

Playing Down a Man: Examining Why Soccer Failed in Boston, 1870 to 1980

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Soccer in the United States has developed unevenly, with certain areas, like Fall River, Massachusetts proving to be soccer hotbeds. Boston has repeatedly lacked interest and soccer specific infrastructure. Covering the development of professional soccer from 1870 to 1980 this thesis traces the rise and fall of the American Soccer League (ASL) and North American Soccer League (NASL) with a specific focus on reasons Boston failed to support a long-term professional team. While baseball and college football organized from 1870-1900, soccer was in its nascence, confined to specific immigrant groups like the Scottish, who immigrated to mill towns around Boston, not Boston proper. The lack of early interest in soccer meant that when a professional league formed in the 1920s, there was no amateur to professional player development pathway, no soccer specific stadium, and no cultural connections to the sport. The failure of the ASL to develop long-term community connections in Boston meant that the NASL inherited the same problems: no permanent stadium, small attendance numbers, and lack of community support. This thesis catalogues each eras of development in order to narrate the history of professional soccer within Boston.

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Key Abbreviations

AAU	Amateur Athletic Union
AFA	American Football Association
ASL	American Soccer League
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
IACB	Irish Athletic Club of Boston
ISFA	Intercollegiate Soccer Football Association
ISFL	Intercollegiate Soccer Football League
LASA	Luso American Soccer Association
MLS	Major League Soccer
NASL	North American Soccer League
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NPSL	National Professional Soccer League
USA	United Soccer Association
USSFA	United States Soccer Football Association

Introduction

If you have ever sat in the cold metal bleachers of Newton Soccer and Lacrosse Complex with about thirty other people or the cold seats at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts with about 2,000 other people, then you know where this thesis started. At Boston College, the 2023 men's soccer roster had nine players from Massachusetts out of the thirty-one listed on the roster.¹ Expanding regionally, seventeen out of thirty-one players were from New England.² On the women's side, six out of twenty-eight players were from Massachusetts, while fourteen out of twenty-eight were from the New England region.³ With a professional season that stretches from March to October, fans of the New England Revolution experience snowstorms, heat stroke, and Nor'easters to see their professional team play. The college season stretches August to November, with the same variability in weather. However, the weather does not explain the small attendance numbers or where all the Massachusetts talent goes after graduating college. On the professional side, too, besides the love of the crayon flag logo, there was an odd lack of history surrounding the Revolution, as if the team had simply appeared at Gillette, and no one questioned their right to be there.⁴

This lack of history is not the case in other cities across the United States. Growing up in St. Louis, there was a historical narrative surrounding soccer. Without needing to search online, I could rattle off the fact that St. Louis University has won the

¹ "2023 Men's Soccer Roster," Boston College Athletics,

² "2023 Men's Soccer Roster," Boston College Athletics.

³ "2023 Women's Soccer Roster," Boston College Athletics.

⁴ Pablo Maurer, "The Demise of the New England Revolution's 'Crayon Flag'—the Final remnant of the Original MLS Design," *The Athletic*, November 4, 2021.

most NCAA national championships in soccer.⁵ The 1950 World Cup team was composed of Italian immigrants from the Hill, significant, of course, because that was the team to knock England out of the World Cup with a 1-0 win.⁶ The debut of a Major League Soccer (MLS) team in 2023 brought to the forefront the history of soccer within the city. The history museum displayed an exhibit titled “Soccer City.”⁷ St. Louis’s Open Cup history became central to the debate surrounding MLS withdrawing their first teams from the historic tournament in favor of MLS NextPro teams.⁸ The first player signed to a professional contract to the new team was Bosnian, a nod to the city’s immigration history.⁹ Soccer could develop deep roots in communities in the United States, but for some reason that did not happen in Boston.

Originally, this thesis began as an attempt to answer questions about what soccer in Boston looked like. It quickly morphed into why soccer was not in Boston and the failures that led to the New England Revolution playing in a football stadium instead of a soccer specific one. The story became more interesting when considering that soccer thrived in communities like Fall River, Massachusetts, located an hour south of Boston, or in Ludlow, Massachusetts, located an hour and a half west of Boston. What contributed to a rich soccer tradition in these smaller towns that was missing from a growing city like Boston? What were the conditions that led to five professional teams and one imported team to fail from 1924 to 1980? How did Boston’s growth map onto

⁵ Maggie Rotermund, “SLU Legends and Lore: The Billiken Soccer Dynasty,” *St. Louis University News*, November 27, 2019.

⁶ Anthony Kristensen, “Remembering Five St. Louisans, 1950 World Cup Team, that Beat England 1-0,” *Columbia Missourian*, July 13, 2021.

⁷ Mike Miller, “‘Soccer City’ Traces the History of St. Louis’ Love for the Beautiful Game,” *St. Louis Magazine*, April 5, 2023.

⁸ Nathan Rubbelke, “St. Louis City SC to Sit Out National Soccer Tournament, but Not by Choice,” *KSDK*, March 1, 2024.

⁹ Corey Miller, “St. Louis City SC Signs First Player in Franchise History,” *KSDK*, February 1, 2022.

soccer's development? Utilizing the *Boston Globe* as my primary means of analysis, this thesis attempts to answer these questions while narrating the history of professional soccer in Boston until the end of the North American Soccer League (NASL) era in 1980. By centering newspaper accounts, this thesis approaches the questions of soccer's development in Boston through the lens of what residents would have discovered when opening the sports section in the morning.

Historical Context

The United States soccer landscape has been, and remains to some degree, complicated. As an imported sport, soccer did not benefit from having strong roots in communities across the United States. Instead, during the initial period of 1870 to 1900, soccer grew in a patchwork pattern of communities based largely on immigrant connections. In fact, Brian D. Bunk, sports historian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, notes,

[I]mmigration from the United Kingdom to the United States rose between 1850 and 1890, with the greatest increases coming in the decade between 1881 and 1890. The popularity of soccer in many cities and regions expanded steadily over this same period before falling away around 1900 as economic recession slowed the influx of British immigrants.¹⁰

Soccer journalist Roger Allaway confirms the connection between immigration and soccer's development specifically within a New England context, citing Scottish immigration to Fall River's textile mills as the primary reason soccer developed there.¹¹

As an imported sport with no original governing oversight besides the Football Association in England, soccer in America relied on ethnic connections to take roots in

¹⁰ Brian D. Bunk, *From Football to Soccer: The Early History of the Beautiful Game in the United States*, (University of Illinois Press, 2021), 76.

¹¹ Roger Allaway, *Rangers, Rovers and Spindles: Soccer, Immigration and Textiles in New England and New Jersey*, (St. Johann Press, New Jersey, 2005), 18.

communities. At this early stage, ethnicity was the key factor in deciding which local immigrant communities played soccer. While soccer was called both football and soccer in this early period, unless directly quoting material that calls the sport football, this thesis refers to the sport exclusively as soccer.

At this early stage, it is important to note the role that whiteness and class played in soccer's development. Irish immigrants in Boston existed in a multi-ethnic society, one that was mostly hostile to the new arrivals. For the Irish, [p]articipating in or watching American sports came to represent a focal point in the social lives of those living in Irish enclaves, and the Irish successes did much to allow them to acquire much needed self-esteem."¹² Facing a wider societal pressure to become "American" enough to blend in, Irish immigrants in Boston had to choose between playing their traditional sports or becoming involved in American ones. Within this dueling sporting landscape, there was no room for an additional imported sport. Soccer did not fit into the whiteness narratives confronting Irish immigrants and thus the sport was ignored. On the other hand, Fall River existed as a primary immigrant community with significantly less pressure to assimilate. Instead, as Roger Allaway repeatedly notes, those in the Fall River community devoted their time to recreating their former lives in their new location.¹³ With less pressure to become "white" and meld into an indistinguishable part of Boston society, immigrants in Fall River did not have to choose between playing American sports or importing their ethnic traditions. A less crowded sports landscape also provided fewer opportunities to play American sports, as the local community immediately established their own sporting traditions. Thus, the struggle to achieve acceptable

¹² Paul Darby. "Gaelic Sport and the Irish Diaspora in Boston, 1879-90." *Irish Historical Studies* 33, no. 132 (2003): 390.

¹³ Allaway, 18.

whiteness by Irish immigrants played a role in determining the sports played by the immigrant community. Soccer, too foreign, did not advance the Irish's agenda of becoming full citizens of Boston and thus went unplayed in those communities.

After the importation of soccer within immigrant communities across the United States, the next phase of development was organized leagues culminating in the first professional soccer league in the U.S., the American Soccer League (ASL). The period of 1900 to 1930 represented a move from patchwork soccer organizations to an attempt at more cohesive development. Confined regionally to the East Coast, the professional ASL never achieved a truly national profile.¹⁴ The most prominent soccer connections at this time, “labor and ethnicity,” also set the ASL and soccer in general up for failure—as the Great Depression began in 1929 “draining money from its wealthy industrial patrons.”¹⁵ To become a player in the American sporting landscape, soccer needed a sustainable professional league. The ASL never caught on in Boston and other big cities to the extent that league owners hoped for, betraying the myriad of ways soccer had fallen behind sports like baseball or football.

Granted, the Great Depression played a huge roll in the failure of the ASL to maintain popularity and remain in operation. Unlike longstanding sports like baseball, soccer did not have the history and tradition to fall back upon as fan revenue dried up. Baseball survived, in part, because “Major League owners began buying or subsidizing Minor League teams in the 1920s.”¹⁶ The benefit of this, especially after the onset of the Great Depression, was that instead of engaging in bidding wars for players, a team could

¹⁴ Dennis J. Seese, *The Rebirth of Professional Soccer in America: The Strange Days of the United Soccer Association*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 2-3.

¹⁵ Seese, 2-3.

¹⁶ David George Surdam, *Wins, Losses, and Empty Seats: How Baseball Outlasted the Great Depression*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 95.

instead promote from their own systems without having to pay large amounts of money.¹⁷ With talent in-house and available to promote at a cheaper contract rate, baseball could spend considerably less during times of financial stress. Soccer, relying heavily on imported talent from abroad and with no talent development pipeline, could not subsidize players. Like other relatively late additions to the Boston sports scene, professional soccer did not survive the financial crush of the Great Depression due to a lack of broader community and infrastructure roots.

In the post Great Depression Era, the ASL returned as an unsanctioned, semi-professional league.¹⁸ Teams represented Boston in this scaled back league, but they are not discussed in this thesis for the most part as the focus is on professional teams. Instead, in the 1960s, professional soccer in the U.S entered the “soccer wars” in which at one point in time there were three different sets of investors attempting to create different professional leagues within the U.S.¹⁹ The chaotic mess of this fight to establish a professional soccer league stemmed not from consumer demand, but instead from “the sudden rush to make money as a big league owner—or at the very least to reduce tax liabilities...”²⁰ The professional sports landscape already had wealthy owners who were unwilling to part with their teams. Soccer, then, became the vehicle for franchise ownership and with no already established professional league or soccer infrastructure, the race was on to create one.

At all points in its development within the U.S., soccer has remained closely tied to place. Its success in Fall River depended entirely on the large population of Scottish

¹⁷ Surdam, 95.

¹⁸ Seese, 24.

¹⁹ Seese, 12.

²⁰ David Wangerin, *Soccer in a Football World*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 3.

immigrants, a longstanding history of factory-sponsored competition, and the continuation of that tradition in the absence of any professional leagues. Boston represented the contrast to that model. Although growing at the same time, Boston attracted Irish immigrants who did not play soccer. Without a tradition of soccer, Boston did not create soccer specific stadiums, an amateur to professional player development pipeline, or community sponsored teams in which residents invested. The difference in place represented a difference in philosophy. Those living in Fall River actively participated in soccer while residents of Boston saw soccer as an evening's entertainment. While the broader historical context of soccer and sports in the United States is important, this thesis focuses extensively on the specifics of Boston as the context for professional soccer's failure to take root in the area.

Literature Overview and Organization

Given that Boston is decidedly not a soccer hotbed, the literature surrounding the topic is scarce. Historically, soccer literature in America focuses on places such as New York, St. Louis, Fall River, Pawtucket. These places represent soccer success stories. Authors such as Roger Allaway, who wrote about the early history of soccer in New England, grounds soccer's success in mill towns to the ethnic composition of those towns. His book, *Rangers, Rovers, and Spindles: Soccer, Immigration and Textiles in New England and New Jersey*, analyzes how the immigrant populations of Fall River and New Bedford created the conditions for soccer to thrive in those locations.

However, by the time NASL analysis appears within soccer literature, the focus is entirely on the financial situation of the soccer league, mostly removed from other iterations of professional and semi-professional leagues that had appeared in the U.S

sports landscape beforehand. Dennis Seese's *The Rebirth of Professional Soccer* looks at the soccer wars between the ASL, the NASL, and the name changing, unsanctioned second league that eventually merged to finalize the NASL. Similarly, Ian Plenderleith's *Rock 'n' Roll Soccer: The Short Life and Fast Times of the North American Soccer League* focuses on the league's unwieldy spending, large contracts, and attempts at netting flashy stars proved unsustainable. Although neither book operates with doomsday narration, both operate under an attitude of instability from the beginning—a soccer doomed to fail for being too ambitious.

While a succinct analysis of league wide problems benefits a macro look at the soccer ecosystem, soccer failed to achieve major sports status for a variety of reasons that varied depending on location. Success stories represent the bulk of soccer specific research: New York for always managing to recruit and retain big names like Pelé, St. Louis for their storied soccer tradition, and New Bedford for surviving as long as possible with strong teams despite low attendance given how much smaller the location was. A comprehensive analysis of a city like Boston, that was repeatedly deemed a necessary part of any professional soccer league, can illuminate structural failings across time, as well as give a more textured analysis of why soccer repeatedly failed to gain a sporting foothold. Boston's repeated failures to support a soccer team, failure to secure soccer specific infrastructure, and prior history as not a soccer city mean that, so far, scholars have reduced Boston to a footnote in soccer history, if mentioned at all.

For the most part, this thesis relies heavily on the *Boston Globe*'s sport archives to look at how reporters covered, responded to, and spoke about soccer in Boston from 1870 to 1980. Coverage within the *Boston Globe*'s pages helps to illuminate how the

newspaper and its readers thought about soccer, what was important to cover, and how prevalent the sport was within the city. Tracing one paper's coverage over 110 years demonstrates both the consistent lack of coverage and the second-tier status of the sport as a whole. The newspaper analysis also pays close attention to how traditional Gaelic sports are covered in the paper, as well as other imports like cricket, to show how foreign sports in general achieve either legitimate sporting status or become relegated to entertainment. The evolution of small side-notes in larger sports columns to dedicated beat reporters in the 1970s illustrates another method of analyzing soccer's growth in Boston. The *Boston Globe* represented, with the caveat that writers and editors were mostly men, a summary of the daily happenings of Boston. The newspaper coalesced vast cross sections of the city into stories that utilized residents' voices to report on what mattered to Bostonians at the time. Press coverage meant enough people wanted to read about soccer that it was worth writing about, in various levels of detail. As a source, what the *Boston Globe* does not say about soccer and the limited coverage also tells the story of a sport that spent much of its history struggling to develop. The *Boston Globe* outlasted every professional soccer team mentioned in this thesis, making the paper a constant and accessible source to trace the growth of soccer in Boston.

Furthermore, my decision to rely on the *Boston Globe* stemmed partly from my background as a journalist. The question of objectivity has been hotly debated, particularly in the last ten years. I do believe that journalists can write objective, well-researched, fact-based articles. I also believe that a writer's bias cannot ever be fully removed from any article. When I am writing a player profile, or writing up a game recap, I am deliberately choosing what to include and what to leave out. Goals obviously

are important, but a different journalist might decide to focus exclusively on tactics while I include a paragraph on player's body language. Therefore, what a writer for the *Boston Globe* did not write about interested me as much as the articles that appeared in print. Within articles, I was interested in the focus on fan attendance over tactics, who was quoted and who was not, whether or not articles focused on drama unfolding within ownership groups or simply on the product on the field. The *Boston Globe* acts as its own agent in this thesis, with special attention paid to developments like beat writers or consistent authors. The almost exclusive focus on newspaper sources is a deliberate attempt to narrate the history of soccer in Boston through journalism, answering my own questions about how the *Boston Globe* mediated and synthesized Bostonians opinions on the sport.

Other historians have examined at the evolution of sports through newspaper coverage. Brian Campbell's dissertation focused on the relationships between the Black Press and players in the Negro League. For Campbell, the main focus was illuminating the ways that athletes and journalists collaborated to "expose racial inequality in America."²¹ While the relationship between Black Press beat writers and players in the Negro League positively impacted coverage and created a collaborative environment that went beyond reporting game scores, that same relationship did not materialize within the soccer landscape, especially for Boston reporters. Larger social commentary did not appear in any professional soccer articles published by the *Boston Globe*. John Chi-Kit Wong's dissertation on the National Hockey League (NHL) tells a similar story of the way increased press coverage helped to establish the NHL as a sustainable professional league. As hockey expanded, "local games between professional teams helped to cement

²¹ "Black Press and Negro League," University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2 February, 2021.

the link between the local senior club and the reputation of the city, and transformed the showing of the hockey club into a symbolic representation of the city's status."²² Hockey actively courted press coverage, utilizing reports to tie the sport to a city's identity.

Soccer, however, did not have the same long-term relationship with the press and was viewed as an outsider instead of part of a city's identity. Different structural choices led to different relationships with the press, which in turn influenced how the *Boston Globe* thought about and covered soccer.

This thesis is organized into three chapters that build upon each other to construct how soccer developed within Boston from 1870 to 1980. The first chapter analyzes soccer's early beginnings in America from 1870 to 1900 to provide a clear contrast with Fall River, Massachusetts—a mill town that developed successful and long-term soccer infrastructure early on. By comparing the population demographics of Boston and Fall River, soccer's early reliance on ethnic roots to lay an American foundation becomes apparent. Boston, comprised mostly of Irish immigrants fleeing the Potato Famine, developed a strong tradition of Gaelic games. Fall River, whose population was comprised of Scottish and English immigrants, developed soccer into an important part of the community. Understanding the ethnic reasons for soccer's early failure to catch on within Boston helps to explain the eventual failures of two different professional leagues in the early and mid-1900s.

The second chapter of this thesis covers 1900 to 1930 with a special emphasis on the Boston Wonder Workers and the Boston Bears. Both teams represented Boston in the American Soccer League (ASL), the first professional soccer league in the United States.

²² John Chi-Kit Wong, "The Development of Professional Hockey and the Making of the National Hockey League, (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2001), 382.

The ASL was functional as a professional league from 1920 to 1933 and then re-formed after the Great Depression as a semi-professional, unsanctioned league. While devoting space to the two professional teams, the second chapter also focuses on the lack of significant soccer infrastructure within the city. Institutions like Harvard played collegiate soccer, but did not provide enough development to transition players from amateur levels to semi-professional or professional players. The ethnic connections discussed in the first chapter return, with ASL professional rosters mostly comprising of Scottish professional players.

The third and final chapter of this thesis is devoted to covering the four professional teams that played in Boston from 1967 to 1980 in the North American Soccer League (NASL). With the Boston Shamrocks being imported directly from Dublin, Ireland to appeal to Boston's Irish-American population, the ethnic makeup of the city still dictated how franchise owners approached soccer in the city. The next three franchises—the Boston Beacons, Boston Minutemen, and Boston Tea Men—all suffered from depressed fan turnout, stadium uncertainty, and a lack of roots within the communities supposed to invest in the teams. The failures of the NASL franchises were the result of the processes described in chapters one and two. Each franchise sought increased fan attendance, struggled to build community, and ultimately failed to survive in large part due to stadium concerns. The culmination of decades of neglect, the third chapter weaves together the ethnic and infrastructure choices that led to four consecutive failures from 1967 to 1980.

Taken together, the chapters in this thesis argue that from 1870 to 1980 sustained neglect for the sport of soccer as a whole, combined with not insignificant ethnic

demographic differences, contributed to the failure of soccer at the professional level within Boston. What began as simply an ethnic difference, with Boston's Irish immigrants preferring traditional Gaelic games to English soccer, grew to longstanding neglect of developing soccer specific infrastructure, an amateur to professional pipeline, and community support for a professional team. Each new professional team repeated the mistakes of the previous franchise, without investing significantly in creating a soccer stadium, a Boston soccer talent base, or, in the 1970s specifically, elevating one of the semi-professional teams with strong ethnic support to the professional level. The failure of soccer to develop into a sustainable, natural part of Boston's sports landscape began in the 1870s and compounded across the next one hundred years with continued neglect, lack of community, and a genuine disinterest in creating soccer specific infrastructure within the city.

Chapter One:

Delayed Kick-Off: Soccer's (Failed) Early Development in Boston from 1870 to 1900

The pages of the *Boston Daily Globe* from 1870 to 1900 provided a snapshot of a city in progress. The social pages, local news, national stories, and daily hustle and bustle filler stories covered events unfolding in Boston that Bostonians might be interested in. Readers could flip through and discover events that, in the eyes of the *Globe's* editors, mattered to residents or those passing through the city. As the city transformed, the *Boston Daily Globe* provided a daily record of these changes, with headlines shouting the evolution of stories that readers cared about. While this was the case for catalogued demographic changes and increased reporting on Irish-American news events, it was also reflected in the sports pages, where leagues like the National Hockey League (NHL), Major League Baseball (MLB), and college football rivalries developed—even if reporters originally considered these sports as passing trends. One sport frequently ignored by the *Globe*? Soccer. The relative silence in the *Boston Daily Globe* about the new sport helps to explain the reason soccer failed to develop as a long-term feature of the Boston sporting landscape. Despite a growing and increasingly covered sports scene, including an emphasis on ethnic sporting events, Boston's demographics stifled the success of soccer, even as a successful hotbed of the sport developed in nearby Fall River, Massachusetts.

The Demographic Differences

Most important for the fate of soccer in Boston was the fact that, though expanding towards the end of the 1800s, Boston was not a mill town attracting Scottish,

Portuguese, and Lancashire immigrants. Instead, Boston existed as a city transforming into a sprawling suburbia through an influx of immigration. Most of the immigrants arriving to Boston in the late 1800s were Irish, with the bulk coming during the famine years.²³ Given soccer's English origin, though global in nature, the game would have to be imported to the United States, as it was elsewhere. However, the Irish in Boston were unlikely to import English soccer, bringing instead traditional games like hurling to the U.S. The massive waves of Irish immigration taking place during the Potato Famine occurred before soccer had caught on in Ireland and therefore was not popular enough to be exported.

Boston from 1870 to 1900 was expanding—but not with the industries that would have fostered a soccer culture. Whereas soccer thrived in Fall River, Massachusetts precisely because of the mill industry that pulled Scottish immigrants to the town, Boston's immigrant population “worked as unskilled laborers, dockworkers, hod carriers, teamsters, and domestic servants”.²⁴ Furthermore, a diversity of jobs and places of employment made it more difficult to introduce a new sport like soccer within the workplace. Boston's existence as a city was not built around a single mill owner. Therefore, organized, sponsored sports teams were less likely to be sponsored by a particular owner and more driven by ethnic associations. Ethnic associations and churches did the heavy lifting of creating community engagement for the Irish in Boston. Those organizations relied on pre-existing cultural touchpoints to create community—not on a relatively new phenomenon such as the sport of soccer. Thus, from the beginning,

²³ “Irish.” Global Boston, Boston College. 26 October 2023.

²⁴ *Global Boston* “Irish.”

the demographic makeup of immigrants in Boston and the organizational structure of the city's ethnic enclaves worked against the importation of soccer in any formal way.

Nearby places where soccer was successfully cultivated differed from Boston in three key ways: those recruited to immigrate there, the industries recruiting said immigrants, and the organization of the towns which were considerably smaller and less diverse than Boston at the time. For example, Fall River, which would develop into a successful hotbed of soccer, was built on "a large influx of Irish and English immigrants during the 1840s."²⁵ Most of these English immigrants "were trained cotton textile workers" who immigrated to the United States in part because of their union roots in England, which were not exactly welcome there or in the U.S.²⁶ The different immigrant backdrops resulted in different cultural imports. Fall River imported organized soccer; Boston imported sports like hurling or found their immigrant populations adopting American games like baseball. Geographically close, the two places were worlds apart in terms of sporting culture and demographics.

The 1870s Sporting Culture

Perusing the sports pages of the *Boston Globe* from the 1870s, there is not a single mention of soccer. Instead, the paper is concerned with American football results, yachting, horse racing, and even the occasional hurling match. Upon opening the paper, residents of Boston would have been able to follow the cricket club, football matches, "base-ball" games, and other aquatic sports.²⁷ The "out-door sports" column summarized

²⁵ Philip Thomas Silva Jr., *The Spindle City: Labor, Politics, and Religion in Fall River, Massachusetts, 1870-1905*, (Phd. Diss., Fordham University, 1973), 19.

²⁶ Silva, *The Spindle City*, 28.; Roger Allaway, *Rangers, Rovers and Spindles: Soccer, Immigration and Textiles in New England and New Jersey*, (St. Johann Press, New Jersey, 2005), 20.

²⁷ "Out-Door Sports.: [...] Base Ball, Cricket. The Ture." *Boston Daily Globe*, May 11, 1872.

the various newsworthy events in the sports world, without allowing any particular loyalty to a specific team or sport. This daily column, which never had an author's byline, utilized the headline to alert readers to which "out-door" sports would be reviewed in the column. Particular attention was paid to the collegiate sports scene, focusing on the exploits of Harvard's football team and, later on, the professional and collegiate "baseball" scores.

Sporting culture in Boston began and ended with Harvard more often than not. Headlines over the course of 1872 included "Base Ball Harvard v. Yale" on May 25, 1872 followed two days later by another report on "Base Ball Harvard v Yale" alerting readers to the important update that instead of a single baseball game, this year there would be a three-game series.²⁸ Surprisingly, the *Boston Daily Globe* covered not only Harvard's games, but also Yale's, increasing their baseball and football coverage. Other colleges like Princeton had the occasional mention, though the *Boston Daily Globe* tried to keep their reporting local. In this early decade, the coverage was mostly focused on match recaps and the occasional rule change, though it would grow to include columns on coaching decisions and opinions on what went wrong in each game.

Beyond college sports, the *Boston Daily Globe* focused most of their sports reviews on baseball, detailing games played by the Bostons, the precursor to today's Red Sox team. Special editions of the "Out-Door" column included "Aquatics" and "the Turf" which focused on regattas and horseraces respectively. As the paper continued to develop, sports were separated into seasons with an "Autumn" and "Winter" "Out-door" section that created a rotation of coverage in the Boston area, although a sporting event in

²⁸ "Special Despatch to the Boston Globe Out-Door Sports.: Billiards. Important Game. Cricket. Base Ball. Yale Vs. Harvard. New Club. Clevelands Vs. Bostons. Excelsions Vs. Mutuals. [...] Vs. Unas. Unas Vs. Mystics." *Boston Daily Globe*, May 27, 1872.

New York was fair game. Towards the end of the decade, “Out-doors” columns were reserved for recounting events, while a new column, “Sporting Matters,” detailed the business side of sports. A December 6 column focused on “constitutional changes” allowing baseball teams to suspend players for “drunkenness or insubordination” and noted that the list of umpires for 1880 was set.²⁹ Other often reported stories included summaries of boxing matches held in the area with a line or two recapping who won the fight along with a general description of the participants.

One could suggest that the *Boston Daily Globe*'s definition of a proper sporting event was limited to “American” sports. However, the paper included descriptions of cricket, indicating that foreign sports were not excluded. Soccer was not too un-American, it just was not popular or organized enough to warrant a blurb in the *Boston Daily Globe*. Places such as Salem, Needham, and Chelsea—all Massachusetts towns—had their own cricket clubs.³⁰ In 1875, the *Boston Daily Globe* had cricket scores cabled over from London—even though the match ended in a draw.³¹ Notes on British cricket clubs continued into the 1880s, with a December 19, 1880 article presenting notes on last season's record for the Lascelles Hall Cricket Club.³² With a small, but dedicated, percentage of coverage focused on cricket in both the U.S. and England, the *Boston Daily Globe* could have reported on soccer scores, especially from England's growing soccer scene. Instead, due to soccer's novelty and unpopularity, the paper devoted no space to covering a sport that meant nothing to their readership. Additionally, while cricket clubs

²⁹ "Sporting Matters: Base Ball. Important Constitutional Changes Made St The Meeting of The League Yesterday." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 06 1879.

³⁰ "Out-Door Sports.: Cricket. Alphas Vs. Albions. Alphas Vs. Winnisimmets." *Boston Daily Globe*, May 28, 1872.

³¹ "Cable to The, Boston Globe: College Sports in England--the Eton-Harrow Cricket Match Drawn." *Boston Daily Globe*, July 13, 1875.

³² "Cricket: Some Suggestions About the New Club. Notes." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 19, 1880.

appeared in different Boston locales, the same could not be said about organized soccer clubs.

Moreover, the *Boston Daily Globe* did reflect sports that the Irish brought with them to the U.S. Hurling, while never covered in its own “Out-door” section, did receive some notice in the paper. In 1879, while covering Irish games in Mystic Park as a whole, a section of the article was devoted to hurling. At pains to describe how the game was set up, the paper notes that goals were marked with “a beautiful American flag and a stately tree, and the west goal by Irish and American flags.”³³ The article went on to describe each of the three courses of the game, focusing more on the crowd’s reaction than on the game being played, describing the “large gasps made in them when the course of the ball took its flight in their midst.”³⁴ With the emphasis being on the crowd, not the sport, hurling remained outside of traditional sports coverage and only rarely received print space. Unlike cricket, hurling was ruled outside of the standard sporting culture and therefore not worth printing regularly.

Why did newspapers focus on sports, and U.S. sports in particular? The role of sports in creating community and serving as a vehicle for inclusion has long been documented. Lawrence McCaffrey, a historian of Irish immigration to the U.S., points out for Irish immigrants specifically:

Sports offered the Irish an ego lift as well as ways out of poverty and insignificance. Like religion and politics, sports offered possibilities to the Irish, who were excluded from business and the professions by the Anglo-Protestant

³³ "Irish Athletes: What They Did at Mystic Park Yesterday. The Hurlers Make Sport For 400 People. Fine Jumping and Foot Racing-- The Winners and Prizes." *Boston Daily Globe*, October 31, 1879.

³⁴ "Irish Athletes: What they Did at Mystic Park," *Boston Daily Globe*.

establishment. And athletics provided the Irish community with badly needed heroes.³⁵

Still working to gain acceptance in white, Protestant Boston, Irish immigrants adapting to U.S. sports provided a path forward. In light of needing to seem “American”, Irish immigrants would have preferred to adopt sports like baseball or American football when choosing a new sport over traditional ones like hurling. Soccer, deeply connected to its English heritage, would have been unpopular in Ireland due to the independence movement and political fallout from the famine. Therefore, the Irish likely would not have played soccer or brought it over to the U.S., in addition to the sport being an unpopular choice once in America.

In fact, one of the few mentions of soccer in the paper came from an 1879 article that mentioned a Scottish “foot-ball” team arriving to play in America “next year.” The article listed the names speculated to appear on the roster, including N.C. McDonald and John Graham, goalkeepers for two different clubs.³⁶ The only prior coverage to this event was a notice in the “Sporting Matters” column on November 18th, which listed the potential locations matches might be played, including “New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Buffalo, Detroit, Hartford, Saratoga, Newport...”³⁷ Places like St. Louis, Missouri and Hartford, Connecticut made the list because soccer had already started laying a strong grassroots foundation of support in those areas. Boston received a match because the game could be played at Harvard and, with the city’s

³⁵ Paul Darby. “Gaelic Sport and the Irish Diaspora in Boston, 1879-90.” *Irish Historical Studies* 33, no. 132 (2003): 390.

³⁶ “Winter Pastimes: Splendid Scores Made at The Rifle Galleries. Pedestrianism at New Bedford and at Natick. Coming Benefits in This City--Notes and Gossip. In General. The Scottish Foot-Ball Team Which Is to Visit America.” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 29, 1879.

³⁷ “Sporting Matters: An International Foot Ball Team--John Hawdon, The English Sculler--General Notes. The Mccoole-Kelly Prize-Fight. Base Ball Notes. General Notes.” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 19, 1878.

population, investors could be assured of a crowd. No mention of the actual tour made the pages of the *Boston Daily Globe*.

The 1880s Boston Sporting Culture

Although the 1880s sports pages of the *Boston Daily Globe* reflected similar stories reported in the 1870s, there was an important development: the success of the 1879 Irish Athletic Club of Boston (IACB). Organizing a midsummer festival each year, “the promotion of specifically Irish sporting pastimes and culture was very much at the fore.”³⁸ The festival and sporting events served to “[bolster] the desire of nationalist-minded Irish emigrants to support the games of the 'old country', either through participation or financial investment.”³⁹ The IACB was not functioning independently of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in Ireland, instead, as the GAA became increasingly political, “it reinforced the resolve of organizations like the IACB to persevere with their endeavors to spread and promote Gaelic games throughout Boston.”⁴⁰ The non-Irish press in Boston ignored this political agenda, but the organization’s sporting events were advertised—at least as entertainment.

What the success of the IACB meant for soccer in Boston was that it could have been possible to successfully introduce the sport to the city’s population. Games that the festival specifically promoted—like hurling—underwent rules changes roughly twenty years after the Football Association formally codified soccer. The IACB ensured that “in 1886 Boston was the location for the first game of Gaelic football played outside Ireland under the new rules laid down by the GAA”⁴¹ The event was advertised in advance in the

³⁸ Darby, 394.

³⁹ Darby, 395.

⁴⁰ Darby, 395.

⁴¹ Darby, 395.

Boston Daily Globe which stated “[o]n the seventeenth of June the Irish Athletic Club of Boston will give a grand exhibition of ancient and modern Celtic games...”⁴² The article went on to describe the historical tradition behind the Irish games, but did not do a follow up report on the Gaelic football match. The lack of press underscores that despite the popularity of traditional Irish sports with participants, they still were not popular enough to support themselves monetarily.⁴³ The financial struggles of importing teams and organizations, or of trying to professionalize American versions, would be a repeated struggle in attempting to develop soccer within the U.S.

Instead, the *Boston Daily Globe* continued to devote most of their column space to the exploits of the Bostons—the city’s baseball team. With the quintessential American sport dominating the sporting section, it also helped that “the Irish took to these sports, particularly baseball, in such large numbers” so as to provide “evidence of their willingness to adapt to the cultural norms and values of their host society.”⁴⁴ Traditional Irish sports were games billed as *entertainment*, but “base-ball” was a *sport*. In order to receive proper coverage, the sport usually had to be considered American (cricket was an exception), although increasingly native-born Americans were joined by immigrant players. The *Boston Daily Globe* did not usually mark a player’s ethnicity when reporting on baseball line ups, allowing immigrant players to undergo a transformation and be purely American within a sporting context.

With baseball and football coverage dominating the headlines in the 1880s, there seemed to be little space for soccer to develop in an organized fashion. As hurling

⁴² "Ancient Celtic Games: The "Aennch" To Be Held at Oak Island Grove on Ranker Hill Day." *Boston Daily Globe*, May 28, 1886.

⁴³Marcus De Búrca. *The GAA: A History*. 2nd ed., (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999): 31-3.

⁴⁴ Darby, 391.

proved, traditional Irish games were deemed entertainment, not necessarily sport. Hurling recaps were often marked as specifically Irish in the paper, signifying to readers that this was not an American sport and did not have American participants. Sports such as cricket still received attention by the paper thanks to U.S. cricket teams still operating. The final issues of 1889 had a special column on predictions like “cricket, in this vicinity, promises to take a boom unprecedented in its history; and as each locality now has a fairly strong club, considerable talk has been had lately about forming a local league, with a probable radius of ten miles.”⁴⁵ Evidently, the introduction and maintenance of some foreign sports took hold in Boston, while others did not. Ethnic origin, financial investment, and how the sport was covered in the paper all played a role in deciding which sports were legitimate and which were simply not played by Americans.

There was an important development in regards to the future of soccer in Boston, though readers would not have suspected it at the time. The development and reorganization of a six team New England Baseball League in 1889 would eventually provide the blueprint for soccer in the region.⁴⁶ Beginning in 1889, plans rapidly consolidated for a New England specific league, with “Worcester, Lowell, Springfield, and Hartford” meeting to discuss the size and maximum salary of the league.⁴⁷ A month later, the six-team league was formed, although the initial plan called for eight teams to play.⁴⁸ The salary increased and the reason for keeping the teams confined to New

⁴⁵Will Rofee. "Cricket Outlook: Bright Prospects for Game in 1890. Plan for Organizing League of Leading Clubs. Lowells Should Rank Next Longwoods --"Revolving" Players." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 30, 1889.

⁴⁶ Allaway, 51.

⁴⁷ "Want Four More Clubs: New England League to be Formed. Worcester, Lowell, Springfield and Harford Interested." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 28, 1889.

⁴⁸ “Want Four More Clubs”; "Six Clubs Best: New England League Wins Most Profit. Outside Travel Brings Expenses Up Too Much. Salary Limit Below \$1800 Will Mean Success." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 29, 1889.

England was that “it was sure death to these cities to have to travel outside the New England States.”⁴⁹ In the early 1900s, with soccer beginning to gain a foothold in the sporting culture of places like Ludlow and Springfield, baseball owners would sell their stadiums for soccer’s use in the offseason as an attempt to maximize profit.⁵⁰ Thus, seemingly unrelated, the financial decisions of a six-team New England baseball league would shape the future of soccer in Massachusetts and help explain the reason for excluding Boston as a place for a permanent team.

The 1890s Boston Sporting Culture

The last decade of the 1800s brought new sports to Boston and made an already crowded sporting landscape harder to break into for non-American, imported sports. The decade started out with a January 1 baseball season preview, continuing the trend of baseball being the most important sport to Boston readers. With Boston having two baseball clubs to begin the 1890s, the paper promised “it seems fair to assume that Boston can support two good clubs, and events may prove that she will be glad to do so in a handsome and profitable manner.”⁵¹ The paper expected “at the opening of the season it is fair to presume that curiosity among the lovers of sport will lead to large attendance.”⁵² The challenge was retaining the public’s interest and engagement after the newness wore off.⁵³ With Boston increasing the number of baseball teams and the *Boston Daily Globe* expecting there to be enough fans to generate revenue for both, it is clear that the sporting scene at the start of the 1890s was crowded, but there was still space for

⁴⁹ “Six Clubs Best: New England League Wins Most Profit,” *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁵⁰ Allaway, 46.

⁵¹ “The Base Ball Outlook.” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 1, 1890.

⁵² “The Base Ball Outlook.” *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁵³ “The Base Ball Outlook.” *Boston Daily Globe*.

new teams. However, those teams had to come from a sport that was familiar to U.S. audiences and had a proven history within the city.

The start of the 1890s saw the growth of not only organized professional sports in Boston, but also the increased activity of amateur sporting clubs. With “a semi-professional spurt” threatening to disqualify amateur athletes, the Boston Athletic Club “offered to the Inter-Scholastic Amateur Association a number of prizes for a series of sports to be competed for...”⁵⁴ The announcement of the prizes was accompanied by a history of the Inter-Scholastic Amateur Association and a list of participants in the events. The article pointed to the success of the Association in preparing athletes to debut within semi-professional or collegiate sports, noting:

It will not be amiss to give a brief history of this young organization that is destined to furnish some of our best and cleanest athletes, both for amateur clubs and college teams and no better recognition can be obtained for them than the fact that four men who played ball in the interscholastic league last season are now trying for the Harvard nine, and three are almost certain to get on the team.⁵⁵

Despite the fact that most of the events recorded in summary at the end of the article are races, the Association’s biggest success came in the field of baseball, further highlighting its importance in the Boston landscape.

Baseball and amateur sports were not the only ones coalescing into organized, structured leagues as a way to generate fan engagement and growth. Cricket, imported from England, would finally see a New England League formed in the 1890s, despite having been talked about since the early 1880s. The potential for a new league was announced in early January 1890, with an article declaring “appearances indicate that the

⁵⁴Eugene Buckley, "To Encourage Amateurs: The Interscholastic League Games. Boston Athletic Association Offers Trophies. List of Competitors with Their Records." *Boston Daily Globe*, February 24, 1890.

⁵⁵ Buckley, "To Encourage Amateurs."

local league will be formed at an early date.”⁵⁶ The author of the article, Will Rofee, having alerted readers to the possibility of the league, turned his attention to the issue of umpires, declaring “should the league be formed one of the first things it must turn its attention to is the appointment of a staff of competent umpires.”⁵⁷ The in-depth article demonstrated the *Boston Globe*’s familiarity with the sport of cricket, another argument that foreign sports could achieve popularity and coverage within the newspaper and the Boston area as a whole.

Beyond the baseball scene in Boston, the *Boston Daily Globe* also reported on two major cricket events that pointed to the popularity and growth of the game in the 1890s: the fifth annual meeting of the secretaries of the New England Cricket Club and a match between English cricketers and All-New Yorkers cricket team in New York City. The February 21 report on the meeting and arrangement of interstate matches also included the schedule for the season stretching from April to October with the dates and locations, as well as the secretaries’ addresses.⁵⁸ The match between English cricketers and an All-Star New York team in October of 1899 demonstrated the success of bringing English teams to the U.S.—a trick that both English and American businessmen would use when attempting to expand their sport’s influence. The article reported that after drawing with the New York team, “the Englishmen left after the game for Philadelphia, where they will begin a return match against the gentlemen of Philadelphia tomorrow.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Will Rofee, "Leg Before Wicket.: New Wrinkles for New England Cricket Umpires--A Strong Local League Probable." *Boston Daily Globe*, January 06, 1890.

⁵⁷ Rofee. "Leg Before Wicket."

⁵⁸ "Cricket Men in Session: Fifth Annual Meeting Held Yesterday. Full Schedule of Dates for the Coming Season. Addresses of Secretaries of The Different Clubs. Games Scheduled for Next Season. April. May. June. July. August. September. October. Addresses of Secretaries." *Boston Daily Globe*, February 21, 1890.

⁵⁹ "Cricket Men in Session" *Boston Daily Globe*.

A successful cricket tour with an imported English team would later serve as the blueprint for attempts to interest Bostonians in soccer.

Not only did the 1890s see the expansion of already developed sports, the end of the century also saw the beginnings of a new sport: basketball. The first mention of the sport appeared in 1894, with an article describing a new game that was “a fine sport for girls either indoor or against a sunny wall.”⁶⁰ Describing a game where players throw a ball against the wall and try and catch it, the article ended informing readers that “Ball-stand is an old Swedish game—bolista. It was introduced in this country by Baron Posse and is popular alike with men and women, boys and girls.”⁶¹ However, by 1899, the *Boston Daily Globe* was running an article from New Haven about the “biggest thing that Yale has ever done in the way of basket ball,” having organized a trip to travel “as far west as Wisconsin” to play teams.⁶² In addition, it was not just collegiate teams forming. In 1898, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) engaged in sanctions against unregistered basketball teams.⁶³ The dispute was over teams who held matches “without obtaining sanction from the union, and that they allowed unregistered athletes to compete, representing their teams.”⁶⁴ Basketball, in the span of five years, had gained enough popularity to enter the college scene, as well as infiltrate amateur athletic unions. The sport was not an organized league yet, but the rapid growth demonstrated that Boston was still open to accepting new sports and that the paper was willing to cover high school and college matches.

⁶⁰ "Ball-Stand: Fine Sport for Girls Either Indoors of Against a Sunny Wall." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 16, 1894.

⁶¹ "Ball-Stand: Fine Sport for Girls," *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁶² "Yale's Basket Ball Team: Jim Robinson Has Been Engaged as Trainer and Sport is Booming." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 9, 1899.

⁶³ "A. A. U. And Basketball: Action by the Organization to Compel the Players to Register." *Boston Daily Globe*, January 4, 1898.

⁶⁴ "A.A.U and Basketball," *Boston Daily Globe*.

As the 1890s drew to a close, another vital Boston sport found itself established on the sports pages: hockey. The news in the ice hockey world in 1899 was the growing popularity of hockey and the diminishing popularity of ice polo. The committee “decided to substitute the Canadian for the American game, which now makes it certain that hockey will be the sport of the winter on the ice in this vicinity.”⁶⁵ The paper noted that “ever since Harvard and the other colleges took it up, it has been gaining in popularity, and now it bids fair to replace ice polo for good.”⁶⁶ The following day the *Boston Daily Globe* ran a second article on the change, focused on the decision making process behind said change. The deciding factor was, as reported the day before, that colleges and “leading preparatory schools throughout New England” were already playing the sport.⁶⁷ Thus, hockey was substituted for ice polo and demonstrated another pathway towards gaining legitimacy in the sporting world: starting at the college level.

The 1890s represented a decade of expansion for sports within Boston. Amateur pathways, new sports like basketball, and established sports such as baseball and cricket all saw growth heading into the 1900s. Leagues restructured, grew, and established themselves as permanent parts of the community. Amateur associations ensured the continued development of athletes and engaged a larger variety of supporters while feeding the surrounding colleges. The sporting boom proved Boston’s appetite for new sports while also exacerbating the conditions that made it impossible for soccer to gain a

⁶⁵ "Hockey on Top: Cc Polo Likely to Drop Out of Sight. Canadian Game has Become More Popular Each Year. League Decides in Favor of the Puck This Year. Big Schedule of Games and a Banner to Win. Cold Weather Will Receive a Welcome from Enthusiasts." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 22, 1899.

⁶⁶ "Hockey on Top," *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁶⁷ "Favor Hockey: Schools Vote Against Ice Polo Series. Canadian Game Will be the One to Play This Season. After Some Discussion the Change Goes Through. Cup Will be Played for as in The Old League. Fixtures for Season Show the Interest of Old." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 23, 1899.

foothold. Amateur associations were not hosting soccer matches, there were no organized soccer leagues within Boston, and Irish organizations were not interested in another English sport. Sports were in, but soccer was out.

The Counter-Point: How Soccer Developed Outside of Boston

While sports in Boston were adopted, modified, solidified, and organized during the period from 1870 to 1900, soccer was developing too—just not within city limits. In order to fully understand the conditions that prevented soccer’s growth in Boston, it is important to look at places where soccer did develop in Massachusetts. The largest historical hotbed of soccer development in Massachusetts was Fall River. This particularity of geography happened due to the fact that “the boom in the textile...produced a flood of immigration from the Lancashire region of England.”⁶⁸ Important for the incubation of soccer in Fall River, Lancashire “was the area of England in which association football had most taken root among working-class people...”⁶⁹ Those immigrating to Fall River, then, were already versed in soccer culture, having been a part of the sport back in England. Transporting themselves to Fall River meant that soccer inevitably also made the transition, becoming a key piece of community building in the town.

Looking through census records confirms the demographic differences that defined the success of soccer in one place and its failure in another. Fall River’s records from 1850 to 1880 detail English and Scottish immigrants’ movement into the town,

⁶⁸ Allaway, xii.

⁶⁹ Allaway, xii.

though Ireland appears frequently as country of birth.⁷⁰ Even those born in Massachusetts are denoted as having foreign born parents.⁷¹ Pure demographics was not the sole reason that soccer thrived in one area of Massachusetts and not another. In this early era of soccer, where the sport was isolated to pockets of England and Scotland, demographics played a key role in who was exposed to soccer early. With Fall River immigrants determined to reinvent a version of Lancashire, which already had a longstanding soccer tradition, the sport became part of the cultural fabric of the booming mill town. Boston, growing with a different group of immigrants, instead saw sports like hurling establish itself in the sporting landscape—albeit as a source of entertainment and less as a permanent sport.

Part of the reason soccer thrived in Fall River was this direct import of Lancashire immigrants. Purposefully, those immigrating to Fall River “tried, successfully, to replicate what they had known on the other side of the ocean. One of the elements of that, by the late 1870s, was association football.”⁷² The region had a strong soccer foundation in England, particularly as the English gave a greater focus to standardizing the rules. The first professional soccer league featured twelve founding members, five of whom were from Lancashire.⁷³ With a history of professional and semi-professional clubs back home, immigrants took a standardized version of soccer with them as they moved to textile mills in places like Fall River or Pawtucket, Rhode Island. It was this community connection that allowed soccer to thrive, as the sport was not viewed as a new import, but instead as

⁷⁰ United States Census Bureau, “1870 United States Census, Fall River Ward 6,” Ancestry.com, accessed December 12, 2023.; United States Census Bureau, “1880 United States Census, Fall River Ward 6,” Ancestry.com, accessed December 12, 2024.

⁷¹ United States Census Bureau, “1870 United States Census.”

⁷² Allaway, 18.

⁷³ Allaway, 18.

part of recreating Lancashire in the U.S. Having already standardized the game and grown familiar with the idea of a permanent professional league, soccer thrived in Fall River due to previous knowledge and a strong cultural connection—a recipe that could not be replicated in Boston.

Conclusion

As soccer was in its nascence in places like Fall River, Massachusetts and Kearney, New Jersey, Boston had no appetite or space for the sport within an already crowded sporting landscape. The immigration and sporting conditions were not ripe for soccer to gain a foothold in Boston’s neighborhoods, and the organization of ethnic neighborhoods and sporting associations made it more difficult for soccer to gain recognition. Because the city was composed of immigrants from Ireland, soccer had either not caught on or had caught on after those immigrants had resettled in Boston. Unlike mill towns, Boston also had greater options for sporting entertainment and less reliance on mill sponsored activities and teams. This combination of factors: the wrong group of immigrants to foster the game, greater sporting diversity, already established forms of entertainment, and churches being the central organization of neighborhoods, meant that soccer had little opportunity to develop in a crowded landscape.

With soccer unable to claim a foothold in Boston at the beginning of the Irish immigration boom, the landscape would only prove more difficult to break into as time progressed. As the next chapter discusses, without an organic soccer landscape, investors into the sport had to create demand while also creating a team—impossible without talented players already in the market. Arguments about soccer’s “un-Americanness” would make the recruiting process more difficult and investors would resort to recruiting

teams from abroad in order to try and create demand. The move would be reminiscent of the GAA's attempt to import Gaelic hurling teams to America in the 1880s in order to increase demand for the sport. The finances behind soccer would also look like the New England Baseball League's consolidation in the face of travel costs. Having failed to create the infrastructure necessary to organically develop soccer, Boston would spend the next seventy years attempting to manufacture a product with no history, support, or deep roots in the immediate area.

Chapter Two:

The Need to Get Organized: Soccer's Attempts to Form Semi-Professional and Professional Soccer Leagues in Boston from 1901-1933

While other sports organized into both amateur and semi-professional leagues in the 1890s, soccer did not begin to coalesce in Boston until 1906. In early November of 1906, the *Boston Daily Globe* began reporting on “a meeting of representatives of association football clubs.”⁷⁴ The express purpose of the meeting was to structure disparate association teams into a Boston based league to rival the established Merrimack League that had recently wrapped up play for the year.⁷⁵ A second article, published on December 3, 1906 reported on the follow up meeting that involved “the new clubs” wishing to join the association.⁷⁶ Another meeting day was set for December 16, with the hope being that the association would “include all the association clubs and leagues in the state.”⁷⁷ Soccer, in the first decade of the 1900s, was starting to organize—at least along state lines.

Those soccer enthusiasts scouring the *Boston Daily Globe* for updates would have been hard pressed to find consistent coverage of the sport or the existing Merrimack League. Termed “soccer football,” the *Boston Daily Globe* covered matches sporadically, only occasionally providing the results of match fixtures. One of the first mentions of soccer in the sports pages of the 1900s comes in April of 1906—a game recap of an “annual intercollegiate association” match between the Haverford Eleven and Harvard’s

⁷⁴ "Association Has League: Soccer Teams Meet and Organize. J. H. Fairfax-Lucy is Chosen as President. Another Meeting is Set for Dec 2." *Boston Daily Globe*, November 26, 1906.

⁷⁵ "Association Has League: Soccer Teams Meet and Organize," *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁷⁶ "Article 6 -- no Title: Soccer Men Meet. Massachusetts Football Association Hopes to Include All Clubs and Leagues in the State." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 03, 1906.

⁷⁷ "Article 6 -- no Title." *Boston Daily Globe*.

team.⁷⁸ The article marked the newspaper's first coverage of the annual match, though the unnamed writer does acknowledge that the 1-0 score was "the same score made last year."⁷⁹ Since soccer commanded limited space in the newspaper, matches from the region were lumped in: Fore Rivers took the New England match by beating Lindsay 3-1, while the Rovers beat the visiting Pennsylvania Thistles 4-3 in their New England match up.⁸⁰ Combining all soccer results into a single, relatively unorganized column signaled the *Boston Daily Globe* did not believe the sport popular enough to warrant standing alone. Their inclusion also highlighted the lack of Boston specific soccer to report on, making the inclusion of other scores necessary to fill space.

Soccer, evidently, had made inroads in Boston after the close of the 19th Century. The sport, however, did not receive consistent coverage from the *Boston Daily Globe*. Additionally, soccer was not professionally played within the city's limits. Furthermore, while other sports enjoyed the start of the century already organized into leagues with regular opponents and coverage, soccer would remain mostly localized until the creation of the American Soccer League (ASL) in 1921 (and the scaled back league created in 1933). Even then, the ASL localized travel in order to avoid excessive spending. The struggles of soccer to gain a foothold in Boston in the early and mid-1900s mirrored the struggles of soccer to gain popularity in the broader United States. Sports such as basketball and baseball enjoyed broad appeal to both American and immigrant communities, while soccer remained a mostly immigrant game, linked to specific groups.

⁷⁸ "By a Score of 1 to 0: Haverford Defeats the Harvard Eleven. Game Witnessed by a Small Crowd of "Soccer" Football Enthusiasts." *Boston Daily Globe*, April 01, 1906.

⁷⁹ "By a Score of 1 to 0: Haverford Defeats the Harvard Eleven," *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁸⁰ "By a Score of 1 to 0: Haverford Defeats the Harvard Eleven," *Boston Daily Globe*.

The Massachusetts Football Association

As the opening of this chapter notes, the November 1906 meeting laid the groundwork for a Massachusetts Football Association. The December 3rd edition of the *Boston Daily Globe* alleged a follow up meeting to happen on December 2, 1906 to solidify association details.⁸¹ Two additional meetings occurred on December 16, 1906 and January 6, 1907. The newspaper did not report on the first meeting, but the second, which resulted in the Association admitting New Bedford.⁸² The lack of reporting regarding the December 16, 1906 meeting may be due to several factors. First, it may not have happened. Second, reporters may have deemed it inconsequential since the formation of the league was already final and the second meeting received coverage summarizing the first. Three, newspaper may have disregarded as unimportant given the general lack of interest in soccer. Regardless of the reasoning, 1907 started with a brief notice that Lynn had removed themselves from the league due to “lack of finances,” and New Bedford would be replacing them with “one or two changes in the schedule.”⁸³ The lack of attention to detail surrounding the formation of the Massachusetts Football Association highlighted two things: the *Boston Daily Globe*’s struggle to detail the nuances of the Association and little popularity soccer enjoyed. Newspaper coverage suggested the details of a new association mattered only if locations close to Boston were mentioned. As a whole, the Massachusetts Football Association did not warrant sustained coverage.

⁸¹ “Article 6 -- no Title: Soccer Men Meet. Massachusetts Football Association Hopes to Include All Clubs and Leagues in the State,” *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁸² “New Bedford Admitted: Meeting of New England Association Football League at Fall River. Rules Committee Meets.” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 07, 1907.

⁸³ “New Bedford Admitted,” *Boston Daily Globe*.

It is important to note that part of the reason for an increased interest in soccer was the 1906 American tour of the Corinthians, an amateur English team, along with another amateur English team, the Pilgrims.⁸⁴ The *Boston Daily Globe* reported on the victory between the “All Fall River” team over the Corinthians in a full page 1906 article. The headline blared “British Soccer Team Gets its First Beating” and reported “in the presence of slightly more than 6000 [sic] persons the Englishmen were decisively beaten, 3 to 0.”⁸⁵ While English teams like the Pilgrims toured the U.S. in 1905 and 1909, the *Boston Daily Globe* makes no references to these tours, demonstrating soccer’s importance in the region was only when local, or near local, teams won.⁸⁶ A specific interest in reporting exclusively local soccer hurt the sport’s ability to grow as potential fans could not read about the sport. Additionally, the Pilgrims not playing in Boston again indicated that investors did not find the city profitable to soccer enterprises.

By May 1907, the Massachusetts League was functioning with some regularity—and continued financial questions. A May 13 article recorded “the regular message of the Massachusetts football association” hosted “a large number of delegates from the different clubs.”⁸⁷ The article also reported that Fore River requested an extension for paying their league dues for the season, which the Association granted.⁸⁸ The Association’s general business conducted at the meeting pointed to relative stability and cohesion within the Massachusetts League. Despite the “large number of delegates,” the

⁸⁴ Roger Allaway. *Rangers, Rovers and Spindles: Soccer, Immigration and Textiles in New England and New Jersey*. (Haworth, NJ.: St. Johann Press) 2005, 49. An important note: Allaway has the date as 1907 for the All-Fall Rivers victory, but no newspaper cited.

⁸⁵ “British Soccer Team Gets its First Beating: All-Fall River Shuts Out Corinthians of London, 3 to 0, Losers Having Won Every Previous Game in American Tour.” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 14, 1906.

⁸⁶ Allaway, 49.

⁸⁷ “Held a Lively Session: Massachusetts Football Association Meeting Attended by a Large Number of Delegates.” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 13, 1907.

⁸⁸ “Held a Lively Session,” *Boston Daily Globe*.

only other business point covered was a dispute between Andover and the McGregors because “it [the match] did not take place on neutral ground.”⁸⁹ The Association decided to resolve the issue in a “special meeting...when action will be taken.”⁹⁰ The *Boston Daily Globe* did not report the result of the Andover-McGregor dispute indicating, once again, that soccer received limited coverage in the sports section. Soccer was not popular enough to require special meetings to be reported, just Association general business.

Perhaps the most telling part of the coverage of the Massachusetts League was the lack of dedicated column space. When reporting Association game results, other sports results were recorded in the same column space. On July 5, Boston offered the Boston Rovers and Bostonians twin cups after playing to a tie.⁹¹ Also noted in the column was a recap of a Gaelic football match and a hurling match. The *Boston Daily Globe* combined soccer cup winners with ethnic games happening around the city, relying on Gaelic football, at this point substantially different from soccer, as the lynchpin. This clear connection in the minds of Bostonian newspaper writers further pointed to soccer’s removal from the core of Boston’s sports culture.

By August 1907, however, the Association was in danger of losing a number of teams due to increasing rancor from member teams. An August 18 article with the headline “No Business Done” noted that Lowell clubs, participating in the Massachusetts League, were “dissatisfied.”⁹² The clubs and their grievances, however, remained in limbo as the Association president declared that “he did not know when another meeting

⁸⁹ "Held a Lively Session," *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁹⁰ Held a Lively Session," *Boston Daily Globe*.

⁹¹ "Play A 3 To 3 Tie: Boston Rovers and Bostonians Contest at Soccer Football for Cups Offered by the City. Easy for Erin's Hopes. Gaelic Football Team Defeats A Picked Team for City's Purse. Game Ended in a Row. Wolf Tones and Young Shamrocks Started A Hurling Match, but the Former Withdrew." *Boston Daily Globe*, July 05, 1907.

⁹² "No Business Done," *Boston Daily Globe*, August 19, 1907.

would be held.”⁹³ No reference to a follow up meeting can be found in the paper, perhaps signaling that the Lowell clubs were allowed to form their own league apart from the Massachusetts Association League. Splitting into factions, or more local leagues, was not uncommon in this era, especially for teams looking to cut down on travel costs.

Reports of Massachusetts Association Football matches continued to appear in the *Boston Daily Globe*, but without the accompanying columns about board meetings. In 1908, an article announced “the committee of the Lawrence and Lowell association football league has arranged the following schedule...”⁹⁴ While Association Football continued to be found in the sports pages, the word Massachusetts was dropped, with articles simply referring to league play specifically by Boston league teams. Unlike American football, whose control of the sports pages meant their games rarely shared column space, Association Football results could be found next to, in this case, cricket matches.⁹⁵ The splintering of the Massachusetts Association League demonstrated soccer’s inability to remain organized. The *Boston Daily Globe* continued to focus on Boston soccer matches, but did not grant the sport its own column space, signaling soccer’s foreign nature by placing match results next to cricket game reports.

Sporadic coverage indicated both the lack of resources dedicated to Boston soccer and inconsistent interest. However, the fluid state of leagues also complicated coverage, with teams joining and leaving leagues throughout the early part of the 1900s. While matches were reported on, teams joined, left, merged with other teams, or formed their own association leagues. Without an overarching league, teams within Massachusetts

⁹³ “No Business Done. Association Football Clubs have Brief Session at Lowell, Which Maguire Leaves Early.”

⁹⁴ “Games to Begin Sept 12: Each Club in Lawrence-Lowell Soccer Football League Will Play 12 Times-- The Schedule.” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 11, 1908.

⁹⁵ “Games to Begin Sept 12,” *Boston Daily Globe*.

played opponents when they could, with older, more established teams having greater familiarity with the soccer landscape—and more talent to field. There was no clear talent pipeline in the early 1900s, except for recruiting talent from abroad. Communities with an early, strong soccer heritage had an advantage in recruiting talented players, making for greater entertainment, which in turn further established soccer in those select communities.

The American Soccer League

With leagues forming around the New England area, the relatively successful 1905 English soccer tour, and interest growing with proven revenue in places like Fall River, it was time for soccer to solidify into an organized, professional league in 1921. The American Soccer League (ASL) owed its existence to the United States Football Association (USFA), which became the national governing body of soccer in the U.S., despite the protests of the American Football Association (AFA), who served as the original governing body in the U.S.⁹⁶ With a Federation Internationale de Football (FIFA) provisional recognition, and then full recognition, USFA worked to establish a national league that encompassed the patchwork soccer hotbeds that had popped up across the country. USFA would do this despite protest from the AFA. Both governing bodies wanted to grow soccer in the U.S. However, competition between the two reduced the overall effectiveness of each organization.

Those founding the ASL quickly realized “there was no critical mass of American college players for the league to draw upon.”⁹⁷ Without colleges to produce instant,

⁹⁶ David Wangerin. *Distant Corners: American Soccer's History of Missed Opportunities and Lost Causes*. (Temple University Press, 2011), 44.

⁹⁷ Edward G. White, *Soccer in American Culture: The Beautiful Game's Struggle for Status*, (University of Missouri Press, 2022): 41.

homegrown stars, the ASL did not have a talent bed in the U.S. to draw from. Instead the league was forced to turn “almost exclusively to foreign players.”⁹⁸ Although the *Boston Daily Globe* did not announce the formation of the new league, the paper did run a story from New York. The article reported on “British soccer stars” that had “already begun to arrive here to get a place in the new league.”⁹⁹ Also included in the article was the decision of the board to allow each team to retain their own gate receipts, rather than pool ticket sales between them.¹⁰⁰ This profit model imitated the baseball leagues of the day, allowing individual owners to turn a profit for higher attendance figures, while smaller clubs would struggle. The recruitment decisions, as well as gate receipt debates, illustrated the lack of soccer infrastructure in the U.S. Borrowing financial policies from other leagues did not work when the initial, cheap talent base of college stars did not exist in the U.S. at the time.

Boston, although seeing growth within the district league, would be a tumultuous participant in this first iteration of a professional soccer league in America. The city’s more durable team would be the Boston Wonder Workers, who were ASL champions in the 1927-1928 season.¹⁰¹ Representing Boston, the Wonder Workers did not start getting *Boston Globe* coverage until ten games into their inaugural 1924-1925 season.¹⁰² Notably, the team played not in Boston proper, but on the Walpole fairgrounds, an approach that would be the norm for Boston soccer teams.¹⁰³ Despite a growing number of teams playing soccer, space inside Boston city limits created a scheduling nightmare,

⁹⁸ White, 41.

⁹⁹ “British Soccer Stars Joining the New League.” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 23, 1921.

¹⁰⁰ “British Soccer Stars Joining the New League.” *Boston Daily Globe*.

¹⁰¹ Colin Jose, *American Soccer League, 1921-1931: The Golden Years of American Soccer*. In *American Sports History Series, no.9* (The Scarecrow Press, London, 1998): 3.

¹⁰² George M. Collins, “Newark Plays Pacemakers: Looks Soft for Boston, but Upset is Possible Tomorrow’s Soccer National Cup.” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 24, 1924.

¹⁰³ Collins, “Newark Plays Pacemakers,” *The Boston Daily Globe*.

leading to the professional ASL team playing in Walpole, instead of Boston. The struggle for stadium space would encapsulate the fight soccer had for taking up space within a crowded sports landscape within Boston proper.

Scanning through the roster for the initial season of the Wonder Workers showcases the heavy reliance on recruiting talent from Scotland or England in the ASL. Of the twenty-five players on the Wonder Worker's inaugural roster, fifteen were internationals, two were Americans, and eight did not have a birthplace listed.¹⁰⁴ The majority of these foreign-born players, twelve in total, had come from Scotland, often playing with Scottish professional clubs before making the jump to the ASL.¹⁰⁵ The remaining three international players were two English players and a player from Ireland.¹⁰⁶ American talent on the Wonder Workers came from Ohio and Pittsburgh, two areas that had seen some success in soccer at the start of the ASL.¹⁰⁷ Players leaving high level English and Scottish clubs to come to the U.S. demonstrated interest in American soccer—or at least in playing for a few years in a new location. However, the import of talent spoke to the lack of professional pathways in the U.S. and the talent gap that required teams to recruit from overseas. American talent simply was not at the level needed to sustain a professional league in the U.S. at the time. Once again, in light of Boston's majority Irish demographic make-up, it is important to stress that the talent buoying the ASL was decidedly Scottish, although there was one Irish soccer player on the roster.

¹⁰⁴ Jose, 131 and "Player Register" 316-465.

¹⁰⁵ Jose, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Jose, 71.

¹⁰⁷ Jose, 71.

The roster of the Boston Bears, the Wonder Worker's replacement, tells a slightly different story. The Bears fielded a roster that was comprised mostly of Massachusetts talent. Although the 1929-1930 season was suspended "for failing to carry out program," the team resumed activities in the spring of 1931 with a roster that featured three Massachusetts players and another U.S.-born player.¹⁰⁸ The ASL at this time operated under a two-season schedule with matches played in the spring and fall. There were still two Scottish players on the roster: Tommy Adams, who played for the Wonder Workers previously and Charlie O'Hare.¹⁰⁹ The shift away from Scottish stars represented less a development of the U.S. game and more the failings of the ASL in Boston to recruit star talent. Most of the players on the Bears roster could not be identified, and the team folded after the Fall 1931 season.¹¹⁰ The Boston Bears represented the second iteration of a Boston professional soccer team but were less successful than the Wonder Workers in maintaining a long-term presence or bringing trophies to the area. The team's failure owed, in part, to the recruitment of Massachusetts talent, which could not compete with the Scottish stars dotting the league.

Ultimately, the ASL failed in Boston due to a lack of investment, repeated scheduling difficulties, and the absence of a local talent pipeline. For the Wonder Workers, after five years and a championship, the ending came suddenly. There was no mention of the team disbanding in a November 10, 1929 game recap, the last game before the *Boston Globe* would report the team was in trouble.¹¹¹ Four days later the *Boston Globe* reported, in a headline buried under news about Boston University's new

¹⁰⁸ Jose, 283 and "Player Register," 316-465.

¹⁰⁹ Jose, 283, 317, 426.

¹¹⁰ Jose, 283, 301.

¹¹¹ George Collins, "Whalers Defeat Wonder Workers," *The Boston Daily Globe*, November 10, 1929.

team and the lead story about a high school football team, that “the Boston soccer team will be disbanded after Saturday’s game...”¹¹² The article provided no details beyond information that “a ‘responsible’ Boston buyer is being sought” and certain players would immediately join the Fall River team.¹¹³ An update on November 17 updated the story with the headline declaring that “Wonder Workers Will Not Disband.”¹¹⁴ The club was turned over to James McDonald, who was to guide the team to “make a successful and financial merger” that would find new ownership for the team and allow it to continue to play in the Atlantic Coast League.¹¹⁵ The delay in disbanding was contingent upon new ownership emerging in Boston to buy the desperate Wonder Workers.

Unfortunately, that new leadership never emerged despite an upbeat article on November 24 announcing that the Wonder Workers were still in contention for a championship.¹¹⁶ With the team practically “been put away in moth balls,” the win generated “renewed life.”¹¹⁷ The article also marked the return of *Boston Globe* coverage instead of relying on special dispatches from Fall River. However, the “renewed life” lasted only until November 28, when the *Boston Globe* announced “Wonder Workers Have Disbanded.”¹¹⁸ The reasons for the team’s sudden dissolving centered around the failure of the Wonder Workers to provide a field to play the Providence Club.¹¹⁹ With the inability to field a team for a mandatory league game, the tentative continuation of the Wonder Workers fell apart, leading to the immediate disbanding of the team. The team’s

¹¹² “Wonder Workers May Disband,” *The Boston Globe*, November 15, 1929.

¹¹³ “Wonder Workers May Disband,” *The Boston Globe*, November 15, 1929.

¹¹⁴ “Wonder Works Will Not Disband—Team to Remain in Professional Soccer—Fall River Strengthened,” *The Boston Globe*, November 17, 1929.

¹¹⁵ “Wonder Workers Will Not Disband,” *The Boston Globe*, November 17, 1929.

¹¹⁶ George Collins, “Wonder Workers Keep in Race,” *The Boston Globe*, November 24, 1929.

¹¹⁷ Collins, “Wonder Workers Keep in Race.”

¹¹⁸ “Wonder Workers Have Disbanded,” *The Boston Globe*, November 28, 1929.

¹¹⁹ “Wonder Workers Have Disbanded,” *The Boston Globe*.

dissolution over a lack of a field demonstrated the way that while soccer could survive in Boston, it was not thriving, and even a professional sports team did not have priority over usage of a high school field.

The Boston Bears emerged to significantly less press coverage, resulting in less information known about the team. Unfortunately for the Bears, the team entered the ASL right as the League began to decline as a result of the ongoing economic depression. In their first season, the Bears folded after seven games and were “a squad of relative unknowns.”¹²⁰ There is no record in the *Boston Globe* of the Bears’ struggle to remain solvent and to complete the 1931 season or any season after that. There were, of course, game recaps, but with no mention of the team eventually disbanding and no attendance records, there is only speculation as to the exact reasons that the Bears folded. The ASL folded at the same time in 1933, due to ongoing financial struggles, but re-formed in 1934 without a Boston team.¹²¹ The silence around the Bears dissolution demonstrates that Boston sports writers were interested in a soccer team when one was available but were not particularly interested in calling for a team, just as sports financiers were not interested in investing long term in a permanent professional team.

The formation of the ASL offered a chance for growth, but, important to the narrative of soccer within the U.S., soccer was a relatively late addition to the organized sports world. In Boston, like elsewhere, baseball and college football overshadowed soccer. With “no tradition of soccer played in prep schools or college,” especially in the early days, there was “no movement to standardize the game’s rules.”¹²² Soccer’s late standardization contributed to the sport having to develop “under the distinct shadow of

¹²⁰ “The Year in American Soccer—1931,” American Soccer History Archives, accessed 20 February 2024.

¹²¹ “The Year in American Soccer—1934,” American Soccer History Archives, accessed 20 February 2024.

¹²² White, 54.

baseball” which was “run by individuals who often owned teams in connection with their businesses.”¹²³ In contrast, businesses sponsored soccer too as it developed in textile mill communities, but those businesses found themselves in economic trouble at the same moment that their sport started to coalesce into a professional league. Ultimately, the problem for Boston teams was the lack of support from personnel to locations for hosting games. Soccer made the pages of the *Boston Globe*, but most tellingly, the failure of soccer raised only an article or two. The newspaper’s silence spoke volumes; the demise of Boston’s professional teams was expected.

Collegiate Soccer

The *Boston Daily Globe* did not reserve the most consistent coverage for the Massachusetts League or for the newly founded American Soccer League. Instead, the exploits of the Harvard soccer team captured the most column space in the newspaper. Regular collegiate soccer coverage began in April of 1906. The *Boston Daily Globe* covered three of the games at length: Harvard’s loss to Haverford, win over Fort Warren, and future “intercollegiate match” against Pennsylvania on April 14 but the result of that match was not reported.¹²⁴ The season picked up again in December, with Harvard facing Haverford again in the intercollegiate championship. The recap remarked that “Haverford was much faster than Harvard,” but “Harvard had excellent chances to tie the score, but the Crimson did not take advantage of her opportunities.”¹²⁵ The *Boston Daily Globe*’s

¹²³ White, 54.

¹²⁴ "Soccer" To Their Liking: Harvard Men Defeat Fort Warren, 4 To 0. Yale Players Show Up Strong at English Rugby. Novices at Game, But Hold Britons To Tie. Play Rugby Like Veterans. Yale Men, Inexperienced in English Game, Hold Old-Time Players To No Score. Pennsylvania 4, Columbia 2." *Boston Daily Globe*, April 08, 1906.; "Sporting Notes." *Boston Daily Globe*, April 14 1906.

¹²⁵ "Haverford 2, Harvard 1: Crimson's First Defeat This Season. Haverford Unbeaten, and is Soccer Champion. Is Faster and Has Much Better Team Play. Soccer Football Results. By a Score of 2 To 1. Haverford Beats Harvard in Game for the Soccer Championship." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 09, 1906.

in-depth coverage of collegiate matches indicated familiarity with the sport. It also indicated a willingness to cover soccer provided the story was framed with a local angle.

After the 1906 coverage, Harvard soccer experienced a bit of turbulence. A catch-all article on December 14, 1906 reported on the instability across the college game. Harvard “has sent out a call” to elect the next captain.¹²⁶ Yale’s soccer team “has disbanded and the men do not feel like going back to training,” which prompted the Harvard soccer team to disband as well “to renew activities in the spring.”¹²⁷ The spring season appeared not to have happened as the next reference to a soccer match came in June 1907, where the game “was one of the poorest played” and from Harvard’s perspective, “the most discouraging that has been seen there this year.”¹²⁸ Harvard and Yale would meet in 1908, and that year marked a turning point for coverage, with the *Boston Daily Globe* providing more consistent coverage of collegiate matches, even including other school’s soccer schedules.¹²⁹ No Boston paper reported on the April 4 match between Harvard and Cornell indicating that, despite some progress being made, soccer still struggled with garnering consistent coverage.

Despite being played on college campuses, soccer had already come up against, and lost, the popularity contest against one of its primary opponents: American football.

During the tours of the Pilgrims and Corinthians, “none of the American commentators

¹²⁶ "Must Choose Between Five: Harvard Eleven Elects Captain Tuesday. Crimson Not to Meet Yale At Soccer This Year. Columbia Cancels, Giving Haverford Title. Yale-Harvard Game Off. Soccer Football Teams of Both Universities Have Disbanded. Columbia Cancels Haverford Game. Burns Is Amherst Manager. Waltham High Eleven Dined." *Boston Daily Globe*, December 14, 1906.

¹²⁷ "Must Choose Between Five: Harvard Eleven Elects Captain Tuesday. Crimson Not to Meet Yale At Soccer This Year," *Boston Daily Globe*,

¹²⁸ "Harvard Is Beaten 4 To 5: Bowdoin Gets Away with A Victory. Crimson Puts Up A Very Weak Game in The Field. Work of Brunswick Team Is Steady Throughout. Results of College Games Crimson Piles Up Errors. Seven Made in The Game, Which the Bowdoin Boys Win, 5 To 4. Harvard First to Score. Bowdoin Scores Winning Run. Celebrate at Bowdoin. Students Have A Great Time Over the Baseball Team's Victory on Soldiers Field. Holy Cross 2, Williams 0. Amherst 3, Alabama 2. Princeton 6, U. Of P. 0." *Boston Daily Globe*, June 13, 1907.

¹²⁹ "Cornell's Soccer Schedule." *Boston Daily Globe*, February 15, 1908.

seemed to assume that soccer could coexist with gridiron football, a game at the time exclusively played in colleges.”¹³⁰ There was even the sense that, since baseball was not played in the winter, soccer could operate then, giving fans something to watch.¹³¹ In England, “association football had a class dimension,” with players remaining “linked to British public schools, gentleman amateurs, and an ethos of playing the game not for money but for the joy of exercise and competition.”¹³² In America, gridiron football represented these interests, with soccer being seen as an immigrant sport played mostly in ethnic communities. Therefore, soccer, from the outset, did not enjoy the same level of promotion and publicity in America that it enjoyed in England, with American football instead interesting the upper and middle class. Individuals might choose to play soccer, but the sport as a whole would not enjoy popularity and would remain under the shadow of more American sports like baseball and football.

Just as professional baseball remains important to overshadowing the development of soccer, the role of collegiate baseball, as well as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), must be examined in limiting growth opportunities for soccer at the college level. Within the collegiate landscape, baseball, basketball, and football occupied the central development pathways. The “identification...as the team sports most central to the athletic programs of US colleges and high schools” rested largely on the belief that those programs “that members of the communities in which those colleges and schools were situated would want to follow the fortunes of their teams in those sports.”¹³³ In other words, in order to invest in sports at the college level, interest

¹³⁰White, 35.

¹³¹ White, 36-37.

¹³² White, 37, 40.

¹³³ White, 103.

had to be present from a wider base than just college attendees. It helped, of course, that all three sports mentioned, “had been created in America.”¹³⁴ At the collegiate level, soccer’s imported history prevented wider American interest in the sport which in turn prevented collegiate investment.

Here is where Boston, by virtue of Harvard, had an early pathway to establishing a soccer legacy. Starting in 1906, eastern colleges formed the Intercollegiate Soccer Football League (ISFL), whose members included Columbia, Harvard, Haverford, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale.¹³⁵ Despite these colleges playing yearly for a cup to relatively substantial press coverage from the *Boston Daily Globe*, the influence of these mostly Ivy League schools remained contained to the ISFL. The League did disband, once, in 1926 to reform as the Intercollegiate Soccer Football Association (ISFA), which included six new schools. It, however, still did not expand beyond the reach of New England and the region nearby.¹³⁶ Collegiate soccer’s inability to expand beyond the New England region delayed the growth of the sport. Development siloed into regions prevented a more consistent and expanded platform for soccer and limited recruitment efforts.

Even with relatively consistent play in the ISFL and then the ISFA, college soccer remained removed from creating sustained infrastructure that would enable larger community support. Part of the problem was a lack of knowledge about the game. With soccer a relatively new and still mostly immigrant sport, “[m]ost coaches knew almost nothing beyond what they’d picked up in PE class; many leaned on their experience of

¹³⁴ White, 103.

¹³⁵ White, 107.

¹³⁶ Wangerin, 109.

field hockey or lacrosse.”¹³⁷ The poor showings, lack of experienced coaching, and differences in rules “did not provide a great deal of entertainment.”¹³⁸ Without the financial backing or expertise to grow, only those colleges with programs proceeded to field soccer teams and were quite content to play the same six or so schools. Important to soccer’s development, college soccer only had eighty teams by 1939 and there was no NCAA sanctioned championship until 1959.¹³⁹ The infrastructure to support soccer and then to grow the sport was missing from the college level.

The different non-college leagues present around Massachusetts and Boston in the early half of the 20th century demonstrate that soccer had made some inroad and provided some post-collegiate development pathways. Harvard regularly played games and won the ISFL cup twice.¹⁴⁰ Despite team turnover and financial difficulties, there was a consistent Boston District amateur league within Massachusetts that had a regular season of games. Players could move from the collegiate level to one of these district teams, although the district teams were not profitable. There was, however, starting in 1921, a professional league where players could make money, with a team in Fall River. The new league did not dispel “the continued and widespread perception of soccer as an “ethnic” sport that recent immigrants, who learned the game outside of the U.S. played.”¹⁴¹ The rosters of these college teams highlighted: “good teams tended to rely on foreign students and natural athletes.”¹⁴² Thus, despite the successes, soccer remained a fringe sport, with relatively few participants, mostly of ethnic backgrounds.

¹³⁷ Wangerin, 102.

¹³⁸ Wangerin, 102.

¹³⁹ White, 108.

¹⁴⁰ White, 107.

¹⁴¹ White, 108.

¹⁴² Wangerin, 109.

The Counter Point: Soccer's Success Elsewhere in Massachusetts

As soccer struggled to organize itself and be successful in Boston, it continued to stake a strong hold in other areas of the state. Fall River, a textile town with a majority Scottish immigration base, continued to be the leading success story in organized soccer within Massachusetts. In 1901, five years before Boston leaders considered organizing into a local association, the Fall River Rovers won the soccer championship held during the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, defeating a team from Toronto.¹⁴³ The local press in Boston simply reported a seven-line article stating the championship “was won by Fall River from the Scots of Toronto by a score of 5-3.”¹⁴⁴ While an ethnic tag was left off Fall River’s team, the designation of the “Scots of Toronto” indicated just how closely tied soccer and ethnicity still was at the start of the 20th century.

More importantly, while Boston spent much of the early 1900s slowly forming small leagues that remained closely tied to location, places where soccer had already caught on participated in American Football Association games that ranged from the New England area to places in the Midwest.¹⁴⁵ Those playing Association Football instead,

tended to cluster in a few isolated communities distinguished by enclaves of immigrants from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Italy. The formation of soccer clubs in those communities began in the 1880s, and was directly connected to the presence of those immigrants. These clubs, which bore names such as the Kearny Rangers, the Fall River Rovers and East Ends, the Pawtucket Free Wanderers and Rangers, the St. Louis Thistle and Mound City Club, and the Chicago Thistles and Wanderers, were mainly composed of men who had migrated to the United States from Scotland or the Lancashire region in England, two early centers of association football in the UK. In many instances, the men who played on those teams made their livelihoods in textile factories.¹⁴⁶

Boston, on the other hand, had relatively few of these early immigrant populations, with the Irish immigrant population having elected to start and support Gaelic Games instead

¹⁴³ Allaway, 48.

¹⁴⁴ "Fall River's Honor: Wins International Championship in Association Football at Buffalo, Defeating Scots of Toronto." *Boston Daily Globe*, September 06, 1901.

¹⁴⁵ Allaway, 50.

¹⁴⁶ White, 37-38.

of the English import. As communities like Fall River cemented their soccer pedigree, Boston remained uninterested beyond collegiate games and a few league games. The grassroots still refused to take deep root.

Perhaps the most important counterargument lies in these textile teams participating in a restructured American Football Association (AFA). The 1910 *Spaulding Guide* to the sport covered the restructuring, reporting “the following clubs entered the competition for the cup in 1906: True Blues, Paterson Rangers and Celtics of Paterson, West Hudsons, Kearney Stars, Riversides and Caledonians of Kearney, Bronx Rangers and Burns Club of New York, O.N.T. and Scottish Americans of Newark.”¹⁴⁷ These AFA matches had also taken place in the late 1800s, but “the profitability of cup matches was adversely affected by an economic depression in 1893, and after 1898, cup tournaments ceased.”¹⁴⁸ Financial instability would plague each iteration of national and local soccer leagues, but the cup tournaments helped to raise the profile of the game.

Places outside of Boston regularly participated in cup competitions, hosted AFA meetings, and had support from USFA due to their longstanding soccer history. Granted these places had pioneered early soccer in the U.S. which granted them leverage, especially when dealing with USFA. With cities such as New York able to field successful teams, the argument for soccer as a rural sport falls short, further highlighting that Boston’s urban population demographics were the most significant challenge to developing soccer into a core part of the city’s sporting culture. Despite growth, soccer remained in baseball and football’s shadows, preventing clear pathways for growth, and lacking the infrastructure to thrive in a broader community.

¹⁴⁷ Allaway, 50.

¹⁴⁸ White, 42.

Conclusion

The double failure of the American Soccer League would not be the final time that Boston would attempt to find room in its professional sports landscape for soccer. The failure of a league to support itself, both with talent and revenue, within Boston city limits demonstrates the significant obstacles to creating a sporting culture with a non-American sport. In addition to talent and revenue issues, soccer that did not have the proper immigrant base to support itself in Boston. Soccer failed in Boston during the early to mid 1900s precisely for the reasons it had failed to gain a foothold in the late 1800s: the wrong demographics, a crowded sports landscape, and the inability to sustain a professional league fielded with local talent. Soccer remained a foreign sport suitable for the occasional report, especially when the teams involved were relatively local, but was not suitable for regular consumption within Boston city limits.

Already emerging were the storylines involving soccer as a rich, English sport that competed with the growing rich, American sport of football. Failing to become purely American, soccer would remain relegated to the sports pages an ethnic label that other smaller towns played. Although all sports are entertainment, instead of being the entertainment that the majority of athletes wanted to participate in, soccer remained outside. The sport could be compared to the still occurring Gaelic Games that attracted large crowds but were a spectacle that most Bostonians did not participate in as athletes. Local infrastructure allowed minimal participation at the college level, while amateur and semi-professional leagues also experienced minimal growth, rendering soccer relatively unpopular and unable to support itself—both financially and with star-power personnel.

The death of the ASL and its smaller rebirth in 1933 was not the last time that Boston and soccer would try to create sustained success through league play. The North American Soccer League (NASL) would operate from 1968 to 1985, serving as one of the precursors for Major League Soccer (MLS). Once again, league teams, rosters, and infrastructure help to illuminate the ways that soccer in Boston remained on the margins of sporting culture. Despite attempting to solve the financial questions the American Soccer League had left unanswered, the NASL left unresolved the question of where local, homegrown talent would come from, demonstrating how difficult implementing a top down approach to creating interest was in the sporting landscape. Without grassroots support and a fundamental understanding of Boston's population, soccer would remain unpopular.

Chapter Three:

Playing a Man Down: Boston's Sustainability Struggles in the North American Soccer League From 1967 to 1980

The American Soccer League (ASL) failed, technically twice. The first failure happened at the onset of the Great Depression. The second occurred when the scaled-back version never achieved the same prominence in the sporting landscape that the first had managed. Boston periodically had teams represented in the newly re-formed ASL, though not consistently. Often these ASL teams were the remnants of relocated teams trying to financially survive and hoping Boston would provide the needed fans. Teams like the Boston Wonder Workers (1924-1929) and the Boston Bears (only struggled to field a team on multiple occasions) appeared and disappeared in a landscape that long-term soccer hotspots still dominated such as Bethlehem Steel, the Fall River Marksmen, and the New Bedford Whalers.¹⁴⁹ The rebirth of the ASL in 1933 as a scaled semi-professional league where Boston teams saw some success signaled soccer had some life within the city, though professionally the sport was on its deathbed.¹⁵⁰ Without a professional league, soccer continued to be a second or even third tier sport within the Boston landscape. The sport maintained some popularity in specific ethnic enclaves and in locations near Boston, but not in the city as a whole.

It was in this scaled-back and subdued soccer landscape that the next hope for a permanent professional soccer league in Boston would emerge. In the mid-1960s, the

¹⁴⁹ Colin Jose, *American Soccer League, 1921-1931: The Golden Years of American Soccer*. American Sports History Series, No. 9. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 11, 70-72, 98-99, 130-131, 162-164, 197-197, 223-224, 243, 283, 300.

¹⁵⁰ Steve Holroyd and David Litterer, "Mid 20th Century: Soccer Lies Low in the Second Division," in *New England Pro Soccer History*, American Soccer History Archives, last modified February 17th 2008, accessed January 4th, 2024.

North American Soccer League (NASL) emerged as a contender for a permanent, stable, and United States Soccer Football Association (USSFA)-approved professional league. The new league granted Boston one of the first ten franchises, giving the sport a new life and a chance for the city to develop an amateur-to-professional pipeline that would lead to sustainable soccer in Boston and the region. The best asset to the growth of a professional league is organization. From the start, the NASL was embroiled in chaos and a so-called “soccer war.” To understand the chaotic soccer landscape in Boston, the chaotically organized NASL must be examined first.

Vying for Top of the Table: The NASL and the National Professional Soccer League Soccer Wars

The NASL grew out of direct competition with the 1967 National Professional Soccer League (NPSL), another burgeoning league attempting to capture the soccer market within the United States. The NPSL emerged first, with a launch season of 1967, while the NASL aimed for an inaugural season of 1968.¹⁵¹ Both leagues faced difficulties in gaining approval and recognition from USSFA. The governing body had charged the NASL twenty-five dollars “a year for its professional status.”¹⁵² Now, with there being multiple leagues interested in starting, USSFA decided “it wanted 4 percent of the gate receipts, 10 percent of any television money, and a \$25,000 franchise fee from each club.”¹⁵³ The NPSL rejected the fees, the NASL acquiesced, and so it was the NASL who received the USSFA’s official sanction.¹⁵⁴ What this meant was that the nascent NPSL

¹⁵¹ Dennis J. Seese, *The Rebirth of Professional Soccer in America: The Strange Days of the United Soccer Association*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 25.

¹⁵² Steve Holroyd and David Litterer, “The Year in American Soccer—1966,” American Soccer History Archives, last modified February 17, 2008, accessed January 3rd, 2024.

¹⁵³ Holroyd and Litterer, “The Year in American Soccer—1966.”

¹⁵⁴ Seese, 23.

was now operating without official sanctioning from USSFA, therefore receiving no support from the governing body.

The lack of support did not stop the NPSL from moving forward, despite a recommendation from the Federation Internationale de Football (FIFA) “that the leagues get together.”¹⁵⁵ FIFA wanted a singular, sanctioned league within the U.S., not two competing factions. A *Washington Post* article further detailed the animosity between the NPSL and USSFA, with USSFA president Frank Wood commenting extensively on the NPSL “spending plenty of money,” though not “wisely.”¹⁵⁶ In a September 1967 article, writer Andrew Beyer, who had been covering the emergence of the two leagues, reported “[t]he possibility of a merger between the two leagues, so confidently predicted only a few days ago has been blown to smithereens.”¹⁵⁷ The article also pointed out “a prolonged war between them would be tantamount to suicide.”¹⁵⁸ To those following the sport, the soccer infrastructure across the U.S. could not support two independent leagues (and the still running ASL). One of the best indicators of soccer’s state within the U.S. generally was that the contested franchise fee would be “earmarked for junior soccer and the promotion of soccer, little leagues and clinics” according to Wood.¹⁵⁹ A multi-tiered, amateur-to-professional, centralized soccer development landscape had not yet been built within the U.S., furthering hampering soccer’s growth.

The Boston media glossed over the infrastructure intricacies of two leagues, expressing only a cursory interest in the going-ons of both the NASL and NPSL. Starting

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Beyer, "Amateurs Grab Soccer War Payoff: Soccer Amateurs Grab Payoff." *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1967.

¹⁵⁶ Beyer, "Amateurs Grab Soccer War Payoff."

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Beyer, "Soccer Moguls Boot a Big One," *The Washington Post*, September 12, 1967.

¹⁵⁸ Beyer, "Soccer Moguls Boot a Big One."

¹⁵⁹ Beyer, "Soccer Amateurs Grab Soccer War Payoff."

in 1966, *Boston Globe* writer Tommy Holmes, after reporting on the 1966 World Cup, turned towards reports of a new league. Announcing that the NASL “hope[s] to have 10 [teams] when they start operations in 1968 and 14 two years after that.”¹⁶⁰ The Holmes’ article quoted Joe Barriskill, a youth soccer star and immigrant from Belfast, declaring “in the beginning, foreign players will be necessary to produce high grade soccer here. To starter, it is planned to have ten players from Europe, the British Isles, or South America and five American players on each team.”¹⁶¹ The report ended, rather glibly, with “[i]t sounds as though it might be fun.”¹⁶²

In 1967, one year before the proposed opening of the NASL, the league still did not garner much attention in the news. The first article to name the Boston NASL franchise appeared on January 20, 1967, detailing the ownership group for the soon-to-be team. The five-paragraph article named “Weston W. Adams, chairman of the board of both the Bruins and Boston Garden,” as one of the men in charge of the franchise, in addition to “Forrester A. Clark, Hans H. Estin, as well as many other well-known sportsmen.”¹⁶³ The article made sure to point out that the NASL was “the only professional soccer league recognized by the U.S. Soccer Football Association,” and the board would meet “later this month.”¹⁶⁴ With a Bruins board member primarily in charge of the new soccer team, it was clear that Boston intended on utilizing already existing sporting infrastructure to ensure the success of their new soccer team.

However, the next article would not be the results of the next board meeting but rather a reprinted *Associated Press* article on January 27 about the plan to conduct the

¹⁶⁰ Tommy Holmes, “Plans Afoot for Major Soccer Loop in U.S.,” *The Boston Globe*, July 29, 1966.

¹⁶¹ Holmes, “Plans Afoot for Major Soccer Loop in U.S.”

¹⁶² Holmes, “Plans Afoot for Major Soccer Loop in U.S.”

¹⁶³ “Boston’s Pro Soccer Club Formed,” *The Boston Globe*, January 20, 1967.

¹⁶⁴ “Boston’s Pro Soccer Club Formed.” *The Boston Globe*.

first NASL season with European professional teams.¹⁶⁵ While there is no way to know for certain how many people read the *Boston Globe* articles on soccer, the sporadic coverage of only major events indicates that writers and editors did not believe exhaustive coverage necessary. The article reported that the NASL “will begin regular season competition in May with teams imported from nine foreign countries.”¹⁶⁶ At the time of the decision, no specific team had been chosen to represent Boston. On February 9, 1967 an article would answer that question with owner W. W. Adams disclosing “that the Dublin Shamrock Rovers would represent Boston this summer in the North American Soccer League and that the team would play 16 games...”¹⁶⁷ The selection choice of the Dublin Rovers was a blatant attempt to appeal to Boston’s Irish-American population, since the use of foreign teams meant that there would be no local heroes.

Boston and other NASL cities resorted to importing foreign teams for a rushed 1967 season lies in the battle between the NASL and the NPSL. The *Boston Globe* did not mention the NPSL except to declare it a threat in one article.¹⁶⁸ Lacking official sanctioning, NPSL simply ignored USSFA and FIFA and instead orchestrated a coup: securing television rights before the NASL.¹⁶⁹ Dave Brady authored a *Washington Post* article that proclaimed “[t]he ‘outlaw’ National Professional Soccer League yesterday won the first—and possibly the decisive—battle in its world-wide war with the National American Soccer League.”¹⁷⁰ The article compared the deal to the American Football League’s television deal, noting that with secured broadcasting rights, “the 12-team

¹⁶⁵ “Foreign Players to Staff U.S. Soccer Loop Teams,” *The Boston Globe*, January 27, 1967.

¹⁶⁶ “Foreign Players to Staff U.S. Soccer Loop Teams,” *The Boston Globe*.

¹⁶⁷ Rob Sales, “Dublin Rovers to Represent Hub in Soccer, Play at Lynn,” *Boston Globe*, February 9, 1967.

¹⁶⁸ “17 NE, Soccer Teams Vie for Amateur Cup.” *The Boston Globe*, October 23, 1966.

¹⁶⁹ Seese, 30.

¹⁷⁰ Dave Brady, “‘Outlaw’ Soccer League Lands CBS TV Deal,” *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1966.

National is in business—to stay...”¹⁷¹ Additionally, pointing to the significance of the ten-year, ten-million dollar total deal, the article acknowledged that “CBS also telecasts National Football League and National Hockey League games.”¹⁷² The renegade NSPL had managed to defy USSFA and usurp the NASL once again, despite their unsanctioned status.

With the NPSL having secured a television contract, the NASL scrambled to close the gap between the two leagues, searching for ways to make up the television deal and year-earlier starting date the NPSL had. Having already planned to use 1967 as a year of exhibition matches, almost immediately rumors swirled that the inaugural season would simply involve importing European teams.¹⁷³ Scrambling, and with no broadcast deal of their own to announce, NASL leadership received official sanctioning on December 28, 1966 and announced it on December 29.¹⁷⁴ It was in this reprinted Houston article found in the *New York Times* that readers could find a schedule for the inaugural season with a reference to “a home-and-home schedule from April through September next year...”¹⁷⁵ Notably, this schedule would be unacceptable to the European teams due to it impacting their domestic schedule in both April and September.¹⁷⁶ The lack of attention to detail as the NASL scrambled to confront the NPSL demonstrated just how unprepared the NASL was to confront a competitive league, especially when lacking broadcast rights. The scramble also betrayed the truth that the NASL knew only one league would likely survive in the U.S. sports landscape.

¹⁷¹ Dave Brady, “‘Outlaw’ Soccer League Lands CBS TV Deal.”

¹⁷² Dave Brady, “‘Outlaw’ Soccer League Lands CBS TV Deal.”

¹⁷³ Seese, 31.

¹⁷⁴ Seese, 33.

¹⁷⁵ “New Soccer League Given Pro Sanction,” *The New York Times*, *Associated Press*, December 29, 1966.

¹⁷⁶ Seese, 33.

The NASL did not secure a broadcasting deal, despite a late 1967 rebrand to the United Soccer Association (USA).¹⁷⁷ The irony was, of course, that in the USA's inaugural season the league would be "consisting exclusively of foreign teams imported from around the world."¹⁷⁸ The rebrand was to emphasize the league's difference from the NPSL, with commissioner Dick Walsh announcing the change was made in order to "dispel any confusion which might have existed by reason of the similarity between our league name and the name of the unsanctioned group, the National Professional Soccer League."¹⁷⁹ It helped, of course, that the rebranded USA was blatantly patriotic. Without a television deal, the rebranded USA turned towards manufactured ethnic connections and patriotism in a bid to sell interest and tickets.

The name change would not solve the lack of broadcasting rights, but those involved in the decision hoped the new name might make soccer more palatable to fans and dispel myths of it being an imported foreign sport. Of course, directly appealing to Boston's Irish base was another method of attempting to court a perspective ticket base without having grown natural community-based support. After failing to support a pro-league twice before on a national scale, USA and NSPL were prepared to gamble on the idea that the American public was ready for not one, but two, professional soccer leagues.

Boston Shamrock Rovers—1967

The imported Boston Rovers, formerly Dublin Shamrock Rovers, entered this "soccer wars" landscape for the first NASL, now rebranded as the USA, season in 1967. A February 1967 article reprinted from the *Wall Street Journal*, quoted Boston franchise

¹⁷⁷ Seese, 39.

¹⁷⁸ Seese, 40.

¹⁷⁹ "Pro Soccer League Adopts New Name," *The Washington Post*, March 10, 1967.

owner Weston W. Adams as admitting “[w]e wanted that Kennedy touch,” when discussing why a team had been imported straight from Dublin.¹⁸⁰ Hoping to appeal to Boston’s large population of ethnic Irish, the Dublin Shamrock Rovers became the Boston Shamrock Rovers, or just Boston Rovers. The team would begin their season in May, playing six home matches and six away matches against other imported teams representing other hub cities in the abbreviated USA season.

From the beginning, the *Boston Globe* staff had questions about how the importation experiment would go over with American consumers. In April, a month before the season started, the newspaper ran an article from a *Dublin Daily Irish Press* writer who was also a member of the Dublin Rovers. Titled, “Soccer... Will it Go Over in Boston?” the article served as an introduction to the team, explaining the club’s winning record, the ownership structure, and the players making the journey to Boston at the conclusion of the Rover’s regular season.¹⁸¹ The article itself did not question whether Bostonians would show up; it simply introduced the team to perspective fans. By utilizing Pat Courtney, a member of the Rovers, to write the article, the *Globe* introduced readers to the Rovers without a mediator. By importing a writer, the *Boston Globe* also handed over their responsibility to cover the team. Only the title betrayed the question of support or the lack of it that potentially awaited the prominent Irish team. Tellingly, the Rover’s “unbeaten record” and the team’s accomplishment of having won “the coveted Football Assn. of Ireland cup three consecutive times” were mentioned within the first two paragraphs of the article.¹⁸² The marketing strategy for selling tickets appeared to be

¹⁸⁰ “If Soccer Fails to Go It Will Be a \$20M Boot,” *The Boston Globe*, February 19, 1967.

¹⁸¹ Pat Courtney, “Soccer... Will it Go Over in Boston?”, *The Boston Globe*, April 23, 1967.

¹⁸² Courtney, “Soccer... Will it Go Over in Boston?”

Pat Courtney's reporting for the *Boston Globe* and the Rover's winning record in Ireland—at least until Bostonians became proper soccer fans.

The season began in earnest on May 28, 1968, though the *Boston Globe* ran two features on the team's the first game. Neither profile focused exclusively on the business of playing soccer. A May 23 article outlined the social calendar of the newly arrived Dublin players, titled "Soccer's Their Game—and Partying Too."¹⁸³ The article, written by the *Globe's* society editor Marjorie Sherman, appeared not in the sports pages but the society pages due to the focus on a social calendar instead of a sports schedule. A May 27 article profiled Pat Courtney, with a brief history on his soccer career before focusing on the player's plans for "exploring Boston."¹⁸⁴ Courtney's article made overtures at connecting with Bostonians on a cultural, not sporting level. Knowing soccer's relative unpopularity, Courtney instead attempted to court publicity through tourism. The most soccer specific article was a profile on newly appointed head coach Kevin Walsh, also from Ireland, who had been named the coach of the USA Boston team set to play in 1968.¹⁸⁵ The new coach pointed out "[t]he important thing for Boston is to develop a winning team from the start. That will generate enthusiasm in the game and encourage youngsters."¹⁸⁶ The new coach hoped winning might be enough to legitimize soccer in Boston and move coverage from the society pages to the sports pages permanently.

Once the season began, and the Shamrock Rovers failed to remain undefeated, interest and coverage waned. The opening match against Belfast Glentoran (now known as the Detroit Cougars) warranted a four-column preview with pre-match quotes from

¹⁸³ Marjorie Sherman, "Soccer's Their Game—And Partying, Too," *The Boston Globe*, May 23, 1967.

¹⁸⁴ Bob Sales, "Rover Booters' Camaraderie Makes Courtney Proud Member," *The Boston Globe*, May 27, 1967.

¹⁸⁵ Kevin Walsh, "Hub Coach Develops Winners," *The Boston Globe*, May 16, 1967,

¹⁸⁶ Walsh, "Hub Coach Develops Winners."

both the vice president of the club and Pat Courtney.¹⁸⁷ The post-match analysis made note of “a paid attendance of 7,300” to see the 1-1 tie— “a disappointing one for Boston fans.”¹⁸⁸ Incorporating a play-by-play style that examined both teams’ tactics, the article ended on the positive, asserting: “[i]f they play 90-minute soccer with the verve and imagination of which they are capable of, even the most critical soccer fan will be entertained, and entertained well.”¹⁸⁹ The in-depth article demonstrated a genuine attempt by the *Boston Globe* at publicizing soccer as an exciting new sport in the Boston sports landscape while providing tactical information to potential new fans.

However, the coverage for the rest of the season failed to inspire entertainment or sustained interest. Only the match against New York would warrant a match preview since the *Boston Globe* quickly switched to exclusively match recaps for the rest of the season as it took the Rovers till July to secure their first win.¹⁹⁰ Of the twelve games played, the *Boston Globe* elected to cover nine of them in a season where the Rover’s won only two games.¹⁹¹ Attendance figures at Rover’s games in Lynn, Massachusetts dipped as low as 853 in a game against San Francisco Golden Gate Gales (admittedly “in a downpour.”)¹⁹² Rover’s beat writer Seamus Malin also made note of the attendance figures in a late June loss to Dallas, calling the turnout “a sparse crowd” in a “Gaelic feud” that should have generated bigger attendance numbers.¹⁹³ Although there was an early season profile on the Rover’s hopes to end the season top of the table, when the tour

¹⁸⁷ Bob Sales, “Rovers-Glentoran Soccer Clash a Natural,” *The Boston Globe*, May 28, 1967.

¹⁸⁸ Seamus Malin, “Boston Booters Tie in Debut,” *The Boston Globe*, May 29, 1967.

¹⁸⁹ Malin, “Boston Booters Tie in Debut.”

¹⁹⁰ Seamus Malin, “Rovers Stun Stars for First Win,” *The Boston Globe*, July 3, 1967.

¹⁹¹ Seese, 87.

¹⁹² Seamus Malin, “Gales Beat Rovers, 4-3, Before 853,” *The Boston Globe*, June 19, 1967.

¹⁹³ Seamus Walin, “1100 See Dallas Team Outclass Rovers, 4-1,” *The Boston Globe*, June 22, 1967,

wrapped up there was no mention of it in the *Boston Globe*.¹⁹⁴ Playing far from Boston proper and without a winning culture hurt general interest in the team, failing to pave the pathway for a more successful, local Boston team supposedly coming in 1968.

Did the Boston Shamrock Rovers achieve their goal of priming an American audience to engage with and enjoy soccer? Not to the extent that Boston franchise owners and USA leaders were hoping—though Boston was not the only city where appealing to ethnic backgrounds failed to generate sustained interest in soccer. Importing a team simply meant that the new league felt like an extended exhibition schedule, not helped by the fact that the Boston team finished at the bottom of their division.¹⁹⁵ The *Boston Globe* covered the team, though with the air of covering a foreign sport, not one that would remain a permanent part of the Boston sporting landscape. Meant to be a temporary solution, the Boston Shamrock Rovers simply demonstrated the myriad of ways soccer needed to grow both within Boston and the U.S. as a whole. A stronger indication of the fragile roots soccer had in Boston could be found in the next team to enter the city's sports landscape: the Boston Beacons.

Boston Beacons—1968

Although competition within the American sports landscape led to the creation of sustainable leagues – such as the National Football league (NFL)—multiple soccer leagues proved unsustainable despite rarely competing directly with each other in terms of overlapping teams in the same city. One reason is that soccer fans represented a smaller portion of total sporting fans in the U.S. After one season of direct competition and the name change to USA, the desired merger took place with the new league being,

¹⁹⁴ Kevin Walsh, “Hard-Tackling Shamrocks Set Sights on First Place,” *The Boston Globe*, June 3, 1967.

¹⁹⁵ Seese, 87.

once again, known as the North American Soccer League. The merger became official on December 7, 1967 and created a 17-team league.¹⁹⁶ Having finally settled the dispute, the new league retained sanctioning from soccer's governing bodies and aimed to start playing in 1968.

Mentioned in the *Boston Globe* as early as 1967, the Boston Beacons officially entered the professional soccer landscape after the merger between the USA and the NPSL. Tellingly, the first article to mention the “still-teamless Beacons of the National Professional Soccer League” in May 1967 came in an article titled “Soccer—Guest or Usurper?”¹⁹⁷ Due to a lack of soccer specific infrastructure, the NPSL would be using the Red Sox's stadium to host exhibition matches—prompting the *Boston Globe* writer Harold Kaese to take a hard look at the chances of success the new sport might have in its borrowed stadium. His conclusion was grim for soccer, which “needs a lot of missionary work, for it is a low scoring game in which the action drags.”¹⁹⁸ The Boston Rover's attendance numbers only seemed to prove Kaeses's point.

The Beacons survived for only a season. Ultimately, the team was brought down by a combination of being too expensive to survive and poor attendance—which a poor record did not help. Opening day was televised, with ownership admitting to the hope that airing the game would lead to “a larger crowd” for the second, untelevised game.¹⁹⁹ Initial attendance was 4,406.²⁰⁰ A May article appeared to answer the question of whether the gamble had succeeded, with Bob Sales writing, “[t]he Beacons fill no stadiums and

¹⁹⁶ Seese, 226.

¹⁹⁷ Harold Kaese, “Soccer—Guest or Usurper?” *The Boston Globe*, May 3, 1967. For those interested, Kaese wrote a similarly scathing article comparing hockey and soccer, although in this case the comparison was a little more favorable. The article is titled “Soccer Team Woos B's Fans.”

¹⁹⁸ Kaese, “Soccer—Guest or Usurper?”

¹⁹⁹ Leigh Monteville, “Will Beacons TV Gamble Pay at Gate?” *The Boston Globe*, April 26, 1968.

²⁰⁰ Monteville, “Will Beacons TV Gamble Pay Off at Gate?”

have no charisma. They are struggling.”²⁰¹ The major problem was “the indifferent attitude the public has taken towards soccer thus far.”²⁰² Between a dismal record and a lack of engagement with the team as a whole, the Beacons were failing to generate press, attention, or interest. More than that, the Beacons were losing more money than ownership was comfortable with, which meant it was likely the team would shutter its doors before grassroots efforts could be grown.

By the end of the season it was clear that the Beacons needed new leadership and the new influx of cash that came with the transfer. The *Boston Globe*'s season ending article acknowledged “[t]he rumors persist...that the team is for sale.”²⁰³ The paper confirmed the team was up for sale the same day with an article stating “[t]he Boston Beacons finished their first—and probably last—North American Soccer League season” with a win.²⁰⁴ Another September 9th article outlined the reasons the club failed. General Manager George McKenny admitted projections ““were based on an average attendance of about 7000,”” but the Beacons only averaged “4373” for “losses of nearly \$500,000.”²⁰⁵ That was an amount that the ownership group was not prepared to lose again. Ultimately, no sale was ever announced, and the Beacons simply closed their door, ending the professional soccer experiment in Boston. It seemed the soccer naysayers were right: Boston would never generate the ticket sales to make professional soccer a money-making endeavor.

²⁰¹ Bob Sales, “Soccer Apathy Doomed: Coach,” *The Boston Globe*, May 28, 1968.

²⁰² Sales, “Soccer Apathy Doomed: Coach.”

²⁰³ Kevin Walsh, “Beacons End Season at Fenway Today,” *The Boston Globe*, September 9, 1968.

²⁰⁴ Leigh Montville, “Beacons Up for Sale, Win Boston Finale, 1-0,” *The Boston Globe*, September 9, 1968.

²⁰⁵ Bob Sales, “Beacons Lose About \$500,000,” *The Boston Globe*, September 9, 1968.

The merger, a dismal season, low attendance...all contributed to the hasty demise of the Boston Beacons. The owners' reluctance to continue investing in an unprofitable franchise hastened that demise, as a year could hardly generate the kind of long-lasting support that gradually made a sports franchise profitable. To survive, the Beacons needed better players or more fans, both of which would have required ownership to shell out more dollars—something ownership refused to do. The failure of the Beacons to generate fans lay in a crowded sports landscape that relegated soccer to using a baseball field when the team was not playing. The lack of true American stars, fan knowledge, and an instant winning culture was the result of an almost century long neglect for the sport. The Beacons fizzled because there was no soccer culture to build on or recruit support from.

Boston Minutemen—1974-1976

Despite the failure of the Beacons to remain in the league for a second season, the Boston Minutemen entered the soccer scene in 1974 and survived until 1976. The new team announcement received little fanfare, just a single February 1974 article that told readers to “[a]dd the Minutemen to the list of teams that play professional sports in the Greater Boston area.”²⁰⁶ There was relatively little celebration in the lead up to the Minutemen's opening season. Leigh Montville, former Beacons beat writer, wrote about the Minutemen and the American Soccer League's Boston Astros having tryouts on the same day, remarking “the strange subterranean 1974 soccer struggle to the death has begun.”²⁰⁷ That article, comparing the tryouts of both teams, would be the only preseason leadup to the inaugural season. Like the Boston public, the *Boston Globe* was hesitant

²⁰⁶ “Team Scene: Minutemen Get in Step,” *The Boston Globe*, February 7, 1974.

²⁰⁷ Leigh Montville, “Boston Minutemen v” *The Boston Globe*, March 10, 1974.

about investing full resources in the new team, although they did regularly provide match recaps and announced potential player signings.

In fact, some soccer fans in Boston blamed the newspaper coverage for poor attendance. During their second season, in 1975, the *Boston Globe* reprinted a letter to the editor that blasted the paper for constantly mentioning “poor attendance...in the news coverage.”²⁰⁸ Writing under her husband’s name, Mrs. Anthony D’Andrea scolded the *Boston Globe*, arguing “poor reporting is partially responsible for this [poor attendance].”²⁰⁹ The letter to the editor hoped that the paper would start reporting on the successes of individual players instead of relying on big names like Pelé to generate attention. The media and fans did pay significantly more attention to the New York match, mostly because the arrival of Pelé led to such crowds that the NASL had no choice but order the match a replay due to mobbing.²¹⁰ However, star power could not generate attendance revenue every match, especially because the Minutemen had none of their own.

What ultimately forced the Minutemen to fold was a combination of falling attendance figures and continual relocation as there was no designated home field that lasted more than a season. Over the course of their three seasons, the Minutemen played in no less than six different home locations, making it nearly impossible for a consistent schedule or for fans to consistently plan on how to attend matches.²¹¹ The start of their 1976 season was delayed due to stadium negotiations.²¹² The mishaps continued, with a

²⁰⁸ Anthony D’Andrea, “Reporting Hurts Soccer Attendance,” *The Boston Globe*, August 10, 1975.

²⁰⁹ D’Andrea, “Reporting Hurt Soccer Attendance.”

²¹⁰ “NASL Upholds N.Y. Protest of Boston Game,” *The Boston Globe*, July 2, 1975.

²¹¹ Seese, 1196.

²¹² “Minutemen Opener Postponed,” *The Boston Globe*, April 16, 1976.

July 8 article enumerating the multiple gaffs the Minutemen had experienced. *Boston Globe* writer Ray Fitzgerald listed poor attendance numbers, the stadium debacle, canceled publicity events, and the sale of key players before summarizing, “the Minutemen situation has begun to resemble a train wreck.”²¹³ The writing was on the wall for the end of the franchise, especially with the sale of key players to try and keep the franchise afloat financially, though playing significantly worse soccer.

Minutemen owner John C. Sterge hastened his team’s demise by being investigated and eventually charged with violating federal securities laws in 1967. Poor financials ultimately led to the NASL suspending and then banning the Minutemen, effectively ending their run as Boston’s professional soccer team. The *Boston Globe* first reported the story in May 1976 with the alleged complaint stating that “the defendants did not tell investors that a part of the money they invested was being diverted into other interests.”²¹⁴ The Minutemen had been surviving on borrowed money and the club immediately turned to selling players to try and fund themselves in the midst of the investigation. By October, however, the finances were in shambles, and the NASL had stepped in with the *Boston Globe* reporting that “for failure to post payment and performance bonds” the Minutemen may be suspended.²¹⁵ Embroiled in a federal lawsuit, it was the end for the Minutemen, who had already struggled with generating ticket sales and paying for stadium use. Sterge’s lawsuit hastened the end of the franchise, but it was unlikely the Minutemen would have survived much longer anyways.

²¹³ Ray Fitzgerald, “Never a Dull Minutemen,” *The Boston Globe*, July 8, 1976.

²¹⁴ “US Sues Three Boston Firms, False Statements Charge,” *The Boston Globe*, May 25, 1976.

²¹⁵ “NASL May Ban Minutemen,” *The Boston Globe*, October 18, 1976.

For the Minutemen, a combination of low attendance numbers, unstable ownership, and lack of a permanent home field—on top of the NASL ban—shuttered the team, which left Boston franchise-less for the second time in the NASL era. While the peculiarities of the Sterge case added to the downfall of professional soccer in Boston, other complaints, like the lack of a permanent home field and poor attendance were longstanding issues that dated back to the early days of soccer in America. Boston had not invested in soccer specific infrastructure, or publicized the collegiate game, leaving the city with nowhere for potential soccer franchises to play. Furthermore, soccer was a novelty—a game for children to play but not something to regularly attend, especially since there were no American stars to take the press away from reporting sensational stories about the Brazilians and Englishmen playing in the league. Professional soccer in Boston was an experiment, one that by the time of the Minutemen, most residents expected to fail.

New England Tea Men—1978 to 1980

Into the vacancy that the Minutemen left entered the New England Tea Men, based in Boston from 1978 until 1980. The team came together quickly, with the first mention of Boston's new team coming in the same year they entered the NASL. A January 20, 1978 article announced “the Lipton Tea Co. unveiled the management end of its new franchise in the North American Soccer League.”²¹⁶ The article pointed out that, unlike the “defunct” Minutemen, the Tea Men “[have] everything that the bankrupt franchise did not, especially money” and that “[t]here were some local college stars at the

²¹⁶ Barry Cadigan, “Soccer’s the Game, New England Tea Men’s the Name,” *The Boston Globe*, January 20, 1978.

luncheon...”²¹⁷ The implication being that not only would the new franchise survive initial lean years, but that the team was interested in investing in local Boston players to create a college to professional pipeline.

Initial coverage was positive, with *the Boston Globe* devoting coverage to Tea Men tryouts and important player signings in the rather short buildup to the team’s inaugural season. Nevertheless, within the standard preseason and tryout coverage, there was also a February 5th article announcing “Toughest Opponent for Teamen—and Soccer—is Baseball.”²¹⁸ Although playfully arguing in the opening paragraph that the “million debunkers” declaring that soccer can never match baseball “will have to admit that the latest attempt is a first-class bid,” the article admitted that the two dates where both baseball and soccer would be played at the same time would “tell whether the international pastime will ever challenge the Great American One.”²¹⁹ Almost one hundred years after baseball owners had rented their stadiums to soccer teams, the two sports were still being compared with soccer permanently relegated to baseball’s shadow.

Midway through the inaugural season and amidst the game recaps (still no pre-match coverage) the *Boston Globe* highlighted Tea Mens head coach Noel Cantwell’s “major disappointment”...the crowd sizes.²²⁰ Cantwell spent most of his quoted time in the article discussing his squad construction, but spent the last three paragraphs making a plea to fans to “get a crowd of 30,000 for next Wednesday’s Cosmos game” noting that Schaefer Stadium could seat “61,000.”²²¹ The average crowd at the midpoint was 12,000,

²¹⁷ Cadigan, “Soccer’s the Game, New England Tea Men’s the Name.”

²¹⁸ Barry Cadigan, “Toughest Opponent for Teamen—and Soccer—is Baseball,” *The Boston Globe*, February 5, 1978.

²¹⁹ Cadigan, ““Toughest Opponent for Teamen—and soccer—is Baseball.”

²²⁰ Joe Dinneen, “Coach Disappointed in Tea Men Crowds,” *The Boston Globe*, July 12, 1978.

²²¹ Dinneen, “Coach Disappointed in Tea Men Crowds.”

although Cantwell did see 30,126 fans show up to see the New York Cosmos match, the record for the season.²²² The Tea Men had inherited the attendance woes of the Beacons and Minutemen.

Most telling about the ways soccer still lagged behind in the public's imagination was the lack of coverage and analysis about the Tea Men's loss in the playoffs. Only one article, published immediately after the loss as a game recap, and then a second article, published on August 11, the day after, titled "For Lipton and its Tea Men, 'Next Year' has Already Begun" covered the post season loss²²³ Aimed at convincing fans that this year was only the start, the article highlighted key players who would be likely to return to the squad, as well as the decisions facing the coaching staff. It also highlighted Lipton's commitment to investing long term in the Tea Men, quoting team president Derek Carroll as saying "'I'm not even counting the crowds for three years."²²⁴ Ironically, the Tea Men would only be a Boston fixture for three years.

After the success of the first season, coverage followed roughly the same pattern for the second season. However, cracks in the foundation started to show. Before their second season, the *Boston Globe* ran an article announcing "[t]he New England Tea Men are counting on kids to make professional soccer fly here, but an 8:30pm starting time for all home games seems hardly conducive to drawing tots to Foxboro's Schaefer Stadium."²²⁵ Despite arranging for later start times, "Judge Allen Dimond rendered a declaratory judgment that New England Harness Raceway had to give its approval for the

²²² Dinneen, "Coach Disappointed in Tea Men Crowds,"; Barry Cadigan, "Tea Men Surprise Cosmos, 1-0," *The Boston Globe*, July 6, 1978.

²²³ Bob Ryan. "For Lipton and it's Tea Men, 'Next Year' has Already Begun," *The Boston Globe*, August 11, 1978.

²²⁴ Ryan, "For Lipton and it's Tea Men, 'Next Year' has Already Begun."

²²⁵ Barry Cadigan, "Tea Men Will Keep Kids Up with Late-Hour Games," *The Boston Globe*, December 10, 1978.

Tea Men to play in Schaefer Stadium on any day there was racing at the track.”²²⁶ By March 29, the Tea Men had decided to play their home games at Boston University’s Nickerson Field.²²⁷ The move, combined with a dismal season, saw attendance figures drop to “their smallest home crowd ever, 1,446,” although the average crowd size for the Tea Men appeared to be around 5,000 per home game.²²⁸ Nickerson Field proved to be a poor substitute for Schaefer Stadium, and, despite being located in Boston, lacked the turnout that the Tea Men had previously enjoyed in their inaugural season.

The scheduling conflicts and lack of a secure home stadium would ultimately force the team to move from Boston to Jacksonville, Florida. The 1980 season opened with rumors of discontent—the *Boston Globe* ran an article titled “Lipton Denies Disenchantment with Tea Men” aimed at reassuring soccer fans in Boston that the company wanted the team to stay and had, in the words of team president Derek Carroll, ““strong commitments” to the local soccer scene.²²⁹ A midseason article outlined the problems facing the Tea Men schedule-wise: “does even the giant Lipton Co sell enough tea to continue to support a professional soccer team if only 4329 fans show up?”²³⁰ Despite moving back to Schaefer Stadium, conflicts with the race track next door prevented the Tea Men from playing at times conducive to attracting casual fans. Lipton team ownership hoped the summer months would see an increase in fans.²³¹ Even with a

²²⁶ Will McDonough, “Team May Have to Leave Schaefer as Harness Track Wins in Court,” *The Boston Globe*, March 22, 1979.

²²⁷ Joe Dinneen, “Tea Men Make Move to Nickerson Field,” *The Boston Globe*, March 29, 1979.

²²⁸ Barry Cadigan, “Tea Men Fall, 3-1” *The Boston Globe*, May 24, 1979; Barry Cadigan, “Tea Men Blanket Cruyff,” *The Boston Globe*, May 31, 1979; Steve Marantz, “Tea Men Flag Down Express, 3-1,” *The Boston Globe*, July 1, 1979; Barry Cadigan, “Tea Men Win Big One, 2-1,” *The Boston Globe*, July 29, 1979.

²²⁹ Barry Cadigan, “Lipton Denies Disenchantment with Tea Men,” *The Boston Globe*, April 16, 1980.

²³⁰ Barry Cadigan, “Wither Tea Men?” *The Boston Globe*, May 15, 1980.

²³¹ Cadigan, “Wither Tea Men?”

potential attendance boost though, the Lipton leadership was beginning to view the constant scheduling legal struggles as a detriment to the success of soccer in Boston.

The writing was on the wall at the end of the 1980 season. Press coverage focused almost exclusively on speculation of where the Tea Men might play their next season. In October, an article surfaced where Team President Derek Carroll admitted that the Tea Men, ““may not be in Schaefer Stadium,”” though they could ““be moved to another New England city.””²³² A follow up article on November 11 detailed plans to have the Tea Men play in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, historically a soccer hotbed.²³³ A November 17 follow up listed “only 721 fans” at an indoor game that the *Boston Globe* speculated to be the Tea Men’s last in Boston.²³⁴ Two days later the news was official: “the New England Tea Men officially became the Jacksonville Tea Men yesterday, going south to avoid the headaches they have had with Schaefer Stadium.”²³⁵ It was the end of professional soccer in Boston, driven by low attendance numbers and a prolonged battle for space and prime time slots at Schaefer Stadium. Ironically, upon arriving in Florida, long term Tea Men beat reporter Barry Cadigan reported that the Tea Men “are still having schedule problems.”²³⁶

The Tea Men never saw the attendance figures that would have led to a sustainable club, mostly because the team came second to racing interests and lacked a stable home field. Despite the money Lipton Tea Company poured into the endeavor, the lack of soccer infrastructure made it impossible to generate sustainable grassroots

²³² Barry Cadigan, “Tea Men Will Play Next Year But it Could Be Far From Here,” *The Boston Globe*, Oct. 23, 1980.

²³³ Barry Cadigan, “Tea Men Take Step Closer to R.I.,” *The Boston Globe*, November 11, 1980,

²³⁴ Barry Cadigan, “Tea Men Florida-Bound?” *The Boston Globe*, November 17, 1980.

²³⁵ Barry Cadigan, “It’s Official—Tea Men Moving South,” *The Boston Globe*, November 19, 1980.

²³⁶ Barry Cadigan, “Tea Men Schedule Wrong Nights,” *The Boston Globe*, December 21, 1980.

support. The needs of the racing track ownership group had priority over professional soccer, relegating it to secondary status and preventing its long-term success in the Boston sporting landscape. The New England Tea Men's three years in the NASL demonstrate that what was holding Boston back from the professional soccer scene was not money—the Lipton Tea Company had plenty—but a lack of soccer specific infrastructure and an unwillingness to change that fact.

Conclusion

Even the NASL and the growth of soccer as a whole in the United States was not enough to save professional soccer in Boston. There would be no long-lasting soccer franchise within Boston city limits due to the same factors that had prevented soccer's permanence before: a lack of support within the city's ethnic populations, a lack of infrastructure that allowed local athletes to work from amateurs up to professional, and an already crowded professional sports landscape that had little room for a new sport with chaotic leadership. Financial insolvency, a problem ubiquitous across the NASL landscape, prevented a team from surviving for longer than two years, making it nearly impossible for fans to build a connection with a team that was often shuttered after an initial season or two.

The focus of this chapter centers on Boston teams within the NASL because the mark of a sustainable sports culture in American remains a professional sports team. As evidenced through the tumultuous teams of the NASL, Boston largely failed at supporting professional soccer within the confines of a professional league. However, not to be overlooked is the multitude of semi-professional and amateur teams operating within city limits. Part of the reason professional soccer struggled was the Portuguese and

Latin American immigrants who had been early supporters of soccer already supported amateur and semi-professional teams in Massachusetts and were unlikely to show up to support any of the four pro iterations.²³⁷ Instead of promoting a team from Luso American Soccer Association (LASA), which, while not a professional league did not have the attendance issues the iterations of the Boston NASL team had, leadership continued to ignore one set of ethnic connections in favor of growing the game from scratch. Ultimately, by ignoring the semi-professional and amateur leagues in the Boston area, the NASL failed to develop a serious marketing strategy or capture sustained fan attention.

The failure to develop an amateur to professional pipeline, as well as to identify and promote talent from Boston semi-professional and college teams hurt professional soccer within Boston. Still attempting to throw off the “foreign” label, the lack of local talent dotting the Boston professional team rosters kept soccer from embedding itself deeply in the community. Collegiate games and LASA events had fewer attendance issues due to the deeper, grassroots connections that served as a built-in marketing campaign for drawing spectators. Had the NASL utilized the successes of these two areas of soccer in their marketing and community building efforts, perhaps one of the three non-imported professional teams would have survived past the initial growing period. The siloing of semi-professional, amateur, collegiate, and professional levels of soccer in Boston prevented a flourishing, multi-tiered soccer ecosystem from developing in the city.

Old foes contributed to the routine failure of a professional soccer team to remain prominent within the city’s sporting landscape. Among those, the shadow of baseball

²³⁷ Seese, 196.

loomed large, and, while not directly responsible for the structural and financial reasons that soccer failed to thrive, certainly was always seen as direct competition in the popular imagination. The direct priority of racing track interests over soccer removed the Tea Men from their base at Schaefer Stadium and eventually forced the team to relocate to Jacksonville, Florida. In fact, a lack of a soccer-specific stadium was an issue for each Boston NASL franchise, creating a chicken-and-the-egg dilemma of soccer needing to be popular enough to justify its own spaces, but needing its own spaces to secure its future.

Not that Boston was particularly unique in their struggles to support an NASL franchise—or rather, any professional soccer. Tea Men beat writer Barry Cadigan wrote a 1980 *Boston Globe* article that opened by stating, “[t]he North American Soccer League continues to run an organization that has everything that the major sports leagues in this country have. Everything that is, except adequate attendance.”²³⁸ Soccer was slow to catch on in the United States as a whole, largely due to its second-tier status in the sporting landscape. Relying on big-time foreign names like Pelé attracted crowds, but those crowds were not sustained after the star-power left—and no American stepped into the limelight to catapult soccer to homegrown fame. The NASL expected to capture the national imagination in a few short seasons, but winning over the American public proved to require a longer financial investment than most league owners were comfortable with.

²³⁸ Barry Cadigan, “IRS the Key to NASL’s ‘Success,’” *The Boston Globe*, September 18, 1980.

Conclusion:

Extra Time: The Inherited Legacy of Boston's Struggle to Develop Professional Soccer

Boston today technically has two soccer teams: the New England Revolution of Major League Soccer (MLS) and a still-to-be-named National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) team debuting in 2026. The Revolution, in reality, play forty-five minutes away from Boston proper in Foxborough, playing on Gillette Field's turf in a stadium the team shares with the New England Patriots, an American football team. The incoming NWSL team is Boston's second women's franchise—the Boston Breakers ceased operations in 2018. With no designated professional soccer stadium, the new NWSL team is considering playing at White Stadium in Boston, which seats 10,000 people...and is in a residential zone with no parking. Already the proposal is generating controversy. Boston Public Schools use the field for events and residents are worried about “parking nightmares, traffic jams, and other commuting woes...”²³⁹ Resident concerns now echo those resident concerns of the 1970s, when the Minutemen struggled to find parking for fans of Pelé. Soccer is, technically, in Boston, but remains rootless and disconnected from tradition, for all of the reasons previously described in this thesis.

Soccer's failure in Boston is not necessarily unique. Soccer has routinely lagged behind sports like football, baseball, and basketball across the United States. Its development has been fragmented, with several “soccer wars” making it difficult to determine the governing body for United States soccer, and several leagues are now defunct. Mostly the sport has remained relegated to specific communities, in specific

²³⁹ Tanisha Bhat. “Residents Voice Concern Over White Stadium Proposal,” *The Bay State Banner*, 19 July, 2023.

locations that either have a soccer history or are comprised of immigrants from places known for soccer. Boston, for large portions of its history had neither of those elements. Mill towns around Massachusetts supplied waves of first English, then Scottish, and finally Portuguese immigrants who created local soccer hotbeds. These small-town hotbeds mostly never achieved professional league status due to their relatively small populations that led to lower attendance numbers than a professional league would prefer. Soccer is not a Massachusetts wide failure. Places like Fall River have won several prestigious tournaments in American history. But soccer is a Boston-specific failure for reasons that date back to the late 1800s.

Viewed with suspicion, ethnic connections contributed the key part of soccer's patchwork development in the U.S. Soccer thrived in textile mill communities due to the strong soccer culture Scottish and English immigrants brought with them. Boston, from the beginning, had a population uninterested in soccer and more focused on establishing Gaelic games and associations within city limits. Irish immigrants also took advantage of established paths to legitimate professional careers available in baseball.²⁴⁰ Soccer, however, had no professional pathways available to them as there were no professional pathways until the 1920s, and even then, pay was low and an amateur to college to professional pathway was relatively absent. In a crowded sports landscape, soccer registered as a collegiate or amateur sport that was more entertainment than legitimate sport. Whereas ethnic connections helped soccer to thrive and win amateur championships in places like Fall River and New Bedford, however, those same ethnic connections were largely missing in Boston.

²⁴⁰ Paul Darby. "Gaelic Sport and the Irish Diaspora in Boston, 1879-90." *Irish Historical Studies* 33, no. 132 (2003): 390.

Later on, ethnic connections had another role in slowing down the growth of professional soccer within Boston. The Portuguese were the next big immigrant group to bring soccer to Massachusetts. Ludlow and Springfield, Massachusetts are evidence of the Portuguese impact on soccer culture within the state, with Lusitano Stadium being the hallmark (and claims to be the only soccer specific stadium in New England).²⁴¹ However, these strong Portuguese ethnic connections ultimately might have hurt professional soccer in Boston. At the same time that the NASL was struggling to keep a team in Boston due to poor attendance and lack of a secure playing field, Portuguese Leagues like the Luso American Soccer Association (LASA) had no such problems.²⁴² Instead, with Boston professional team struggling to generate fans, “the large Portuguese community of New Bedford, Fall River and Taunton preferred the intimate atmosphere at municipal games to the professional games of NASL teams.”²⁴³ Already having built successful amateur and semi-pro teams, Portuguese immigrants felt no desire to support “a lesser product.”²⁴⁴ Once again, ethnic bonds hindered the advancement of professional soccer in Boston, this time with potential fans having already built connections to semi-professional teams. Instead of elevating one of those teams to the NASL, Boston continued to try and sponsor a professional team that made no effort to build inroads with an already established soccer community. The Portuguese would support LASA games, and NASL teams would have to find their fans somewhere else.

²⁴¹ “Lusitano Stadium: About Us,” *Western MA Pioneers*, accessed 27 February 2024; Frank Dell’Apa, “From Lusitanos to Pioneers: An Old Mill Town’s Enduring Legacy,” *United States Soccer*, March 19, 2022.

²⁴² Seese, 196.

²⁴³ Steven Apostolov, “Everywhere and Nowhere: The Forgotten Past and Clouded Future of American Professional Soccer from the Perspective of Massachusetts,” *Soccer and Society* 13 (no.4, 2012), 526.

²⁴⁴ Seese, 197.

The failures of soccer in Boston are not entirely unique. Soccer in general struggles with attendance numbers, soccer specific infrastructure, and popularity. For example, the New England Revolution are one of six Major League Soccer teams who do not play in soccer specific stadiums.²⁴⁵ In an effort to combat low attendance numbers, MLS, “struggling to fill cavernous NFL facilities that regularly topped 60,000” moved the majority of their franchises into “‘soccer-specific stadiums’ with capacities around 20,000.”²⁴⁶ While the move dramatically increased soccer infrastructure in the United States, it was also an admission “that the popularity of the league would never exceed that level—and that its fans would never reach the number...”²⁴⁷ In the 2023 season, the average attendance for the New England Revolution was 23,940, but the capacity for Gillette Stadium is around 64,000—something the Revolution expect to reach only once this season: when Lionel Messi is in town.²⁴⁸ The 23,940 average represents the club’s recent heavy investment in creating a world-class environment to try and retain fans.²⁴⁹ Over six failed professional teams later, it seems that soccer in New England is finally attempting to the grassroots infrastructure that would allow soccer to flourish in the area. Attendance, long a struggle, is one of the battlegrounds that the Revolution have, after twenty-eight years, finally started routinely winning.

However, tracing the history of professional soccer in Boston illuminates some of the unique reasons the sport failed to catch on while contributing to a larger analysis of soccer in the United States. This thesis argues that early Boston immigrant groups elected

²⁴⁵ “Stadiums Built or Renovated for MLS Team,” Major League Soccer, last modified 22 November 2021.

²⁴⁶ Morgan Wick, “Why MLS May Be Making a Huge Mistake,” *Bleacher Report*, November 21, 2011.

²⁴⁷ Wick, “Why MLS May Be Making a Huge Mistake.”

²⁴⁸ “2023 MLS Attendance,” *Soccer Stadium Digest*, modified October 22, 2023; “Revolution See Rise in Ticket Sales for 2024 Despite Late Season Struggles,” *Sports Business Journal*, December 12, 2023.

²⁴⁹ “Revolution See Rise in Ticket Sales for 2024.”

to focus on Gaelic sports and paid little attention to soccer, thus, Boston did not develop the proper infrastructure, fan support, and community aspects needed for professional soccer. By the time professional leagues arrived, soccer was competing with pre-established teams like the Red Sox or the Bruins, who had spent the time cultivating community relations, had a history within the community, and were known entities. American Soccer League teams by contrast heavily recruited from Scotland and England, making the team rosters foreign and thus tacitly supporting the idea that soccer was foreign. The North American Soccer League had the same problem, relying on foreign stars to draw crowds, further enforcing the idea that soccer was not an ‘American’ sport but instead a sport the rest of the world played. Today, the New England Revolution have nineteen players from the United States on their 2024 season roster.²⁵⁰ Of those nineteen players, two are from Massachusetts, although one is a supplemental player who has yet to see the field, and the other currently represents England in the U-19 system.²⁵¹ Tellingly, one of the Revolution’s homegrown players, Esmir Bajraktarevic, is from Appleton, Wisconsin; the Revolution bought his rights in 2021.²⁵² Massachusetts, and Boston in particular, is not a hotbed of American soccer talent at this point in time.

There is no one reason any given professional soccer team that tried and failed to sustain itself in the Boston sport’s ecosystem failed. Instead, it was a combination of soccer’s relative unpopularity, combined with Boston’s unique ethnic makeup and sports infrastructure challenges that made it difficult for professional teams to last. Decisions

²⁵⁰ “New England Revolution Squad,” ESPN, accessed 27 February 2024.

²⁵¹ “Roster,” *New England Revolution*, accessed 27 February 2024; “Revolution Homegrown Players Noel Buck and Esmir Bajraktarevic Earn National Team Call Ups,” *New England Revolution*, November 13, 2023.

²⁵² “Esmir Bajraktarevic,” *The New England Revolution*, accessed 27 February 2024.

made in the 1870s delayed soccer's organization till the early 1920s, which prevented soccer specific stadiums from being built and maintained while allowing sports like baseball and football, who had already organized, to co-op soccer initiatives to fill their stadiums in the off-season. With little fanfare surrounding two ASL teams, newspaper coverage was spotty, games were played outside of Boston, fans could not expect reliable coverage, and there was the untimely event of the Great Depression—all of which contributed to two different teams becoming defunct. The Great Depression dashed the hopes of a professional team coming to Boston. By the time of the NASL, the neglect for soccer specific stadiums, no clear professional development pathway, and a lack of community engagement had become the pattern for nearly a century. There was no reason to believe that Boston could suddenly manifest large attendance numbers, convincing revenues, and star power in the span of a few short months with no grass roots development efforts. It was too late to save any of the three NASL professional soccer iterations, though the league itself did not long outlive the last of the Boston franchises. The failure of soccer in Boston can be traced back to the 1870s, but it is a story of continued neglect by those attempting to grow the game and wrong place, wrong time for trying to sustain professional soccer in the city.

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