Linfield v Belfast Celtic clash of December 1948. Harry Midgley referred to this during the furious exchange in the Northern Ireland parliament on 4 January 1949 referred to in the earlier section. He was answering the allegation of both sectarian policing and the assertion that he personally had stirred up sectarian animosity prior to the events at Windsor Park that left Jimmy Jones with a broken leg. Indeed, his response implied that the adequacy of policing had been an issue:

We have got to consider a number of things which happened in order to improve conditions and to prevent a recurrence of similar trouble in the future. That is what we are trying to do. I should like to point out that we have met the police authorities and we have had a conference with the object of seeing what can be done to improve things in the future.¹²³

Coyle, citing a conversation he had with Sean O'Neill, then Ballymena United goalkeeper and a friend of Jimmy Jones who was in attendance that day, quotes O'Neill as recalling 'no one gave him (Jones) any protection until I was able to get down close to him. A policeman who was nearby did not even take out his truncheon. I told him to give it to me and I would use it'.¹²⁴ Coyle also stated that, 'in the law courts, Jimmy Jones launched a £10,000 malicious injury claim against Belfast Corporation',¹²⁵ the local authority that was at least partly responsible for the safety and security arrangements at the stadium. In fact, from the Belfast press we learn that it was Jones' father who brought the action under the Criminal Injuries Act against Belfast Corporation.¹²⁶ The case began on 4 November 1949,¹²⁷ and concluded with Jones being awarded £4,361 in damages from Belfast Corporation,¹²⁸ thus the security arrangements at the game were found to have been inadequate in court.

So too in relation to the Northern Ireland-Italy international game at Windsor Park in December 1957, alluded to above, Frank Hanna, the Independent Labour MP for Belfast Central, questioned whether the policing of the game had been adequate. In a significant contribution in the Northern Ireland parliament that linked the Windsor Park pitch invasions of 1948 and 1957, he contended:

¹²³ *The parliamentary debates, official report, fourth session of the sixth parliament of Northern Ireland, 12 George VI, House of Commons*, volume 32 (1948, 49), 4 Jan. 1949.

¹²⁴ Coyle, *Paradise lost and found*, p. 83.

¹²⁵ Coyle, *Paradise lost and found*, p. 87.

¹²⁶ *Northern Whig*, 5 Jan. 1949; *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 Oct. 1949.

¹²⁷ *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 4 Nov. 1949.

¹²⁸ *Northern Whig*, 1 Dec. 1949.

I say that in this respect the protection afforded to the visiting players at Windsor Park on this occasion appeared to be inadequate and it certainly was belated ... It is futile for the police to suggest that they were taken by surprise, having regard first of all to the past history of Windsor Park. It is unfortunately not the first occasion on which serious trouble has taken place there trouble during which players have been attacked.¹²⁹

Following the Burnden Park disaster in Bolton, England, in March 1946, when thirty-three fans died due to overcrowding, the official inquiry appeared more concerned with the spectator behaviour on the day of the disaster than the inadequacy of the facilities or the planning of a major sports event. It stated:

The disaster was unique. There was no collapse of a structure: it was the first example in the history of football following of serious casualties inflicted by a crowd upon itself ... 2:55 The teams come out onto the ground. There is the inevitable moment of interest and excitement in the crowd.¹³⁰

Nonetheless, that disaster was cited during the 1960s by the Irish government as it sought to address the issue of inadequate stadia in the Republic of Ireland.¹³¹ An earlier Department of Justice investigation into the matter in June 1958 identified five stadia in Dublin at which the Irish police force, *An Garda Síochána*, had reviewed the existing safety precautions:

- (1) Croke Park – (GAA)
- (2) Dalymount Park – (Association football - Bohemians FC)
- (3) Tolka Park – (Association football - Drumcondra FC)
- (4) Glenmalure Park – (Association football - Shamrock Rovers FC)
- (5) Lansdowne Road – (Rugby football - IRFU & Wanderers RFC)

At all grounds named the present arrangements are considered by the Garda adequate for safe-guarding the safety of spectators.¹³²

¹²⁹ *The parliamentary debates, official report, fourth session of the sixth parliament of Northern Ireland, 12 George VI, House of Commons, volume 32 (1948, 49), 4 Jan. 1949.*

¹³⁰ Enquiry into the disaster at the Bolton Wanderers' football ground on the 9th of March 1946, June 1946 (His Majesty's Stationery Office London, Home Office, Cmd. 6846).

¹³¹ Football and sports fields: suggestion that legislation should be introduced providing for public safety precautions, 1944-61 (NAI, Department of Justice, 90/71/16).

¹³² Safety of spectators at football matches etc, 3 June 1958 (Commissioners Office, An Garda Síochána, 18/44/55 A.66/21/52.)

Within three years, however, the confidence that these were safe arenas began to be undermined. Then, a GAA match at Croke Park in March 1961 witnessed the forcing of stadium gates by spectators seeking to gain entry.¹³³

This hinted at similar issues of stadium inadequacy on the horizon for association football in Dublin. These soon became apparent during what the FAI later described as an ‘encroachment on pitch’ by spectators that disrupted a Republic of Ireland versus Austria international at Dalymount Park in October 1963. A. Kettle, secretary of Bohemians FC, the ground’s tenant, sought to downplay the incident deploring ‘the ultra-enthusiasm of teenage supporters in invading the ground’,¹³⁴ a view that we might consider to reflect wider societal fears concerning youth violence and juvenile delinquency in 1960s Ireland.¹³⁵

The press, however, conducted a much more thorough review of the incident. The *Evening Herald* likened the pitch encroachment to a river, suggesting that spectator enthusiasm had ‘burst the Dalymount Park banks’ and that sections of the crowd had to be seated along the side of the pitch and behind the goal-line due to overcrowding of the terraces.¹³⁶ However, whilst such an incident underlined the concerns regarding overcrowding that had spawned the government and police review of safety at sports grounds in Dublin, that review had claimed ‘Dalymount Park is very efficiently run, in first class condition and the management is extremely anxious that nothing should occur which would harm the good name of the ground or adversely affect the attendance’.¹³⁷ We might consider this conclusion to have been, to some extent, grounded in a complacent sentimental pride and nostalgia for the traditional home of football in the Republic of Ireland.

Such sentiment was not found in the claims made by a spectator, using the alias ‘hop-too’, who claimed to have been present at the match versus

¹³³ *Irish Press*, 18 Mar. 1961; see also, Forcing of gates and injury to persons at Croke Park on 17th March, 1961, 25 May 1961 (Commissioners Office, An Garda Síochána, 2C.32/26/61).

¹³⁴ *Irish Independent*, 15 Oct. 1963.

¹³⁵ See Carole Holohan, *Reframing Irish youth in the sixties* (Manchester, 2018); Carole Holohan, ‘Challenges to social order and Irish identity? Youth culture in the sixties’, *Irish historical studies*, 38:151 (2013), pp 389-405.

¹³⁶ *Evening Herald*, 14 Oct. 1963.

¹³⁷ Safety of spectators at football matches etc., 3 June 1958 (Commissioners Office, An Garda Síochána, 18/44/55 A.66/21/52.)

Austria. In a letter published in the *Evening Herald*, hop-too's review of the health and safety arrangements for the match were scathing:

Many another referee would have stopped the game long before 90 minutes. Public safety, entrance facilities, playing conditions were deplorable, i.e. young people allowed on top of the flood-lighting system; not near enough stiles to cope with the crowd; at least 500 or more spectators surrounding the pitch ... if conditions like these are allowed to prevail our next home game may have to be played at Windsor Park!!!¹³⁸

Speculating that an Austrian protest over the pitch invasion could have led to Dalymount Park being declared too small for international matches, the *Irish Press* asked whether the FAI 'could be asked to give an undertaking that nothing of this nature will occur again, so in future, we may see all ticket internationals'.¹³⁹ The *Irish Independent* suggested that barbed wire, crush barriers and improvements to terracing were required immediately as 'a reprimand from the European Federation means that, should there be a recurrence of such scenes at the venue, Dalymount Park might be considered unsuitable by the Federation for international football'.¹⁴⁰

The FAI met with Bohemians FC in October 1971 regarding the urgent need to commence a planned upgrade to the main stand at Dalymount Park,¹⁴¹ while in 1972 the FAI received correspondence from a Waterford solicitor concerning the condition of that stand.¹⁴² By then it was already too late, as the FAI had first leased Lansdowne Road, the home of Irish rugby, for a football international against Italy in May 1971,¹⁴³ and it has permanently relocated there for almost all Republic of Ireland international games since 1990.¹⁴⁴

Given the sectarian history of football in Belfast, it is perhaps unsurprising that the sentiment associated with Windsor Park, was altogether different to that connected to Dalymount Park. Its meaning as a site where

¹³⁸ *Evening Herald*, 16 Oct. 1963.

¹³⁹ *Irish Press*, 15 Oct. 1963.

¹⁴⁰ *Irish Independent*, 22 Oct. 1963.

¹⁴¹ FAI general correspondence file (Feb. 1971- Dec. 1972), 1 Oct. 1971 (UCDA, FAI archives, P137/8).

¹⁴² FAI general correspondence file (Feb. 1971- Dec. 1972), 12 Apr. 1972 (UCDA, FAI archives, P137/8).

¹⁴³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 May 1971.

¹⁴⁴ Mike Cronin and Roisin Higgins, *Places we play: Ireland's sporting heritage* (Cork, 2011), p. 90.

working-class Protestant identity was formed, and the manner in which this has become bonded to the Northern Ireland team, made leaving Windsor more difficult than leaving Dalymount. Bairner and Shirlow have argued, for instance:

Both club [Linfield] and ground [Windsor Park] are synonymous with Protestant identity, tradition and metaphor. As a consequence, we argue that the fans who gather most frequently at this ground take part in activities which extend far beyond devotion to a stadium and to the teams that perform there, activities which implicate many supporters in the wider politics of cultural resistance and of allegiance to a political entity either real or imagined.¹⁴⁵

If and when emotive sporting action and poor stadia combined, the role of the police was likely to increase at football matches. However, violent incidents frequently occurred at the sparsely attended junior levels of the game in Ireland. For example, at a junior match in Derry in March 1923 between Rosemount and Templemore, which took place on a field behind Rosemount Barracks, a gunshot was fired during a 'dispute' among spectators at full time, and more shots were fired in the aftermath by police who pursued the shooter 'across country' before he was eventually arrested.¹⁴⁶

Later that year, an IFA committee meeting discussed how, at the completion of a junior game, Willowfield vs. Linfield Rangers, a spectator rushed onto the field to assault the referee, who 'was beaten and kicked'. Notably, this attack had occurred despite the fact that Willowfield administrator McCullough had, due to previous instances of disorder at a game they hosted versus Linfield Rangers, arranged for the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) 'to be present at the ground' to assist club stewards who numbered around twenty.¹⁴⁷

The conduct of spectators at a junior match in Belfast in January 1924, Whiteabbey vs Whitehouse, led to criminal proceedings due to a vicious assault on a referee. The prosecution is reported to have argued that 'hordes of policemen had to go to football matches to protect referees and players', and that 'the referees association as well as the police wished the summons to be

¹⁴⁵ Bairner & Shirlow, 'Loyalism', p. 165.

¹⁴⁶ *Ulster Herald*, 17 Mar. 1923.

¹⁴⁷ *Northern Whig*, 23 Sept. 1923.

dealt with in order to put a stop to conduct of this kind'.¹⁴⁸ The attacks went on, however, and when the referee sent off a Ligoniel player in their [junior] fixture vs. Woodburn in Belfast in May 1924, it was reported that 'a section of spectators evidently resented this', and that 'matters became ugly looking'. Fortunately, for the referee, 'a small force of police immediately took the matter in hand, and a sergeant's cane played havoc with a few of the malcontents and cooled their ardour'.¹⁴⁹

Newry Town's Irish League fixture with Linfield in October 1928 witnessed a Linfield fan invade the field and assault a Newry player. When the case went before magistrates, the police claimed their intervention on the day had successfully prevented a more serious disturbance.¹⁵⁰ In January 1937, Belfast Celtic's visit to Ards in the Irish League is reported to have turned violent after a fifth Celtic goal had been scored. Celtic players and officials were subjected to 'a fierce barrage of stones and sods' when leaving the ground in Newtownards, County Down, and 'a police escort had to be requisitioned to escort the [damaged] Celtic bus along the road from the ground and to divert it on to the Belfast road by a circuitous route to prevent further trouble'.¹⁵¹

If quelling disturbance was the most direct role of the police in the story of spectator violence in Ireland, then on eight occasions, police were the target of violence perpetrated by spectators at football matches. For example, Derry City's visit to Coleraine for a City Cup fixture in April 1931, ended up with five young men, all Derry supporters – Denis Pyne, Rossville Street; William Thomas, Argyle Street; William Montieth, St Columb's Wells; Jas. Alexander, Spencer Road; and Robert Clarke, Fahan Street — in court 'charged with conduct calculated to lead to a breach of the peace'. Defendants Alexander and Clarke were accused of having assaulted Constables Robinson and Gallagher of the RUC who were on duty at the game.¹⁵²

In a game described as 'the sternest struggle ever seen' at the Brandywell, Derry City's fixture with Linfield in December 1936 saw a

¹⁴⁸ *Northern Whig*, 29 Jan. 1924.

¹⁴⁹ *Larne Times*, 10 May 1924.

¹⁵⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 Oct. 1928.

¹⁵¹ *Strabane Chronicle*, 9 Jan. 1937.

¹⁵² *Londonderry Sentinel*, 7 Apr. 1931.

number of spectators rush on to the field where they clashed with police who had intervened to protect the referee. The fraying of tempers followed a decision whereby ‘the referee disallowed a goal scored by Kelly and the Derry players hotly disputed the decision’.¹⁵³

South of the border, the police became increasingly visible and active at football matches. For example, an attack on the referee, Jack Mitchell of Waterford, during the League of Ireland game between Cork and Drumcondra in Cork in October 1935, meant he ‘had to be escorted to a pavilion by Civic Guards amid a shower of sticks and stones. He was later conveyed by bus to the city unharmed’.¹⁵⁴ In March 1940, the League of Ireland meeting of St. James’s Gate and Cork United in Dublin, was abandoned after eighty-one minutes when, ‘with drawn batons, the Guards escorted referee M.J. Nolan to the pavilion at Crumlin yesterday, after hundreds of spectators had invaded the pitch nine minutes from time, at which period St James’ Gate were leading Cork United by a goal to nil’.¹⁵⁵ There is no evidence of sanction or condemnation in the response of the authorities to such a vicious attack. Rather, the League management committee had ‘ordered’¹⁵⁶ the unexpired nine minutes of the abandoned game to be played on 20 April 1940. St James’ Gate retained the 1-0 lead they had held since the abandoned game in March in a result that saw them crowned League champions.¹⁵⁷

The 1944 edition of the wartime north-south cup competition did not escape untainted. The fixture between Cork United and Distillery at Dalymount Park in May 1944 spawned press reports that ‘stones were thrown at the referee, T. Hunter, during the match, and again as he was leaving the field under the protection of Gardai and players’.¹⁵⁸

Given the evidence presented in this section, it is beyond dispute that the police were required to maintain order or to quell disorder at football matches in both parts of Ireland throughout the period under review in this chapter.

¹⁵³ *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Dec. 1936.

¹⁵⁴ *Munster Express*, 18 Oct. 1935.

¹⁵⁵ *Irish Independent*, 25 Mar. 1940.

¹⁵⁶ *Irish Independent*, 22 Apr. 1940.

¹⁵⁷ *Evening Herald*, 20 Apr. 1940.

¹⁵⁸ *Irish Independent*, 2 May. 1944.

As those fixtures were contested by teams from within and between both parts of Ireland, the actual or residual context of sectarian and political conflict alone was not the sole overlapping factor, and we must allow for the contexts of both the emotional response to sporting action, as well as the built environment and accompanying security presence in which the games took place. Once again, we should also allow for the construction and reconstruction of ‘hard masculine identity’¹⁵⁹ within the episodes of football spectator violence in Ireland considered here, as those identities, it is said, are always located in particular spaces and times. There is no singular pattern of masculinity to be found everywhere.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the relatively under-explored area of football spectator violence in Ireland. Having explored the literature on this issue, and indicated some general temporal and geographical patterns, the chapter enhances our understanding of spectator football violence by exploring the phenomenon under three headings. Reflecting the existing Irish literature, the chapter began by considering the extent to which spectator violence had its origins in sectarian and political conflict. While Northern Ireland was the scene of most incidents of recorded spectator violence during the 1920s (sixteen of twenty-five) and the 1930s (twelve of nineteen), comparatively few of these incidents were directly related to sectarian or political causes. That stated, those that did, fixtures between Belfast Celtic and Linfield at Celtic Park in Belfast between 1928 and 1937, confirmed a focus in the existing historiography. Those clashes preceded the serious violence occurring at the Linfield vs. Belfast Celtic fixture at Windsor Park in 1948, and a major incident of violence that occurred at the Northern Ireland vs Italy international in December 1957.

The second section began an exploration of emotional factors underpinning spectator violence in Ireland, with what this analysis has

¹⁵⁹ Ramon Spaaij, ‘Men like us, boys like them: Violence, masculinity and collective identity in football hooliganism’, *Journal of sport and social issues* 32:4 (2008), p. 379.

¹⁶⁰ Raewyn Connell, *The men and the boys* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 10.

characterised as violence originating in sporting action. Principally, this was manifest in the alarming incidence of attacks on players and, even more frequently, on referees by spectators. The spectator anger was, according to the press reports of many of those incidents, a direct response to the conduct of players or to decisions of officials on the field. Of forty-five such incidents recorded by the press as having occurred between 1921 and 1990, twenty-five occurred in the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, the Republic of Ireland was the location of a slight majority of all recorded incidents compiled by this study (thirty-nine as opposed to thirty-seven in Northern Ireland).

The third section considered first the role played by the stadia. In the case of both Windsor Park in Belfast and Dalymount Park in Dublin, these were built environments that acted as a cultural metaphor for, or the sentimental home of, the national football team. This, arguably, complicated matters when it came to carrying out modernisation or upgrades or outright changes of venue when required. In addition, the section found that, increasingly, a visible police presence was a feature at football matches. In both of parts of Ireland, the most common duty for attendant police was to escort to safety a referee under attack from spectators, but on other occasions the police were the primary target of spectator violence.

While the relationship of sport to political and religious identity formation is undoubtedly an important theme, it is one that has perhaps too often dominated the writing on Irish sport. This chapter demonstrates once more that when one looks beyond the ways in which sport in Ireland acted as a proxy for sect or political cause, one finds other sporting or social questions requiring attention. If spectator violence at football might arise from sectarian or political conflict playing out in the sporting arena, then that violence was even more likely to arise from the sport itself and the emotions that crowds invest in it. Moreover, the extent to which such responses were contained seems to have had a direct relationship to physical environment and to the efforts made to police them. Combined, we could consider the two new strands of our understanding of football spectator violence elucidated in this study, to

corroborate Rouse's claim that violence was interwoven within what Irish people, north and south, attached to the meaning of sport.¹⁶¹

Conclusion

As argued in the Introduction to this thesis, for too long the history of sport in Ireland has focused on the history of the Gaelic Athletic Association and centred on the era of the 'sporting revolution' (c.1860-1914). This thesis is a contribution to a recent trend, again outlined in the Introduction, which has witnessed a determined group of scholars bring other sports, and other time periods, into focus. By concentrating on soccer and rugby, the footballing codes that the GAA branded as 'foreign', and by examining the period after partition, this thesis has taken a route less travelled.

With notable exceptions, including Cronin's study of sport and national identity and Moore's examination of the soccer split,¹⁶² the existing histories of soccer and especially rugby have tended to be regional. This is certainly in the cases of histories of soccer and rugby that have told the social (as distinct from the political) history of the development of the games. That existing 'regional' literature on social history of soccer and rugby in Ireland – perhaps most importantly by O'Callaghan (2011), Curran (2015) and Toms (2015) – has underpinned the viability of this study.¹⁶³ In part because it builds on such work, this thesis is proudly, and ambitiously, all-island in its approach. Not only that, across its three sections the thesis has addressed three levels of football, first administrative, second player/participant and third spectator within an all-island framework. Given that the starting point of this study was the political partition of Ireland, this all-island approach has proved particularly important. It has been fruitful to contrast a sport that maintained an all-island sporting association following the political partition of Ireland (rugby) and a game that acrimoniously divided in its administration at that time (association football).

¹⁶¹ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, pp 331-3.

¹⁶² Cronin, *Sport and nationalism in Ireland*; Moore, *Irish soccer split*.

¹⁶³ O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*; Toms, *Soccer in Munster*; Curran, *The development of sport*.

In adopting a comparative approach, encompassing north and south, this thesis contributes significantly to history of sport in both Northern Ireland and Ulster. This marks a crucial advance in our knowledge and understanding of sport history in Ireland. The history of sport in Northern Ireland has, to date, been poorly served by historians who have, with few exceptions, ceded the field to sociologists. Historians – including Garnham, Curran and Moore¹⁶⁴ – have produced fine work on the history of soccer in Ulster prior to partition but very few have developed this subject into the post-partition era.¹⁶⁵ Consequently, if sociologists have helped us to understand the relationship of soccer to religious and social identities in Northern Ireland since the 1960s,¹⁶⁶ before this thesis we knew very little of the development of the game during the first four decades after partition. The history of rugby in Ulster and Northern Ireland is even more poorly served, emphasising the originality of what has been achieved here.

The study has, for the first time, established measurements as to the health of the game in the case of both rugby and football, north and south, as measured by the rise and fall in the number of clubs across time. If not all of the questions posed in the preceding pages have proved amenable to definitive conclusions, then this thesis has without doubt compiled and presented robust empirical measures for club affiliation to rugby's and association football's governing bodies. As a consequence, we know much more about levels of participation in the games, as well as the geographic and temporal patterns of that participation. That alone would serve as a starting point for any future research concerning the prevalence and distribution of these sports in Ireland, but (more than that) this thesis analysed the data across two parallel chapters.

The growing presence and profile of association football, as elucidated in section two of this thesis brought another key stakeholder into focus, namely spectators. Whereas little Irish scholarly endeavour has been afforded to this

¹⁶⁴ Garnham, *Association football and society*; Curran, 'The social background'; Moore, *Irish soccer split*.

¹⁶⁵ An exception is Mike Cronin, 'Playing away from home: identity in Northern Ireland and the experience of Derry City Football Club' in *National Identities*, 2:1 (2000), pp 65-79.

¹⁶⁶ Bairner & Shirlow, 'Loyalism'; Magee, 'Football supporters'; David Hassan, 'A people apart: Soccer, identity and Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland', *Soccer & society*, 3:3 (2002), pp 65-83.

realm, this study has presented the first attempt to quantify the incidence of football spectator violence in Ireland, north and south, between 1921-90. In doing so, this thesis advanced beyond the obsession with violence rooted in sectarian/political divisions, which has dominated the scant sociology of this phenomenon in Ireland,¹⁶⁷ and by drawing on the international sociology of spectator violence has shifted our gaze to spectator violence rooted in other causes.¹⁶⁸

Each chapter offers an advance on the existing literature in the discrete area assessed. Exploring rugby in the historic province of Ulster was the obvious starting point for such an analysis, particularly given that that province was dissected by the political border instituted and confirmed between 1920 and 1922. Known as the IRFU Northern Branch since 1879, the body that would administer rugby in Ireland's northern province had originated in the NFU, established in 1875. Though the representative team was known as Ulster, the fact that the branch was referred to as the 'Northern Branch' ensured, by accident rather than design, that the Branch did not become tied to the Unionist political construction 'Ulster' when that began to emerge in the mid-1880s. The 'Northern Branch' was, in that sense, a usefully imprecise name. Then when Ulster unionism succeeded in its goal of remaining outside any Home Rule settlement, that political ideology became tied to the new political unit of Northern Ireland. Thus the change of name to the Ulster Branch in 1930 did not merely align the name of the Branch with that of the representative team, nor did it simply reflect the theoretical territory of the branch, but ensured that, in its name, the branch did not become tied to the new political unit.

Beyond the symbolism, it also found that for much of the post-partition era, the political border seemed to represent the effective limit of the Northern/Ulster Branch's operational reach. Club and school affiliations from the three southern border counties of Ulster that had, resulting from partition, found themselves in an Irish Free State, were low or non-existent between

¹⁶⁷ Sugden and Bairner, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society*; Bairner and Shirlow, 'When leisure turns to fear'.

¹⁶⁸ Coakley, *Sport in society*; Patsantaras, 'Stadium football violence in Greece'; Paramio, Buraimo & Campos, 'The development of football stadia in Europe'.

1925 and 1970. More than that, however, the game struggled to establish itself in an area proximate to that border, on both the southern and northern sides, representing what appears to have been a liminal space for rugby. If the political border restricted interaction between rugby on its northern and southern sides, then within the political unit of Northern Ireland (and Ulster rugby more generally), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was a core and periphery divide between the areas lying east and west of the River Bann as it dissects Northern Ireland. This is a division that appears to map onto historical socio-economic, but also religious and cultural, divisions in Ulster.

If external (nationalist) critics would suggest that the Northern/Ulster Branch (and indeed, the IRFU in general) navigated the politics associated with partition reasonably well by continuing to embrace a nationhood that existed within an imperial context, the chapter has detailed a number of events which demonstrated that rugby did on occasion fall short in its managing of a cross-border identity. Provincial cohesion was undoubtedly strained by the reputational damage caused by the cancellation of international fixtures by fellow home nations in 1972, the murder of rugby playing member of the security forces, and the bombing of rugby clubhouses between 1976-81, all of which stand in contrast to a concerted effort to distance the game from the Troubles that engulfed its host society in the historiography.¹⁶⁹

Chapter two described how the administration of Irish football had begun to fracture as early as 1910. This undoubtedly contributed to the eventual fissure in 1921 of the IFA, the governing body that had existed since 1880, a subject previously explored in the work of Cormac Moore in particular.¹⁷⁰ Building on that work, this study detailed two further phases of administrative conflict between the IFA and FAI. It has thus framed the partition of Irish football as a schism involving three distinct phases of a cold war. If this was an administrative conflict in which, to begin, one Ireland in football became two, then that unreconciled conflict between the IFA and FAI meant that at the level of international football two Irelands became none. The first ever fixture between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland at

¹⁶⁹ Diffley, *The men in green*, p. 14; Van Esbeck, *One hundred years*, pp 90-1.

¹⁷⁰ Moore, *Irish soccer split*, pp 105-22.

Dalymount Park, Dublin, in September 1978, under the names FIFA had resolved that they were to identify as during the 1950s, marked a settlement of the issues that the associations had come close to resolving in 1932. Unity had not been restored, but a working relationship, of sorts, had emerged.

In addition, and in parallel to the intractable rancour that typified the relationship (or lack of relationship) between the IFA and FAI, a considerable of co-operation between football at senior club level, north and south, has been uncovered from newspaper archives. For instance, there occurred a series of nine cross-border fixtures styled as the unofficial championship of Ireland, played, in most instances, between the Irish League and League of Ireland champions between 1925 and 1955, and the circumstances of which have been spelt out for the reader. This club interaction, now largely forgotten, had parallels at the levels of schoolboy and university football. Again, these have been elucidated here.

Chapters three and four together constitute an exploration of the (not always linear) development of the games of rugby and soccer, north and south, as measured by the rise and fall in the number of affiliated clubs across time. In doing so, this thesis examined the relationship of these sports to the wider, and fluid, political, social and economic contexts of Ireland over a seventy-year timeframe. A series of figures, tables and maps presented throughout have brought to life, and rendered clearer for the reader, some of the complexity inevitably encompassed in a study with a significant quantitative foundation and add valuable temporal and spatial layers to its findings. The combined insights derived from such an approach not only advance our knowledge about the history of rugby and association football in Ireland but open up new lines of inquiry.

Importantly, so as to enhance the comparative value of these chapters, each analysed the rugby and soccer across five parallel sub-sections. In the case of each chapter, the first of these sections laid out the affiliation data across time and space. Having established these patterns, the thesis sets out to analyse these and in doing so has helped us to understand why these games

flourished or retreated at particular times and, as Paul Rouse put it, ‘adequately explain why certain people played certain games in certain places’.¹⁷¹

First, they confirmed the commonly-held assumption that urban settings was the most fertile terrain in which rugby and football clubs could be sustained, albeit there being contrasting patterns and periodisation within each game’s relationship to urbanisation. For instance, senior rugby was, between 1925-50 firmly rooted in the key urban centres of all four provinces. That base began to spread into the provincial towns to a greater extent in the 1950 and 1960s but, by the dawn of a new All Ireland Senior club rugby competition in 1990, the majority of clubs participating were those located in the five key urban centres of Ireland. Junior rugby, chapter three demonstrated, had a much greater reach into the provincial towns and villages of Ireland in the period considered. Football, on the other hand, had a much more consistent relationship with urbanisation across this period. The cities of Belfast and Dublin contained the bulk of senior league clubs and, during times of crisis such as the Second World War, it was to those urban settings that the senior game retreated to. In the post-war era, senior league football did also spread into the provincial towns in both parts of Ireland, in addition to the traditional clubs of the two largest cities. Junior football, chapter four demonstrated was, unsurprisingly, found to have a greater foothold in counties of Ireland with the highest population density in the period c.1936-74 examined.

Second, the social base of each game, and how each developed in the period under review, was spelt out for the reader. The tradition and prestige commonly attributed to the role of schools within the base of rugby in Ireland, was corroborated in chapter three. However, for the first time, an exploration of how that base integrated the new secondary level of education in both parts of Ireland, following the enacting of major educational reform between 1947-67, has been considered. It found that rugby both consolidated its existing base in elite educational settings, as well as spreading the game into the new (and significantly larger) secondary sector in both parts of Ireland. In addition, it has been demonstrated that the perceived social class of rugby was much less monolithic than some previous chroniclers of the games would have had us

¹⁷¹ Rouse, *Sport and Ireland*, p. 242.

believe,¹⁷² and thus we should nuance such simplistic assumptions in future. In football, the relatively unexplored layer of the game found in workplace settings in both parts of Ireland, has been explored in detail for the first time. Empirical approaches have been rare in previous scholarship concerning these subjects, and the representative sample of 192 workplace teams detailed in this study represents a significant contribution to the Irish historiography. Moreover, chapter four outlined how the social base of football was enhanced by the development of women's football in both parts of Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s. Each chapter attempted, for the first time, to quantify the effect of the ending of the GAA ban on foreign games on each game, a matter that has previously been subject to qualitative examination only.

Third, the effect that wider economic trends had on each game was explored side-by-side. The findings of each chapter suggest strongly that the diversity of the social base of each game afforded some degree of wiggle room for each to survive periods of economic crisis, and to later flourish in times of economic prosperity. Nonetheless, it is impossible to ignore the reality that football was much more severely impacted than rugby during the Great Depression era (1929-37), for example. Interestingly, within that there were differences between north and south. The initial economic shock (1929-31) was much more obviously felt in Northern Ireland, where IFA club affiliations plummeted to a greater extent than they had following the loss of Leinster a decade earlier. In the south, that initial impact on club affiliations was less apparent, although when the later, and largely self-inflicted, impact of a disastrous economic war with Britain began to filter through to the game's base, there was a notable decline in FAI club affiliations between c.1934-7.

Fourth, the chapters considered the dual impact, on each game, of both the dawn of the television age in the 1950s and 1960s, and of each game's international engagement. It found that the rugby authorities were significantly more cautious in their initial engagement with television than those in football. Each chapter presented a quantitative analysis of club affiliations alongside television ownership in the Republic of Ireland. In each game, the number of club affiliations rose in parallel to increasing television ownership. If the

¹⁷² Diffley, *The men in green*, p. 15.

findings of that quantitative analysis demonstrate correlation rather than causation, then the qualitative commentary, presented for the reader, that accompanied occasions of high-profile international engagement in either sport, demonstrate at least a perceived causation among the game's administrators in Ireland. From Ireland's Five Nations Championship successes in 1948-51 or 1982-5, to Northern Ireland then the Republic of Ireland reaching the quarter final of the FIFA World Cup in 1958 and 1990 respectively, each success afforded the game's an international prestige that has never been available to one of its sporting competitors, the games of the Gaelic Athletic Association. In particular, Northern Ireland's success in reaching the second round of the 1982 FIFA World Cup, and the similar success of the Republic of Ireland eight years later, occurred when the television age, yet to really take off in 1958, had become firmly embedded in the social fabric in both parts of Ireland.

If Paul Rouse's claim that there was no neat divide on the issue of violence between rugby and football in Ireland carries some weight, then there is no doubt that the violence associated with rugby and the violence associated with soccer were represented differently. It seems certain these differences interact with the social class composition, perceived or otherwise, of both games. Consequently, we have far greater coverage of spectator violence associated with soccer. This chapter unpacked for the reader a representative sample of 101 such incidents of spectator violence at association football, the earliest dating to 1896, and seventy-six of which occurred in the period between 1921 and 1990. The latter is the focus of the analysis which drew upon the sociological study of what it has termed football hooliganism, an area that, until now, has not been documented in the Irish historiography to any meaningful extent.

Previous literature has shown that sectarian/political conflict found expression in club football, in Belfast in particular, prior to partition. This did not disappear with the end of the immediate political crisis by approximately 1922. If we are to conclude that sectarian/political layer had fizzled out by 1948, or at the latest 1957 following high-profile disturbances at Windsor Park, that did not mean an end to spectator violence.

The study found that emotions stirred by action on the pitch could provoke violence, making the pitch a dangerous place to be for both players and referees who became vulnerable to spectator attack. Such violence was far more common than those with a sectarian/political context. In addition, such violent incidents sometimes exposed the inadequacy of key stadia, raising questions about the improvement of facilities or (as in the case of Dalymount Park) their relegation to secondary sporting spaces. Violence also led to an increased policing presence at football matches in both parts of Ireland, while violent incidents were sometimes blamed on the failings of the police.

If this is a thesis on rugby and football that hardly mentions a try or a goal, it has not been pursued without targets of its own. This thesis began by positing that, since the partition of Ireland, rugby and association football have represented more than games for those involved. The energy devoted to administering, playing and fighting over these sports, which is so richly on display here, has demonstrated that convincingly. From its all-island approach to its focus on Ulster, to the manner in which it established clear measures of the health of both games, to its exploration of the phenomenon of spectator violence in an Irish context, each section and chapter of this thesis has offered an advance on, or adjustment to, the historiography of Irish sport.

It had demonstrated the futility of any attempt that may seek to isolate sport from the context of its host society but also that, on occasion, too much emphasis has been placed, in the Irish context, on political differences alone, those manifest in the existence of a border between north and south. Whilst such matters undoubtedly mattered or constituted a key component of the identity of those who reside either side of that divide, sporting interactions within and between the sporting nations of Ireland indicate that other factors were of equal importance. Love of the game, representing your locality or community, the social networks formed during school days or at work, all played their part in the fascinating history of these two games since the political partition of Ireland. In the many ways described in this study, each is more than a game.

Appendices

1. Representative fixtures staged by the IRFU Ulster Branch, 1941-

5.

Date	Result
Saturday 29 March 1941	Ulster 8 Army (NI) 15
Saturday 29 November 1941	Ulster 10 Army (NI) 6
Saturday 7 February 1942	British Army XV 9 Irish XV 6
Saturday 28 March 1942	Ulster 17 Army (NI) 7
Saturday 7 November 1942	Ulster 10 Army (NI) 8
Saturday 19 December 1942	Ulster 17 Combined Services 8
Saturday 30 January 1943	British Army XV 12 Irish XV 11
Saturday 3 April 1943	Ulster 42 Army (NI) 10
Saturday 12 February 1944	British Army XV 15 Irish XV 0
Saturday 10 February 1945	British Army XV 9 Irish XV 5

2. 'Unofficial Championship of Ireland' fixtures 1925-55.

Date	Fixture (n=north, s=south)	Venue
9 May 1925	Glentoran (n) 0, Shamrock Rovers (s) 2	The Oval, Belfast
24 April 1926	Belfast Celtic (n) 4, Shelbourne (s) 2	Shelbourne Park, Dublin
4 May 1929	Belfast Celtic 0, Shelbourne 2	Shelbourne Park, Dublin
14 April 1930	Linfield (n) 2, Bohemians (s) 2	Dalymount Park, Dublin
25 April 1932	Linfield 0, Shamrock Rovers 1	Windsor Park, Belfast
29 April 1939	Belfast Celtic 1, Shamrock Rovers 2	Dalymount Park, Dublin
4 May 1940	Belfast Celtic 4, Shamrock Rovers 1	Shelbourne Park, Dublin
4 May 1941	Belfast Celtic 1, Cork United (s) 0	Dalymount Park, Dublin
16 May 1955	Glenavon (n) 1 Shamrock Rovers 5	Dalymount Park, Dublin

3. Workplace football teams in Ireland, 1921-51.

	<i>Team name</i>	Workplace	Location
1	<i>502 (M) R.A. (T.A.)</i>	Armed Forces	Belfast
2	<i>Aer Lingus</i>	Airline	Dublin
3	<i>Air Corps</i>	Armed Forces	Dublin
4	<i>Aircraft Works</i>	Manufacturing	Belfast
5	<i>Albert Foundry</i>	Metal works	Belfast
6	<i>Arnotts</i>	Dept store	Dublin
7	<i>B. and I.</i>	Passenger Ferry	Dublin
8	<i>Bacon Workers</i>	Meat processing	Cork
9	<i>Bailey, Son & Gibson</i>	Printers	Dublin
10	<i>Bakery Trades</i>	Bakers	Dublin
11	<i>Ballyclare Gymnasium</i>	Gymnasium	Ballyclare
12	<i>Barrow Drainage</i>	River drainage	Athy
13	<i>Barytes</i>	Mining	Sligo
14	<i>Beamish</i>	Brewery	Cork
15	<i>Beanco</i>	Manufacturing (furniture)	Dublin
16	<i>Belfast News Boys</i>	Press	Belfast
17	<i>Belfast Ropeworks</i>	Manufacturing	Belfast
18	<i>Blackrock Hospital</i>	Healthcare	Dublin
19	<i>Boyne R.C.</i>	Manufacturing (furniture)	Navan
20	<i>Brindley's</i>	Printers	Dublin
21	<i>British Thermostat</i>	Manufacturing (appliances)	Belfast
22	<i>Brookfield Mill</i>	Linen Mill	Belfast
23	<i>Brooks Thomas</i>	Building supplies	Dublin
24	<i>Burtons</i>	Retail	Cork
25	<i>Butchers</i>	Butchers	Cork
26	<i>C.I.E.</i>	Transport	Dublin
27	<i>C.I.E.</i>	Transport	Sligo
28	<i>C.I.E.</i>	Transport	Galway
29	<i>Caddies</i>	Golf Club	Lisburn
30	<i>Cahill's</i>	Printing works	Dublin
31	<i>Carroll's</i>	Manufacturing (footwear)	Dundalk
32	<i>Cash's</i>	Dept store	Cork
33	<i>Civil Service</i>	Civil Service	Dublin
34	<i>Civil Service</i>	Civil Service	Cork
35	<i>Clerys</i>	Dept store	Dublin
36	<i>Clyde Shipping Co</i>	Freight	Waterford
37	<i>Comber Distillery</i>	Whiskey	Comber
38	<i>Construction Corps</i>	Armed Forces	Waterford
39	<i>Bacon Factory</i>	Meat processing	Cookstown

40	<i>Cork Chemical</i>	Pharmaceutical	Cork
41	<i>Cork Gas Co</i>	Gas	Cork
42	<i>Cork Spinning Co</i>	Textiles	Cork
43	<i>Crystal Products</i>	Manufacturing	Dublin
44	<i>Customs</i>	Customs& Excise	Waterford
45	<i>Customs Ath</i>	Customs& Excise	Dublin
46	<i>Custume</i>	Armed Forces	Athlone
47	<i>Denny & sons</i>	Meat processing	Limerick
48	<i>Denny's</i>	Meat processing	Sligo
49	<i>Denny's</i>	Meat processing	Waterford
50	<i>Distillery</i>	Blackwater Whiskey	Wexford
51	<i>Distillery FC</i>	Dunville's Distillery	Belfast
52	<i>Dockrell, Sons & Co.</i>	Estate agents	Dublin
53	<i>Dollard's</i>	Printing house	Dublin
54	<i>Donnelly's</i>	Livestock trading	Dublin
55	<i>Downey & Co</i>	Drapery	Waterford
56	<i>Drought's</i>	Printers	Dublin
57	<i>Dublin Port & Docks</i>	Dublin Port & Docks	Dublin
58	<i>Dundalk GNR</i>	Great Northern Railway	Dundalk
59	<i>Dundalk GNR FC</i>	Great Northern Railway	Dundalk
60	<i>Dunlops</i>	Tyre Factory	Cork
61	<i>Dwyers</i>	Manufacturing (footwear)	Cork
62	<i>E.S.B.</i>	Electricity	Cork
63	<i>E.S.B.</i>	Electricity	Dublin
64	<i>E.S.B.</i>	Electricity	Sligo
65	<i>Eagle</i>	Printing works	Cork
66	<i>Eagle Rovers</i>	Manufacturing (plugs)	Drogheda
67	<i>Easons</i>	Bookstore	Dublin
68	<i>Easons</i>	Bookstore	Belfast
69	<i>Edco</i>	Publisher	Dublin
70	<i>Egans</i>	Auctioneer	Sligo
71	<i>Esso Petrols</i>	Petrol	Dublin
72	<i>Eustace</i>	Retail	Cork
73	<i>Evening Mail</i>	Newspaper	Dublin
74	<i>Examiner</i>	Newspaper	Cork
75	<i>Fallon Ltd.</i>	Publishers	Dublin
76	<i>Falls Foundry</i>	Metal works	Belfast
77	<i>Fishmerchants</i>	Fish	Cork
78	<i>Flour Mills</i>	Bread	Cork
79	<i>Fordsons FC</i>	Ford Motor Company	Cork
80	<i>Fry Cadbury</i>	Manufacturing (cars)	Dublin
81	<i>G.P.O.</i>	Post Office	Belfast
82	<i>Gas co.</i>	Gas	Dublin
83	<i>Gas Dept</i>	Gas	Belfast
84	<i>Gentex</i>	Manufacturing (textiles)	Athlone

85	<i>GNR</i>	Great Northern Railway	Enniskillen
86	<i>Graves & Co</i>	Construction	New Ross
87	<i>Great Southern Railway</i>	Railways	Dublin
88	<i>Great Southern Railway</i>	Railways	Waterford
89	<i>Grocers</i>	Retail	Cork
90	<i>H&W Boiler Shop</i>	Shipbuilding	Belfast
91	<i>H&W engine works</i>	Shipbuilding	Belfast
92	<i>H&W machine shop</i>	Shipbuilding	Belfast
93	<i>H&W Plumbers</i>	Shipbuilding	Belfast
94	<i>H&W Welders</i>	Shipbuilding	Belfast
95	<i>H.J Scott's</i>	Manufacturing	Belfast
96	<i>Hairdressers</i>	Hairdressers	Cork
97	<i>Hammond's Foundry</i>	Metal Works	Dublin
98	<i>Hanleys</i>	Furniture	Sligo
99	<i>Harry Ferguson</i>	Mechanic	Belfast
100	<i>Heanre & Cahill</i>	Manufacturing	Waterford
101	<i>Hearne's</i>	Builders	Waterford
102	<i>Heart's Delight</i>	McCann's Bakery	Dundalk
103	<i>Hely's</i>	Stationery	Dublin
104	<i>Higgins K.S.</i>	Wholesalers	Sligo
105	<i>HMS Caroline</i>	Armed Forces	Belfast
106	<i>Hollerith Tabulations</i>	Manufacturing (electronics)	Belfast
107	<i>Holm Factory</i>	Weaving	Banbridge
108	<i>I.B.P.</i>	Oil distribution	Dublin
109	<i>Imco</i>	Cleaners & dryers	Dublin
110	<i>Imperial Tobacco</i>	Tobacco	Dublin
111	<i>Inglis & Co</i>	Bakers	Belfast
112	<i>Irish American Oil Co</i>	Oil	Dublin
113	<i>Irish Glass Bottle Co</i>	Manufacturing	Dublin
114	<i>Irish Omnibus Co.</i>	Manufacturing (buses)	Cork

11 5	<i>Irish Raleigh</i>	Manufacturing (bicycles)	Dublin
11 6	<i>Irish Shell</i>	Oil	Dublin
11 7	<i>Irish Times</i>	Newspaper	Dublin
11 8	<i>Irish Wire Products</i>	Building supplies	Limerick
11 9	<i>J. & G. Boyd's</i>	Stationery	Limerick
12 0	<i>J.P. Corry's</i>	Building supplies	Belfast
12 1	<i>Jacobs FC</i>	Biscuit factory	Dublin
12 2	<i>L.M.S.</i>	Railway	Dublin
12 3	<i>Lagan & Chapman</i>	Construction	Belfast
12 4	<i>Lambeg Bleachers</i>	Linen Mill	Lambeg
12 5	<i>Lambeg R&D</i>	Weaving	Lisburn
12 6	<i>Lambs</i>	Jam factory	Dublin
12 7	<i>Larne Aluminium Works</i>	Aluminium Works	Larne
12 8	<i>Law Clerks</i>	Legal Practice	Cork
12 9	<i>Liffey Dockyard</i>	Shipbuilding	Dublin
13 0	<i>Line's Bros</i>	Manufacturing (toys)	Belfast
13 1	<i>Linfield Factory</i>	Ulster Weaving Co.	Belfast
13 2	<i>Linfield FC</i>	Ulster Spinning Company	Belfast
13 3	<i>Lunhams</i>	Meat processing	Cork
13 4	<i>Lurgan Distillery</i>	Lough Neagh Distillers	Lurgan
13 5	<i>Lurgan Welfare</i>	Civil Service	Lurgan
13 6	<i>Lyle & Kinihans</i>	Light wines	Belfast
13 7	<i>MacNaughton's</i>	Building supplies	Belfast
13 8	<i>Malone Training School</i>	Youth detention centre	Belfast
13 9	<i>May Roberts</i>	Pharmaceutical	Dublin

14 0	<i>McArthurs</i>	Confectioners	Sligo
14 1	<i>McCarins motors</i>	Workshop	Dublin
14 2	<i>McDonnells</i>	Margarine factory	Waterford
14 3	<i>McLoughlin's</i>	Oil distribution	Dublin
14 4	<i>Meldrums</i>	Hardware	Sligo
14 5	<i>Melifont Press</i>	Publishing	Dublin
14 6	<i>Merchant Warehouse</i>	Warehousing	Dublin
14 7	<i>Midland Athletic</i>	Midland Great Western Railway	Dublin
14 8	<i>Munster Arcade</i>	Dept store	Cork
14 9	<i>North of Ireland P.M</i>	Paper Mill	Ballyclare
15 0	<i>Northern Glass</i>	Manufacturing (glass)	Belfast
15 1	<i>O'Donoghue's</i>	Public House	Dublin
15 2	<i>P.Costen & Son</i>	Builders	Waterford
15 3	<i>Patrick & Wilkinson</i>	Agricultural machinery	Belfast
15 4	<i>Polikoff's</i>	Tailoring factory	Dublin
15 5	<i>Portrane M.H.</i>	Mental Hospital	Dublin
15 6	<i>Post Office</i>	Post Office	Waterford
15 7	<i>Post Office</i>	Post Office	Sligo
15 8	<i>Postal Athletic</i>	Post Office	Dublin
15 9	<i>R.E.M.E Workshop</i>	Armed Forces	Hollywood
16 0	<i>R.J. McKinney's</i>	Steel engineers	Belfast
16 1	<i>Railway Athletic</i>	Railways	Drogheda
16 2	<i>Resnik</i>	Manufacturing (clothing)	Dublin
16 3	<i>Roches Stores</i>	Dept store	Cork
16 4	<i>Royal Irish Constabulary</i>	Police Force	Ballymena

16 5	<i>Savage, Smyth</i>	Lemonade factory	Dublin
16 6	<i>Savoy</i>	Cinema	Dublin
16 7	<i>Sirocco Works</i>	Iron Works	Belfast
16 8	<i>Smith & Pearson</i>	Iron works	Dublin
16 9	<i>St Annes Works</i>	Iron works	Belfast
17 0	<i>St James's Gate</i>	Guinness Brewery	Dublin
17 1	<i>St James's Gate FC</i>	Guinness Brewery	Dublin
17 2	<i>Steampacket</i>	Passenger Ferry	Cork
17 3	<i>Stewart & Partners</i>	Shipbrokers	Belfast
17 4	<i>Suttons</i>	Fuel distribution	Cork
17 5	<i>Symington's Athletic</i>	Symington's Factory	Dundalk
17 6	<i>T&C Martin Ltd</i>	Building supplies	Dublin
17 7	<i>T. Lyons and Co</i>	Shirtmakers	Cork
17 8	<i>Taylor Keith</i>	Lemonade Factory	Dublin
17 9	<i>Thom's</i>	Publishing	Dublin
18 0	<i>Thomsons</i>	Insurance brokers	Cork
18 1	<i>Tonge & Taggart</i>	Metal works	Dublin
18 2	<i>Tramway United</i>	Transport	Dublin
18 3	<i>Tramways</i>	Transport	Cork
18 4	<i>Transport FC</i>	CIE	Bray
18 5	<i>Tropical Fruit</i>	Food import/market	Dublin
18 6	<i>Turf Accountants</i>	Office administration	Cork
18 7	<i>Ulster Timber Co.</i>	Woodworks	Belfast
18 8	<i>University Works</i>	Queen's University Belfast staff	Belfast
18 9	<i>Victoria Yard Riveters</i>	Shipbuilding	Belfast

19 0	<i>Victuallers</i>	Alcohol sales	Cork
19 1	<i>Western Iron Co.</i>	Iron works	Sligo
19 2	<i>Woodington's</i>	Manufacturing (footwear)	Drogheda

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