

# The History of the Football

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## Introduction

This paper is a small study that will explain the history of the football, meaning its manufacture and variations, rather than the rules of the game. We also mean of course that when we are talking about football in this paper, we mean of course the original football, soccer, rather than that of our American counterparts.

### Before the Game:

Before the rules of football were even devised, a ball has been recorded to have been kicked around. Indeed the Paraguayan government made a statement in a documentary titled *The Guarani Invented Football*, that the people of Guarani had started playing a recognisable version of the sport around 200 years before the modern game was invented <sup>[1]</sup>.

However, if we are just talking about kicking around a ball, you have to look back to long before that. The first form of footballs used human heads, animal skulls or stitched cloth and pig bladders <sup>[2]</sup>. The Chinese played with an animal skin ball from 255BC. Ancient Egyptian rites are recorded to have included an activity that could have been recognised as the game of football and even the ancient Greeks and Romans played a game in which a version of a ball was kicked around. The Romans called it 'Harpastum' <sup>[3]</sup>. Historians have managed to discover some of the rules used in this game, which included trying to keep the ball up in the air for as long as possible.

It seems that in England, prior to the events of medieval history that a skull would be kicked to a village square, with an opposing village attempting to kick that skull back, meaning that these squares were the first official goals of football history <sup>[2]</sup>.

It was not before long that animal bladders were eventually covered in the leather to retain the ball's shape. It was in this period that the balls were for the first time filled with air <sup>[4]</sup>.

### The Modern Football:

The person who can take credit for the invention of the modern ball is a man called Charles Goodyear. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the game of football was fairly well known. The rules were

fully established and there were 11 men on the pitch and 2 goals. It is during this period that quite a few professional teams started to appear. More focus was now on the improvement of the ball. At this point there was no system and the size of the ball was dependent entirely on the size of the pig's bladder <sup>[2]</sup>.

It was in 1855 that Goodyear built the first vulcanised rubber football, being the one displayed on the right <sup>[2]</sup>. That ball is currently sitting in the National Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta, New York in the United States.

Goodyear had managed with this ball to create a ball that was for the first time in history able to act solid and durable whilst also managing to retain its bounce.



H.J.Lindon was able to create the inflatable rubber bladders for footballs not long after in 1862 <sup>[2]</sup>. It was in 1863 that the rules of the game adopted rules for the football. Due to the balls not changing an exuberant amount over the years, the rules have hardly been touched since then. The only thing that has changed over the years is the material of the ball and the way that it is manufactured. Modern footballs look very different in terms of their paneling compared to their predecessors.

### **The Buckminster Football <sup>[2]</sup>:**



Instead of the laces used to sew the panels of the balls together, the modern day football actually is made from synthetic leather patches sewn into the easily noticeable 32 panel football, as shown on the left. When this is inflated it is a near perfect sphere. The main reason why there are black panels is because that it helps players notice any possible spin that there could be on the football.

The first ball like this was used in Denmark in the 1950s.

### **More Modern Footballs:**

There are still more improvements made to the football to this day. There are researchers such as the ones in Loughborough University where they analyse the aerodynamic ability of the football and seek to improve it. Other improvements may include flight accuracy, water resistance and durability of the skin.

There was a large amount of controversy over the official ball for the FIFA World Cup 2010 which took place in South Africa. The ball model, known as the Jabulani became very unpopular amongst the players and led to many distinguished teams and players playing relatively poorly. The 2002 ball used in South Korea was lighter <sup>[5]</sup>, which helped some technical players, but was also labeled as "a ridiculous kiddie's bouncing ball" <sup>[5]</sup> by Italian goalkeeper Buffon. The issue with the Jabulani ball though was the fact that it was too

perfectly round. This meant that its flight through the air was extremely unpredictable, giving all players a disadvantage. It may have been more aerodynamic in terms of science, but the involuntary swerve the ball may have had meant that attackers and goalkeepers were unable to perform to their highest ability.

*“It’ll allow some people to score extra goals, but leave some keepers looking daft” – Goalkeeper David James of England FC<sup>[5]</sup>*

#### **References:**

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