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EXTENDED ESSAY

HISTORY

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF FOOTBALL
IN SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA
AS A REFLECTION OF THE ONGOING
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISPUTES

3,986 WORDS

Abstract

How did the attitudes of the Costa Rican government and the Catholic Church to the early development of football in the country's capital of San José reflect the ongoing struggle for social influence?

That is the question that this essay attempts to answer, exploring the early introduction and appropriation of football in San José; examining the years between the first game, in 1876, and the founding of the Football Federation in 1921, focusing particularly on the turn of the century included among those years. In this essay, it will be seen that both the Liberal government that ruled Costa Rica at the time, and the Catholic Church that was trying to regain power it had lost in the late 19th Century, set themselves up as the prime supporters of the sport—the former through donations and appearances at matches, the latter through instigating the foundation of football clubs, and encouraging people to play football in the parks located opposite churches.

By exploring these actions, and placing them alongside the social and political context of the time—the State separating itself from the Church and removing aspects of society from its control—it will be seen that the attitudes towards football were indeed reflections of the socio-political context. The State sought to maintain its popularity, as well as improving the physical and mental state of its people, by supporting football over less 'moral' games of chance. Meanwhile, the Church, finding that urbanisation was leading people away from religion, attempted to modernise itself and turn a product of this urbanisation—football—to its own advantage.

It will also be seen, however, that in both cases the support backfired somewhat, as players became more important than political figures, while people preferred to play football than attend Mass.

294 words.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	page 2
Contents	3
Introduction	4
Football's Early Development in San José	5
The Government and Football	7
The Catholic Church and Football	11
Conclusion	15
Bibliography	16
Appendix	18

The Early Development of Football in San José, Costa Rica as a Reflection of the Ongoing Social and Political Disputes

Introduction:

As a faithful follower of football in the Central American country of Costa Rica, the sport's origins in this country have always been of interest to me. These origins lie in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time of significant political and social struggles; between a Liberal government, run by powerful, high-class families—generally coffee merchants; and a Catholic Church, weakened by the State's policies and the country's growing urbanisation. Therefore, a query rose—with this socio-political context, what were the attitudes of the State and the Church towards football? Did either, or both of them, encourage the development of this sport, that involves teamwork, hard exercise, and a smaller quantity of equipment than any other of the time? If so, how did the attitudes of these two bodies reflect the contemporary policies of both, and how successful were they? These are the questions that this essay will attempt to answer, as it examines the attitudes and actions of both groups towards football, during the period 1876 to 1921 (from the first game to the founding of the country's Football Federation, particularly concentrating on the turn of the century) in the capital of San José, and the way in which these attitudes serve as a scaled-down microcosm of what was going on more widely in Costa Rican society at the time.

Football's Early Development in San José:

Certain conflicting stories make it impossible exactly to pinpoint the moment when football arrived in Costa Rica. However, the means of its arrival are in every source attributed to the British, or rather the offspring of rich Costa Rican families who travelled to Britain for education, and subsequently introduced the sport upon their return to their native country.

According to historian Agustín Salas Madrigal¹, the sport was introduced in 1897 by Oscar Pinto Fernández, who shortly after arriving in Costa Rica after spending time in England, “had the idea...of playing football, and offered five uniforms and a ball that he had brought from

¹ Salas Madrigal, Agustín. *Historia del deporte en Costa Rica*. San José: 1951. pp. 68-9.

England...within ten minutes, the plaza was filled with curious [people].”² This reportedly took place in the ‘plaza de San Juan’, in San José.

However, three other sources claim the sport appeared rather earlier, and thank one Captain William Le Lacheur, a native of Guernsey, who by means of his coffee-exporting journeys, “carried out the first exportation of Costa Rican coffee to the London market and indirectly caused the introduction of football into the country”³. According to this modern newspaper account, on the 8th of December 1876, a group of six youngsters who had recently returned from England, after being taken there by Le Lacheur for education, bringing with them football equipment, “met to play the first game on the north-eastern side of La Sabana”⁴, the main park in San José at the time. Another article in the same newspaper⁵, based on historical testimonies, goes into more detail as to the equipment brought⁶, and the actions of the players on the fateful day in question, but agrees with the previous article on the essentials while an article in a different newspaper agrees that “football has always been the most important sport in Costa Rica, and began to be practised from 1876 at the northern end of La Sabana,”⁷ in a place shown in the following photograph:



The northeastern corner of ‘La Sabana’, where the first game was played.

² “Se le vino la idea...de jugar al futbol y ofreció cinco uniformes y una bola que traía de Inglaterra...en diez minutos la plaza se llenó de curiosos.” *All translations are my own.*

³ “80 años del futbol federado.” *La Nación* 10 Jun 2001: “Realizó la primera exportación de café costarricense al mercado londinense y propició indirectamente la introducción en el país del ‘football’.”

⁴ *Ibid*: “Se reunieron para jugar la primera mejenga en el costado noreste de La Sabana.”

⁵ Calvo, Rodrigo. “Una huella ancestral.” *La Nación* 08 Dec 1996: *Revista Dominical*.

⁶ See appendix for a full list of the equipment brought from England.

⁷ “Así se inició el fútbol en Costa Rica.” *La Prensa Libre* 08 May 2001. “El fútbol siempre ha sido el deporte más importante de Costa Rica, y...se comenzó a practicar desde el año 1876 a un costado norte de La Sabana.”

⁸ *La Nación* 12 Nov 2006: *Proa*. p. 12.

As Salas appears generally to be writing from his own memory, with a strong use of the words ‘I remember’ for much of his chapter on football, it seems most likely that the Oscar Pinto story is his recollection of the first he himself knew of the game, while the three newspapers have closely similar stories, with far more seemingly factual detail, appearing to lend credence to the belief that these two are closer to the truth—although the possibility that they have got the stories from each other must be considered. A fourth source, Fernando Naranjo Madrigal, brings both versions together:

“From 1876 a few Costa Rican and English sportsmen were already playing on the fields of ‘La Sabana’...in 1897, Oscar Pinto Fernández arrived [in Costa Rica] from England, where he had been carrying out his studies...Pinto had the idea of playing football [here Naranjo goes on to quote Salas].”⁹ Basically, what this would seem to show, is that while the sport was originally introduced in 1876, it was not until 1897 that it caught the public imagination. Even then, it struggled to impose itself completely, as can be seen from a fragment of newspaper from 1901: “We had already thought [football] was in its grave, turned into a corpse.”¹⁰

These people who first introduced the sport to the country were young members of upper-middle-class “burgués” families, most of them being students of the Liceo de Costa Rica, the main school for the youth of rich families at the time; as these were the people who had the connections with foreigners (in particular the British). However, football was by far the cheapest and easiest sport to play, requiring so little equipment, and so was quickly adopted by lower-class youths, who founded their own clubs. What made the sport so popular, as opposed to more complicated ones such as polo, was that, being a simple team game, it “introduced the element of national representation, and a sporting struggle between the dominant group and the working sector.”¹¹ In this sense, it gave the working classes a way of building a union between themselves, and of leading a reasonably non-violent social struggle, which made it highly popular with the authorities.

⁹ Naranjo Madrigal, Fernando. *Epoca de oro del futbol en Costa Rica*. San José: 1988. p.15: “desde 1876 ya jugaban en los terrenos de *La Sabana* algunos deportistas costarricenses e ingleses...en 1897 llegó al país, procedente de Inglaterra donde hacía sus estudios, Oscar Pinto Fernández...A Pinto se le ocurrió la idea de jugar al futbol...”

¹⁰ *La Prensa Libre* 10 May 1901: p. 2: “Ya lo creíamos [al futbol] en la tumba, hecho cadáver.”

¹¹ Urbina Gaitán, Chester. *Costa Rica y el deporte (1873-1921)*. Heredia: Editorial de la UNA, 2001. p. 109: “introduce el elemento de representación nacional y la lucha deportiva entre el grupo dominante y el sector trabajador.”

The Government and Football:

At the end of the nineteenth century, the government was Liberal, secular, and seemingly obsessed with the idea of bringing Costa Rica up to a level of civilisation comparable with leading European countries of the time; and this Europeanising and secularising of urban culture—thanks largely to the expansion of coffee exportation—was nowhere more apparent than in San José.¹² Its modern architecture led to the capital city being labelled a “metropolis in miniature” by a visitor from the United States,¹³ and another visitor from the same country, John Lloyd Stephens, was of the impression that “San José is the only city in Central America that has grown or even progressed since the Independence [from Spain].”¹⁴ The government wished to maintain this reputation, and “reject popular culture, whose irreverent and plebeian profile greatly worried ecclesiastics, the establishment, and intellectuals.”¹⁵ However, at the same time as they improved education, taking it away from the Church; and encouraged Costa Rica’s reputation as democratic and civilised, there was still a very clear social divide.

This is emphasised by observing the newspapers of the time.¹⁶ Around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, large numbers of newspapers were set up with a basis on the government’s policies, as they finally began to take notice of the 1824 decree that “[invited] citizens to establish in any of the country’s towns a public periodic paper...”¹⁷. Due to this, as an observation of a range of contemporary newspapers revealed, they concentrated mostly on editorialising about the government, generally ignoring or discounting the Church and its policies—with the exception of *El Eco Católico* (‘The Catholic Echo’). One such newspaper is *La Prensa Libre* (‘The Free Press’), which according to personal historian Pedro Rafael Gutiérrez was “open to pluralism [and] intransigent in its principles of defending the Constitution”¹⁸, which can be evaluated as meaning that it shared the government’s policies, or at least its principles. This was

¹² Molina Jiménez, Iván. *Costarricense por dicha*. San José: Editorial de la UCR, 2003. p. 15.

¹³ Molina Jiménez, Ivan, and Steven Palmer. *Historia de Costa Rica*. San José: Editorial de la UCR, 2004. p. 68

¹⁴ Molina: *Costarricense por dicha*, p. 15: “San José es la única ciudad de Centro América que ha crecido o siquiera progresado desde la Independencia [de España].”

¹⁵ Molina and Palmer: *Historia de Costa Rica*, p. 67: “rechazo de la cultura popular, cuyo perfil irreverente y plebeyo preocupaba en extremo a eclesiásticos, burgueses e intelectuales.”

¹⁶ Acknowledgement is due to the Biblioteca Nacional Miguel Obregón Lizano (National Library of San José) for providing access to their newspaper archives.

¹⁷ Blen, Adolfo. *Historia del periodismo*. San Jose: Editorial Costa Rica, 1983. p. 9: “[invitó] a los ciudadanos a que establezcan en cualquiera pueblo del Estado un papel periódico público...”

¹⁸ Gutiérrez, Pedro Rafael. *Cien años de historia a través de La Prensa Libre*. San Jose: Impresora Costarricense, 1989. p. 10: “abierta al pluralismo [e] intransigente en sus principios de defensa de la Constitución”.

particularly visible in 1901, after one J. Marcelino Argüello took over as director and administrator, and wrote frequent editorials based on the country's social and political issues. However, one such editorial, reasonably unbiased, perfectly encapsulates the situation with the ongoing social and political debate:

“The Liberals demand the separation of the Church and the State; the ultramontane conservatives ask for protection for the Church; the Liberals ask for purely laical schooling, secularisation of the cemeteries; and the ultramontane conservatives demand religious teaching [and] tithing; the Liberals...establish that civil marriage is a voluntary, bilateral, annulable, dissoluble contract; and the ultramontanes...label [it] as [immoral]...Where is...the alchemist who can amalgamate such antagonistic elements...?”¹⁹ Here can be seen illustrated exactly the aforementioned social divide.

To face this, the government intervened greatly in most aspects of people's lives with a system of “social control”, of health, education, and economy.²⁰ What the government wanted, however, was a means of popular expression that the state could control, and by controlling it increase their own popularity. They were also searching for a “consolidation of a national identity by means of the invention of the nation”²¹—in other words, for all people within the country to identify themselves with the country. It was at this time that football appeared. By having football teams both from middle and working classes, the workers could both extract a feeling of revenge by defeating their employers, without ever doing them any real harm; and also gain a bond with the upper classes by playing against them. Obviously, as a sport, football had merely a limited scope, but it is worth noting that the country's first openly socialist party, the Reform Party, was not founded until 1923²².

At the same time, another concern of the state was the morality of its citizens, a situation that seemed to be going downhill with the growing urbanisation of the capital city. There were many

¹⁹ Argüello, Marcelino J. *La Prensa Libre 20 Feb 1901*: “Los liberales exigen la separación de la Iglesia y el Estado; los conservadores ultramontanos piden protección a la Iglesia; los liberales piden escuela netamente laica, secularización de los cementerios; y los conservadores ultramontanos exigen la enseñanza religiosa, [y] diezmos; los liberales...establecen que el matrimonio civil es contrato voluntario, bilateral, anulable, disoluble; y los ultramontanos...[lo] impugnan de [inmoral]...¿Dónde está...el alquimista que puede amalgamar tan antagónicos elementos...?”

²⁰ Urbina Gaitán, Chester: “Orígenes de la Política Deportiva en Costa Rica (1887-1942)”. In *EF y Deportes* [online]. April 2001 [accessed 03 NOV 2006]. <<http://www.efdeportes.com/efd34/crica/htm/>>

²¹ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 145: “consolidación de una identidad nacional por medio de la invención de la nación”.

²² Molina: *Costarricense por dicha*, p. 32.

social problems in San José, such as drug abuse (to a certain extent); prostitution, including “under 15s, who frequently escaped from their homes, and some women who prostituted themselves for necessity, in search of glamour, or with the hope of a better income”;²³ and finally gambling. This last, including games of chance and cock-fighting, was very strongly disapproved of by the state, who banned it from all legal sports clubs, making both “all those games in which losses and gains depend on luck or chance and not skill” and cock-fighting finally completely illegal with the Law on Forbidden Games of 1917²⁴. What the government was looking for among its citizens was a healthy, fit, and morally strong population, which could be distracted from revolutionary ideas, and so introduced sports education into its schools. The worry the government had about improving its people’s physical conditions “originates...around the civilising ideal of radical positivism, social Darwinism...assuming thus principles such as racial purity [and] honesty.”²⁵ This is included in the country’s desire to be seen as “a happy Switzerland of the Tropics”²⁶ At first it was sport that the government encouraged, with the creation of Sporting Clubs, but slowly football took over at the premier sport, owing to it being a team game that promoted values of sportsmanship, teamwork, and a “feeling of communal identity between Costa Ricans.”²⁷

A third reason behind the support of football by the government was the simple concept of popularity. With the sport’s increasing attractiveness, it would seem logical for politicians to associate themselves with it, and this hypothesis seems supported by the evidence, beginning in 1904 when the Municipality of San José donated 200 colones (the Costa Rican currency) to football clubs to organise games.²⁸ This was followed by encouraging the use of ‘La Sabana’ for playing games, and also politicians such as Cleto González Víquez (President from 1906-10) and Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno (President from 1910-14) attended football matches and gave prizes (including medals) to the participating teams²⁹, in what may have been a merely philanthropic gesture, but

²³ Marín Hernández, Juan José. “Prostitución y pecado en la bella y próspera ciudad de San José (1850-1930).” *El paso del cometa*. Comp. Iván Molina Jiménez and Steven Palmer. San José: Editorial Porvenir, 1994. p. 58: “menores de 15 años, que a menudo escapaban de su casa, y algunas mujeres que se prostituían por necesidad, en busca de *glamour* o con la esperanza de un mejor ingreso”.

²⁴ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 177: “todos los juegos en que la pérdida o la ganancia depende de la suerte o del acaso y no de la habilidad”.

²⁵ Urbina: “Orígenes de la Política Deportiva...”: “radica...alrededor del ideal civilizador del positivismo radical, el darwinismo social...asumiendo por ende principios tales como la pureza racial, [y] la honestidad.”

²⁶ Molina: *Costarricense por dicha*, p. 8: “una feliz Suiza de los trópicos”.

²⁷ Urbina: “Orígenes de la Política Deportiva...”: “sentido de identidad comunal del costarricense.”

²⁸ *El Noticiero* 19 Nov 1904: p. 3.

²⁹ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, pp. 152-162.

could be seen as thinly veiled political propaganda. Historian Chester Urbina Gaitán, the leading expert on the history of the sport in Costa Rica, leans towards this latter belief, claiming that “Politicians of that time saw in football a means of carrying hatred and divisions onto the field of play—principally in times of electoral campaigns—, taking advantage of sporting encounters as a medium of political propaganda.”³⁰ While this may sound rather extreme—it is hard to believe that a mere sport could have had such an effect—it seems clear that politicians “saw in the sport an important contribution to the forming of good citizens”³¹, and as such one can assume an ability to move the masses; and they wanted to be able to control this to improve their own image. Thus, Urbina’s belief would seem to be supported at least in part by the psychology of politicians of the time, who liked to project a friendly and people-oriented view of themselves—for example, Ricardo Jiménez was well-known for his approachability, on occasion being seen at fairs with his daughter³². It is clear that the lack of a healthy and active lifestyle was a concern at the time, as the press criticised the situation with articles containing messages such as “We have noticed in our youth a certain apathy, a determined abandoning of the life of sport”³³, where can be seen perfectly the way in which the press at least pushed for an alternative sport that would encourage a healthy and active lifestyle among the younger citizens.

Therefore, it seems that Urbina’s interpretation fits the facts, as well as when he considers that this was also because the sport was so popular among the lower classes, that by seeming to support it, they seemed to be supporting and standing up for their people—they “saw in the support of football an excellent way of pushing the practice of sport and of improving their political image.”³⁴

Essentially, politicians saw in sport, and specifically in football, a means of improving the physical and mental fitness (and morality) of their people, of controlling their means of social mobility and expression, and of improving their own status among the people. Thus, the birth of sport-oriented politics can apparently be included as part of “the political-cultural government project for moderating the customs of the popular sectors, with the aim of channelling the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 162: “Los políticos de aquella época veían en el fútbol una forma de llevar los odios y las divisiones al campo de juego—principalmente en tiempos de campañas electorales—, valiéndose de los encuentros deportivos como medio de propaganda política.”

³¹ “El Comienzo.pdf.” *Club Sport La Libertad*. 28 Apr 2007

<<http://www.cslalibertad.com/PDF/EI%20Comienzo.pdf>>: “vieron en el deporte una importante contribución a la formación de buenos ciudadanos.”

³² Molina: *Costarricense por dicha*, p. 10.

³³ *La República* 06 Jan 1898: p.3: “Se nota en nuestra juventud cierta apatía, determinado abandono hacia la vida del sport”.

³⁴ Urbina: “Política deportiva.”

sociability of these groups towards diversions considered by the liberal ideology as being more cultured and modern.”³⁵ Ironically, however, the idea of improving their popularity appears to have backfired, with people gaining interest more in the players than in the politicians behind them, as “the image and popularity that [the players] began to acquire...could hide that of some politicians.”³⁶ This is still visible in the country today, where football players have an immensely high profile among the public.

The Catholic Church and football:

Since Costa Rica’s colonisation by Spain, the Catholic Church had been the strongest body in Costa Rica, more powerful than, or at times on a par with, the government. However, around 1870 the Liberal Government began to take off, and as of this moment the Church began to lose authority, as the “dominant class...saw itself compelled to define the socio-political spaces within the Costa Rican universe between two powers, which were the State and the Church”³⁷—in other words, there was a separation of powers. The Church finally lost large parts of its social influences with the anti-clerical “Liberal Laws” of 1884, when a series of decrees took away a large part of its privileges, from administration of cemeteries and burials, to religious processions in the streets³⁸. The clear aim of the government was to take from the Church the ability to influence people or show itself outside of its own churches, or in other words, for the “State to assume ‘absolute’ control of politics”³⁹, as it “sought to reduce the influence of the Church in society.”⁴⁰ The government wanted control of both the political and the social sides of the country, and by the end

³⁵ Urbina: “Política deportiva”: “proyecto político-cultural gubernamental por morigerar las costumbres de los sectores populares, con el fin de encauzar la sociabilidad de estos grupos hacia diversiones consideradas por el ideario liberal como más cultas y modernas.”

³⁶ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 171: “la imagen y popularidad que [los jugadores] comenzaron a adquirir...podría opacar la de algunos políticos.”

³⁷ Calderón Hernández, Manuel. “Proceso y estructura del liberalismo en Costa Rica (1821-1940).” *Las instituciones costarricenses*. Comp. Jaime Murillo. San José: Editorial de la UCR, 1991. p. 305: “la clase dominante...se vio obligada a definir los espacios políticos sociales dentro del universo costarricense entre dos poderes como lo son el Estado y la Iglesia”.

³⁸ Vargas Arias, Claudio. “La consolidación del Estado costarricense y la Iglesia Católica”. *Las instituciones costarricenses*. p. 477.

³⁹ Calderón: “Proceso y estructura del liberalismo...”, p. 310: “Estado asumía el control ‘absoluto’ de la política.”

⁴⁰ Vargas: “La consolidación del Estado costarricense...”, p. 476: “buscaba reducir la influencia de la Iglesia en la sociedad.”

of the nineteenth century, it had forced the Church into a position of submission, from which it needed to find a new way of influencing the people it depended on.

Partly this was due to a simple desire by the State to have more power, and partly it was due to the clash of ideologies between the Liberals, for whom “reason acquires a special sense, as it constitutes a new route for the admission of truth”⁴¹; and the Church, for whom this happens “by means of faith.”⁴² In any case, whatever the exact cause of this alienation and separation, the Church undeniably found itself forced to alter its attitude to one of less obvious influences, having failed in its attempt to regain control directly by participating in the 1894 elections as the ‘Catholic Union Party’. In clearly fraudulent elections, the Catholic Party was defeated,⁴³ and thus when Monsignor Juan Gaspar Stork came to power as the Bishop of San José in 1904, he recognised the need to avoid antagonising the government, and so elected to stay out of politics, and try and improve the Church’s standing with the government, while influencing the people on whom they depended by more covert means, that didn’t jeopardise their standing with the government any more.⁴⁴

The other growing threat to the Church was that of urbanisation, and more specifically the social movements that come as a natural result of people living in urban communities—fears that it shared with the government. Despite the ideological barrier, both groups were afraid of social revolution, and thus were together in wanting a healthy, fit citizenry, that would not wish to band together into urban movements. The Church “attacked all [these] organisations...and the ideas professed by the workers, be they liberal or socialist”⁴⁵. Urbina, for one, is of the opinion that “in this ‘modus vivendi’ between the Church and the State, what [the Church] was interested in was pious Christian obedience”⁴⁶—meaning that, as long as the people were kept from turning against the Church, they weren’t particularly concerned about the government’s ‘civilising’ wishes—a statement that is supported by other sources talking about the “enthusiasm with which the Catholic Church participated in [cultural] festivals”⁴⁷, and thus the way in which they believed in the State’s pro-

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 470: “la razón adquiere sentido especial, puesto que ella se constituye en una nueva vía para la admisión de la verdad”.

⁴² Ibid.: “por medio de la fe.”

⁴³ Ibid., p. 481.

⁴⁴ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 113: “atacaba [estas] formas organizativas...y las ideas profesadas por los trabajadores, ya fueran liberales o socialistas.”

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 115: “en este ‘modus vivendi’ entre la Iglesia y el Estado lo que interesaba era la obediencia piadosa cristiana.”

⁴⁷ Molina: *Costarricense por dicha*, p. 19: “entusiasmo con que la Iglesia católica participó en tales festejos [culturales]”.

European policies. It would certainly seem that the Church was more concerned with persuading the lower classes that their souls depended on regularly attending church, rather than improving their lot on the earth, having “a limited mission...with respect to the social question [of improving people’s working and living conditions]”⁴⁸.

In summary, the Church needed to combat its own weakening position by finding a means of keeping the masses attending religious ceremonies—similarly to the government, it wanted to improve its popularity and, casting around, it came across the same sport that the government had found, reacting positively to football for practically the same reasons as the State had done so. The following photograph of a football team from 1920 is just one example illustrating how involved the Church had become in the sport:



The ‘San Joaquín de Flores’ football team, 1920

Note the priest at far left of the top row. Observing the archives of old newspapers reveals many more photographs like this one. Additionally, one important early club from San José, founded in 1904, was the Club Sport Josefino, which included among its honorary members Spanish priest Andrés Vilá y Albó.⁵⁰ Examples such as these—there are many more that could be included—serve to show the involvement of the Church in the development of football: by and large, they

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19: “limitado quehacer...en cuanto a la cuestión social...”.

⁴⁹ *La Nación* 12 Nov 2006: *Proa*.

⁵⁰ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 117.

encouraged it. Given that priests still had a prominent position in communities—despite urbanisation—it seems to have been a relatively easy activity.

The Church shared with the State the view of football as a means of building a social and cultural identity; except that in their case this included the Church itself. The vast majority of Costa Rica's towns and villages were originally built around the Spanish colonial urban system, which included a central field or park, with a church beside it. San José (what is now the central area of the city) was also built this way, although on a slightly larger scale, and as at the time it had a much smaller population—47,665 people in 1900⁵¹—the communities were also smaller, and still revolved around the central parks and churches. From this, one would hypothesise that what the Church needed to do was encourage the use of these parks for recreational purposes—in this case football—either before or after attending services at the churches; and this would appear to have been the case. Certainly a tradition appeared—still present in First Division football today—of playing football games around mid-day on Sundays. Once the day's mass was over, people were encouraged to adjourn to the nearby field and spend their day off “liberating by means of games and excesses of every type, the passions that had been repressed by the week's work”, according to Monsignor Stork⁵². This shows that Stork was indeed of the opinion that sport served to take the mind off any possibility of threatening the Church; as well as leading to “religious leaders and their faithful being brought together to a greater extent”⁵³.

The Church also appears to have decided that, to keep people interested in it, a modernisation was needed, and so integrated football matches into its religious celebrations and festivals, in order to attract larger crowds.⁵⁴ However, the attitude of the Church towards football was not a wholly positive one, as several churchmen saw a risk in a sport that seemed to be interfering in religion. For example, during a game in 1908, “at halftime a priest tried to stop the game on the excuse that there was a service.”⁵⁵ As games became more popular, the fact that they were being played on the same days as most religious services meant that people preferred to attend the matches, as they

⁵¹ “Resumen02.pdf.” *Biblioteca Virtual en Población*. Centro Centroamericano de Población. 1 May 2007 <http://ccp.ucr.ac.cr/bvp/re_1883-1910/index.htm>.

⁵² Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 131: “liberaban por medio de juegos y excesos de toda especie, las pasiones reprimidas con el trabajo de la semana.”

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 137: “un mayor acercamiento...entre el líder religioso y sus fieles”.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁵⁵ *El Noticiero* 28 Jan 1908: p.2: “a medio juego pretendió un cura detener la partida so pretexto de que había rosario.”

could, after all, ‘liberate’ those aforementioned ‘passions’ by being free to make as much noise and move around as much as they wanted—something that couldn’t be done in church.

In the end, it seems like football backfired against the Church more than it even did with the State, as football, “being a part of a process of mass consumption, escaped from [the Church’s] control.”⁵⁶ Nowadays, the majority of First Division football games are played at 11.00 on Sunday mornings, and many more people attend them than Sunday morning mass. It is, however, clear that the Church’s attitude towards the early development of football in the capital—the way in which it was seen as a means of regaining importance and popularity without antagonising the government, encouraging it until it became an opponent—did indeed reflect, by and large, the socio-political context of the beginning of the twentieth century.

Conclusion:

The aim of this essay was to examine the way in which the attitudes of the Costa Rican government and the Catholic Church to the early development of football in San José served as a reflection of the socio-political context. Having observed exactly how and why football originally came to prominence in the country, as well as what the context was, it now merely remains to draw a final conclusion.

As has been revealed, both groups had a positive attitude to the development of this sport, seeing in it positive repercussions for whoever supported it, as they would appear to be supporting the people themselves. The State’s benevolent view of the game, with politicians trying to become associated with it, does indeed reflect the way in which the State was attempting to forge a healthy, ‘civilised’ people among the citizenry in general. In the same way, the Church’s attempts to integrate football into the religious lifestyle expected of its followers, are a microcosm of the Church’s concern with losing followers and subsequent compromise on some of the facets of life that they were not previously willing to give way on.

On the other hand, while both Church and State saw the importance of football, they did not seem to realise that its popularity would grow to occasionally overwhelm them both—otherwise,

⁵⁶ Urbina: *Costa Rica y el deporte*, p. 128: “por ser parte de un proceso de consumo masivo escapó del control de [la Iglesia].”

they may well have followed the lead of some priests and politicians, and tried to prevent it from becoming an image of contemporary society.

3,986 words.

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APPENDIX

Contents of the suitcases brought by the group of youths in 1875:⁵⁷

- ∂ 6 rulebooks, with laws adapted from 1863 football.
- ∂ 12 pairs of boots.
- ∂ 3 pumps.
- ∂ 50 shoelaces.
- ∂ 6 boxes of 50 studs.
- ∂ 2 belts.
- ∂ 150 bars.
- ∂ 12 regular t-shirts.
- ∂ 2 turtleneck sweaters—for goalkeepers.
- ∂ 12 shin pads.
- ∂ 24 knee pads.
- ∂ 2 caps.
- ∂ 4 gloves.
- ∂ 2 whistles.
- ∂ 12 white shorts.

⁵⁷ Calvo, Rodrigo. "Una huella ancestral." *La Nación* 08 Dec 1996: *Revista Dominical*. p. 7.