

READING CHALLENGE

How Football Started

From muddy medieval streets to the World Cup — the simple but amazing story of the world's most popular sport

Sport & Adventure | A2 Level | ~12 min read | 5 Quiz Questions

Level	A2 (Elementary)
Age Group	Teens (11–16)
Skill	Reading
Topic	Sport & Adventure
Duration	~15 minutes
Vocabulary	15 words with definitions
Quiz	5 multiple-choice questions

Article

Football is everywhere. In every country, in every city, in every village. Children kick a ball in the street. Families watch matches together on television. People argue about their favourite **teams** at school and at work. About four **billion** people — more than half of all humans on Earth — watched the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Football is the world's most popular **sport** by far. But how did it start? The answer takes us back more than 2,000 years — and through some very strange games along the way.

Ball Games in the Ancient World

People have been kicking balls for a very long time. In ancient China, around 200 BC, soldiers played a game called cuju. In cuju, players kicked a ball made of leather into a small net. This is perhaps the oldest known ball **sport** in history. In ancient Greece and Rome, people also played ball games. The Greeks had a game called episkyros. In this game, two **teams** tried to throw or kick a ball over the other team's line. There were no strict **rules** and the games were often rough and physical. In Mexico and Central America, the ancient Maya and Aztec people played a ball game on a special stone court. Some historians say these ancient games are cousins of modern football. But the sport we know today really started in one place: England.

Football in Medieval England

In **medieval** England, people played a wild and dangerous game with a ball. It was not really **organised** football. It was more like a big fight with a ball. Whole villages played against each other. There were sometimes hundreds of players on each side. There were no **referees** and almost no **rules**. Players could kick, punch, and push each other. The 'pitch' was often the whole town — from one end of the village to the other. Games lasted all day. People got injured. Buildings were damaged. The games were so violent and noisy that several English kings tried to **ban** them. King Edward II banned street football in London in 1314. King Edward III banned it in 1349. But people kept playing anyway. The **passion** for the game was too strong to stop.

The First Real Rules

For hundreds of years, football had no proper **rules**. Every town and school played differently. In some games, you could carry the ball. In others, you could only kick it. This all changed in 1863. In London, a group of schools and clubs came together. They wanted to create one set of rules for everyone. On 26 October 1863, they formed an organisation called The Football Association — or 'the FA' for short. This is the oldest football **association** in the world. The FA wrote down the first official rules of football. One of the most important rules was this: you cannot carry the ball with your hands. Some clubs did not like this rule. They left and formed a different **sport** — rugby. But most clubs stayed. And modern football was born.

Football Spreads Around the World

After 1863, football spread quickly. British sailors, soldiers, and workers travelled to many countries. They took football with them everywhere they went. By the 1880s and 1890s, people were playing football in South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The first **professional** football league started in England in 1888. It had 12 **teams**. Today the English Premier League has 20 teams and is watched by hundreds of millions of people worldwide. In 1904, an international football organisation was created in Paris. It was called FIFA — the Federation Internationale de Football Association. FIFA **organised** the first ever World Cup **tournament** in 1930. It was held in Uruguay. Uruguay won. Thirteen teams took part. Today, over 200 countries try to qualify for the World Cup.

How the Game Changed

Over the years, the **rules** of football changed many times. The **penalty** kick was added in 1891. Before this, there was no punishment for a bad foul near the goal. The offside rule changed many times to make the game more exciting. Goal nets were introduced in 1891 too — before that, nobody was sure if the ball had gone in or not! Yellow and red cards were introduced at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. Before 1970, **referees** could only talk to players. Now they could show a card. VAR — Video Assistant Referee — arrived in the 2018 World Cup. A second referee watches the game on video screens and can help correct mistakes. Some football fans love VAR. Others hate it. The arguments never stop — which is also very typical of football.

Football Today

Today, football is much more than just a **sport**. It is a **championship**, a business, a culture, and a language that **billion**s of people share. The biggest football clubs — like Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, and Bayern Munich — are known in every country. Top players like Pelé, Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi, and Cristiano Ronaldo are among the most famous people who have ever lived. In some countries, a big match stops everything. Offices close. Streets become quiet. Then the whistle blows — and the whole nation watches together. From a **medieval** street fight in an English village to the biggest **stadiums** in the world — football has come a very long way. And its story is not finished yet.

Vocabulary

These 15 words appear in the article. Learn them to help your reading.

Word	Definition
sport	a physical activity that people do for fun, exercise, or competition
rule	an instruction that tells people what they can and cannot do in a game or situation
team	a group of people who play together on the same side in a game or sport
stadium	a large sports ground with rows of seats around it for thousands of people to watch
referee	the person in a game who makes sure all the players follow the rules
tournament	a competition where many teams play against each other to find the best one
ban	an official order that says something is not allowed
medieval	belonging to the period of history between about AD 500 and AD 1500 in Europe
professional	doing something as a paid job, not just for fun or as a hobby
organised	planned carefully with clear rules, times, and structure
association	an official group of people who share the same interest or activity
penalty	a punishment given to a player or team for breaking a rule during a match
championship	a competition to find the best team or player in a sport
billion	the number 1,000,000,000 — one thousand million
passion	a very strong feeling of love or enthusiasm for something

Comprehension Quiz

Choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each question.

1. What was the name of the ancient Chinese ball sport mentioned in the article?

- A. Episkyros
- B. Cuju
- C. Calcio
- D. Kemari

2. In what year was The Football Association (the FA) formed in London?

- A. 1314
- B. 1776
- C. 1863
- D. 1904

3. Which sport was created by clubs that did NOT want the rule 'no carrying the ball with hands'?

- A. Basketball
- B. Tennis
- C. Rugby
- D. Cricket

4. Where was the first ever FIFA World Cup held, and in what year?

- A. England in 1888
- B. France in 1904
- C. Brazil in 1950
- D. Uruguay in 1930

5. What are yellow and red cards used for in football?

- A. To show which team is winning
- B. To help referees punish players who break the rules

C. To tell players when to change their position

D. To signal the start and end of a match

Answer Key

#	Answer	Correct Option
1	B	Cuju
2	C	1863
3	C	Rugby
4	D	Uruguay in 1930
5	B	To help referees punish players who break the rules