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History of Soccer – The Establishment of the Laws of the Game

The history of soccer, like many sports, can make for interesting reading, as the formation of the sport came from the amalgamation of many different pastimes. While the question of when soccer officially began can be answered with a date and place, the origins are harder to define due to the similarities to other ball sports. For the rules of soccer, however, the history is clear.

On the morning of October 26th 1863 at the Freemasons Tavern in Great Queen Street London, England, the first of many meetings took place to form a governing body and to begin to create official rules and regulations for the game known as Association Football (also known as Soccer). It was at these meetings that the game we recognize as either Football or Soccer became structured and organized, with defined laws and rules for players. Following the formation of these laws, players other than the “marks” (goalkeepers) were not allowed to use their hands. Prior to the formation of these rules, similar games existed, some with the use of their hands, some with unlimited physical contact but none with structure or organization that later followed. For example, there is evidence supporting the occurrence of a game as far back as 1004 B.C., where it is believed players in Japan kicked a ball around a small field. In addition, the Munich Ethnological Museum in Germany has a Chinese text from approximately 50 B.C. that mentions games very similar to soccer which were played between teams from Japan and China. Unfortunately, while historians kept records of events such as wars and religious movements they had very little interest in preserving the various origins of soccer or many other sports, so no one can say how soccer seems to have spread from Asia to Europe. Historians have referenced games using balls resembling soccer in Europe since Roman times but the most detailed and accurate documentation of games played, which led to the formation of the rules of soccer, come from England in the 1800’s.

It was the varying forms of football played in public and private schools of England that led to the meetings at Freemasons Tavern. All over England similar games were played with varied rules such as the Cambridge Rules, which were first drawn up at Cambridge University in 1848, and rules set by John Charles Thring of Uppingham School in 1862. All of these rules eventually contributed to the establishment of the Football Association in 1863. Under the charge of Ebenezer Cobb Morley, eleven clubs went on to ratify the original fourteen laws of the game. Yet with the continued existence and use of varied rules, confusion persisted. That is, until the formation of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) in 1886 following a meeting in Manchester, England. The Football Association, the Scottish Football Association, the Football Association of Wales and the Irish Football Association all attended this meeting and formed the IFAB board to ensure consistency in laws and rules of the game. Following the formation in Paris in 1904 of the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the international football body declared that they would adhere to laws of the game of the Football Association. In 1913 the IFAB admitted FIFA representatives onto the board,

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which today consists of four representatives from FIFA, and one representative from each of the four British associations.

The rules of the game are still determined by the IFAB when they meet to discuss and ratify changes in the laws at their Annual General Meeting, which usually takes place in February or March. These meetings occur in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in strict rotation, as well as locations decided by FIFA in years when the FIFA World Cup is held, the most recent meeting taking place in Zurich at the beginning of March.

There have been few major changes to the laws over the years, as the IFAB, a generally conservative organization, believes that the attraction of the game of football resides in its simplicity. As guardian to its laws, the IFAB seeks to preserve the original seeds on which the football has blossomed so spectacularly. Although the IFAB have limited the amount of changes and the severity of the amendments, there have still been major milestones in the development of the laws and rules to which we adhere today.

Major rule amendments timeline:

1863: The Cambridge Rules are rewritten to provide the game's first uniform regulations.

1866: The offside law is changed to allow players to be onside provided there are three players between the ball and the goal.

1891: Introduction of the penalty-kick.

1925: Amendment of the offside rule from three to two players.

1958: Substitutes are permitted for the first time, albeit only for an injured goalkeeper and one other injured player.

1970: The system of red and yellow cards is introduced for the 1970 FIFA World Cup finals.

1988: The goalposts must be of white color.

1990: The offside law is changed in favor of the attacker, who is now onside if level with the penultimate defender.

1990: The “professional foul” rule is introduced, whereby a player is dismissed when they intentionally impede a player who is moving towards his opponents goal with an obvious opportunity to score a goal.

1992: Goalkeepers are forbidden from handling back-passes.

1996: The “advantage clause” is established whereby if the referee applies the

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advantage and the advantage, which was anticipated, does not develop at that time, the referee shall penalize the original offence.

The most recent amendment to the rules was made at the 123rd Annual General Meeting in Newcastle, Ireland on February 28th 2009, and came into force on July 1st 2009. To see the Latest rules of the game: please paste the following link into your browser:

<http://www.fifa.com/mm/document/affederation/federation/81/42/36/lawsofthegameen.pdf>

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