

# **Disability and Football**

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Key words: Disability, Football, Equality, Inclusion, Politics

## **Introduction**

Football rhetoric in recent years has emphasised the notion of the ‘football family’ as an inclusive concept, arguing that the global nature of football can be harnessed as a powerful force for positive social change. If this ‘footballing family’ analogy is applied to disabled people, they might be considered to have moved from being the relative hidden away in the corner at family events that nobody talks to (or about) to being the strange and eccentric relative whose right to be present is at least acknowledged if not fully understood. This chapter will outline briefly the history of disability and football, whilst identifying some of the issues faced by disabled people and investigating the increasing involvement of disabled people as both players and spectators.

## **Disability Football: Historical Overview**

Setting the context of disability football is a daunting task for two reasons. First, unlike its able-bodied counterpart, there is extremely limited information about the history and development of disability football. Second, the diversity underneath the umbrella term of ‘disability football’ is extensive. This diversity results from the range of impairment groups practising different forms of football, different classifications within some impairments groups and differences in the provision for, organisation of, and attitudes

toward, disability football across the globe. The most high profile disability groups involved in football as players have been - and to a large extent remain - amputees and blind footballers but the involvement of disabled people in football has been much more extensive than this limited public perception might suggest. Low public profile, coupled with increased media coverage of disabled football in events such as the Paralympics, might suggest that disabled people's involvement in football has been a comparatively recent development. The available history of disability football supports such perceptions, with searches of both websites and academic resources revealing a great deal of detail on recent disabled involvement in football but very little between the end of WWII and 1980s. For example, Frere (2007) claims that organised amputee football in its current form was created as recently as 1980 in the US, whilst the Blind World Cup was only founded in 1998 (IBSA World Blind Football Championship, 2010). The official histories of FIFA, UEFA and the Football Association in England (the oldest such organisation in the world) do not mention disability, indicating the marginal nature of disabled football until comparatively recently. However, it is only the large scale organisation of much disability football that is a recent development. Ad hoc involvement has had much longer history, but most provision has been discrete or segregated, for obvious reasons: amputees playing against blind footballers for example would not make for any form of meaningful contest.

One notable exception in terms of both large-scale organisation and segregation has been deaf football, which will be the subject of a more extended case study later in this chapter. Organised deaf football has been in existence since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and deaf footballers have played with and against hearing players at all levels but in terms of

disability, this is very much the exception. Football was not originally included in the Stoke Mandeville Games, from which the Paralympic movement emerged and football was only introduced to the Special Olympics as a small-sided game.

Until the increased promotion of disabled football by the sport's various governing bodies during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, football as a participant sport for disabled people was not organised on any systematic or widespread basis. As a consequence, disability football and disabled footballers were at best marginalised and at worst totally ignored by national and international football authorities. Most authorities were happy to leave the organisation, responsibility and funding for disabled football to disability organisations and did not seek to include disability in any form within mainstream football governance or participation. This failure to provide leadership has been tacitly acknowledged by the English FA:

‘Prior to 1999 The Football Association’s support for the development of disability football was limited. At this time there was a plethora of organisations that represented disabled people and the FA found it difficult to produce a coherent all-embracing strategy for disabled football.’ (Football Association, no date)

The turning point in the UK was the establishment in 1998 of the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS), who took responsibility for organising coaching and competition in a wide range of sports, including football, for people with various disabilities. The EFDS introduced a national strategy for disabled participation in football

and also provided the first source of significant funding for disabled football. This in turn led to the FA introducing its Disability Football strategy in 2004, which has served as a template for other countries in developing their own structures for supporting disability football. The inclusion of football in the Special Olympics from its inception in 1968 and the creation of national and international competitions, such as the Blind World Cup for a wide range of disabled footballers, is starting to have a real impact in terms of both participation and perception, as will be investigated later in this chapter.

### **Current State Of Play**

Many professional clubs have developed links with disabled football clubs or organise their own disabled teams; several leading European clubs including Barcelona, Werder Bremen, FC Basel and Hapoel Tel Aviv are members of the Football Club Social Alliance (SCORT) Alliance. SCORT was founded in 2007 to offer training to both players and coaches from a wide range of socially disadvantaged groups in Europe and beyond, including those with disabilities (SCORT Foundation, no date). All national bodies now promote disability football and tournaments organised by FIFA and its member organisations, who work closely with broader disability sports organisations to promote inclusion of football within these bodies under FIFA's Social Responsibility agenda (FIFA, no date). Disabled football is segregated according to disability, in order to ensure discrete provision that meets the particular circumstances of each group and to ensure there is a meaningful competitive element to games and competitions. The categories identified by FIFA include deaf/hearing impaired; cerebral palsy; amputee; intellectual disability; blind/visually impaired; wheelchair users and a relatively large number of local, national and international competitions exist for each category.

International Organisations of Sport for the Disabled (IOSDs) have been involved in organising international competition before disability football was formally recognised by FIFA. Currently, international competition occurs through a range of tournaments, namely, the Paralympics, the Special Olympics and respective World and regional championships / cups for people who are blind, visually impaired, deaf/hearing impaired, amputees, have cerebral palsy, and learning disabilities. Figure 1 outlines the nature of international competition for these impairment groups, detailing the relevant IOSDs and their websites, international tournaments and nations competing at the most recent of these:

Figure 1 – International competition in disability football

Impairment Group: IOSD: Website	International tournaments	Nations competing at most recent tournament (in order of final standings)
Blind  IBSA (responsible for all sports)  <a href="http://www.ibsa-sports.org/sports/football/">http://www.ibsa- sports.org/sports/football/</a>	World Championships (since 1998)	<i>Hereford (England) 2010:</i> Brazil, Spain, China, England, France, Colombia, Argentina, Japan, Greece, South Korea
	Paralympics (since 2004)	<i>London (England) 2012:</i> Brazil, France, Spain, Argentina, China, Great Britain, Iran, Turkey

<p>Visually Impaired</p> <p>IBSA (responsible for all sports)</p> <p><a href="http://www.ibsa-sports.org/sports/football/">http://www.ibsa-sports.org/sports/football/</a></p>	<p>World Championships (since 1998)</p>	<p><i>Miyagi (Japan) 2013:</i></p> <p>Russia, Ukraine, England, Japan</p>
<p>Deaf</p> <p>DIFA (football-specific)</p> <p><a href="http://www.difa-org.com/">http://www.difa-org.com/</a></p>	<p>Deaflympics (since 1924)</p>	<p><i>Taipei (Taiwan) 2009:</i></p> <p>Men – Ukraine, Russia, Germany, France, Iran, Argentina, Ireland, United States</p> <p>Women – United States, Germany, Russia, Great Britain, Denmark, Japan, Thailand</p>
	<p>Deaf World Cup (since 2008)</p>	<p><i>Ankara (Turkey) 2012:</i></p> <p>Men – Turkey, Egypt, Ukraine, Russia, Germany, France, Thailand, Japan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Greece, United States, Venezuela, Korea, Spain,</p> <p>Women – United States, Russia, Germany, Poland, Japan</p>
<p>Cerebral Palsy*</p>	<p>Paralympics (since 1984)</p>	<p><i>London (England) 2012:</i></p>

CPISRA (responsible for all sports) <a href="http://www.cpisra.org.za/">http://www.cpisra.org.za/</a>		Russia, Ukraine, Iran, Brazil, Netherlands, Argentina, Great Britain, United States
	World Championships (since 1982)	<i>Various cities across the Netherlands 2011:</i> Russia, Iran, Ukraine, Brazil, Netherlands, Scotland, Argentina, United States, Ireland, England, Australia, Canada, Japan, Spain, Finland, Korea
Amputee WAFF (football-specific) <a href="http://www.worldamputeefootball.com/index.htm">http://www.worldamputeefootball.com/index.htm</a>	World Cup (since 1984)	<i>Kaliningrad (Russia) 2012:</i> Uzbekistan, Russia, Turkey, Argentina, Great Britain, Ghana, Iran, Ukraine, El Salvador, Liberia, Poland, Japan
Learning Disabilities INAS (responsible for all sports) <a href="http://www.inas.org">http://www.inas.org</a>	World Cup – (since 1994) **	<i>Limpopo (South Africa) 2010:</i> Saudi Arabia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Hungary, Germany, South Africa, France, Turkey, Japan, South Korea
Wheelchair*** FIPFA (football-specific) <a href="http://fipfa.org/">http://fipfa.org/</a>	World Cup (since 2007)	<i>Paris (France) 2011:</i> United States, England, France, Belgium, Japan, Canada, Australia, Portugal, Ireland, Switzerland

\* Ambulant CP football (Classes C5 – C8). \*\* Also the Special Olympics which, in Athens 2011 held men’s 11-a-side, men’s and women’s 7-a-side and men’s 5-a-side events. \*\*\* Wheelchair / Powerchair Football is played “only by those with a diagnosed, severe physical impairment that leads to a verifiable, permanent activity limitation, as a consequence the athlete needs the use of powered mobility in order to play a sport” – includes some non-ambulant players with Cerebral Palsy (FIPFA, 2011).

Whilst mixed competition is permitted in some impairment groups (such as visual impairment and wheelchair users) there is a distinct under-representation of women in competition at the international level. In fact, with the exception of Deaf football and the Special Olympics, international opportunities for disabled women are lagging considerably behind those for their male counterparts. At the Paralympics, for example, the two football events for Blind and Cerebral Palsy are restricted to male-only competitions. It seems the gender imbalance evident in the non-disabled game is being replicated across disabled football. For example, despite receiving praise for their commitment to disability football and exceeding targets in terms of increasing the number of male disabled teams, *The FA National Game Strategy 2011/2012 Report* revealed that targets for female disabled teams have not been met and female teams constituted approximately 10% of all disabled teams. In addition, the FA does not yet support any national female teams (FA, 2012). The remainder of this chapter focuses on the experiences of disabled spectators, followed by three case studies on: deaf football; blind and visually impaired football; and amputee football in Sierra Leone.

## **Disabled Spectators**

Until these recent developments allowed disabled people to take an active part in the game as players, the vast majority of disabled involvement in football has historically been as spectators rather than participants. Even with increased opportunities to participate as players, the majority of disabled people's involvement with the game continues to be as spectators. Most of the focus regarding disability and football has been to legislate for equal access for disabled spectators, although it must be accepted that this is predominantly a Eurocentric initiative. Most disabled provision has been imposed on clubs by governmental bodies, rather than coming from clubs' or football authorities' own initiatives. The mere presence of disabled spectators in grounds raises a number of questions that football at all levels does not seem to have considered, other than in Health and Safety terms. Although there have been some real improvements in provision and attitude in recent years, football's views of disabled spectators are still restricted and restricting because of an apparent primary concern with safety issues rather than focussing on equality of access. All football grounds for major international competitions and in senior European leagues have to be accessible to disabled fans. Specific details of what this involves vary by country and the working definition of 'disability' in this context seems restricted to ambulatory disability (most notably access for wheelchair users) and blind spectators, with some limited provision for deaf fans.

Given the predominance of disabled people as spectators rather than participants, it is not clear how much emphasis FIFA (as the international governing body for football) place on the value of disabled spectators. To illustrate this, tickets for disabled fans were made available for the FIFA Confederations Cup 2013 in Brazil, with a free ticket provided for what was termed the 'Accompanying Person' ('AP') of wheelchair users. However, the

‘AP’ was not guaranteed a seat alongside the wheelchair user they were accompanying. In addition, disabled tickets were expressly limited to wheelchair users, mobility impaired people and somewhat surprisingly obese people (FIFA, no date). No reference was made to any other form of disability such as blindness or deafness, so the conclusion that must be drawn is that either fans with other disabilities were not welcome at the Confederations Cup or they were expected to pay the full price. How such a narrow conception of disability has arisen within FIFA is unclear but the failure to consider other legally defined disability groups could raise problems in a number of member countries were such conditions applied to other FIFA sponsored events. This also seems to contradict other FIFA disability initiatives, such as providing signed reports of every match at the 2010 World Cup on their website. These match reports were delivered in International Sign language, in order to be accessible to deaf sign language users in a wide range of countries across the world. This service provided an unprecedented level of access for deaf viewers but seems strangely at odds with the provision made available to deaf people wishing to attend games in 2014 (FIFA, no date).

For many disabled football fans, attending a match requires them to be dependent and needy, as the working practices of many clubs and organisations do not allow them to be independent. Disabled fans are usually given special consideration through reduced admission prices but this is often conditional on their being accompanied by a carer or helper. Many clubs and organisations also require disabled fans to prove their disability through the production of official documentation. Across football, where disabled access is provided, wheelchair users and blind fans are housed in specific areas of the stadium with trained stewards on hand in case of emergencies. Many grounds in the UK have

provided commentary for blind fans via local hospital radio for many years but FIFA are only introducing audio description for World Cup grounds from 2014. The needs of other disability groups (e.g. deaf and hard of hearing people, people with intellectual disabilities) are not always expressly considered or provided for and this raises a number of important questions. For example, safety information is given in match programmes and by loudspeaker announcements, but how are deaf fans or those with intellectual disabilities made aware of safety instructions or provided with other information? Do clubs have stewards who are trained in sign language or in meeting the particular needs of disabled people who are not blind or in a wheelchair? Do clubs or national associations have any procedures for identifying disabled fans within grounds, other than by the fans themselves self-identifying through purchasing a disabled ticket for a specific area?

CAFE (Centre for Access to Football in Europe) was established in 2009 as a pan-European group to campaign for better facilities (in reality improved access) for disabled fans and to support the creation of disabled supporters' groups at local, national and international levels. CAFÉ's slogan 'Total football, total access' emphasises their focus on the practical aspect of provision for disabled supporters and they are also closely identified with the 'Respect' agenda through links with anti-racist bodies such as Fight Against Racism in Europe (FARE Network, no date). CAFE's website (CAFE, no date) includes a large number of member organisations, including several national disabled supporters groups, with many working closely with their national footballing authorities to promote disabled access. Although there is a growing awareness of the need to consider wider disability issues amongst football supporters, much of the focus of these bodies seems to be on addressing access for wheelchair users and blind supporters.

The Bundesbehindertenfanarbeitsgemeinschaft (BBAG) was founded in 1999 and advises the Deutscher Fußball-Bund (DFB) and Deutsche Fußball Liga (DFL) on all issues concerning disabled people (Bundesbehindertenfanarbeitsgemeinschaft, no date). Disabled fans in Poland are represented by the Fundacja Otwarte Ramię Białej Gwiazdy (FORBG) ('Open Arms of the White Star Foundation'), whose stated constituency includes 'wheelchair users, partially sighted and blind as well as hard of hearing and others' (FORBG, no date). INSIDE (Toegankelijk Voetbal België/Football Accessible Belgique) in Belgium and England's Level Playing Field have similar aims. At national body level, The Football Association of Ireland's Inclusive Supporters Club (FAIISC) (formed in 2010) extend their focus to explicitly include providing access for deaf and hearing impaired spectators at the FAI's national home, the Aviva Stadium. The same year saw the Inclusive Supporters Association launched in Northern Ireland, together with the Scottish Disabled Supporters Association.

Despite the variety of disabilities found amongst football fans and the range of responses from the various football authorities, many of the titles and motifs of club-based disabled supporters groups reflect a much narrower perception of disability equating to wheelchair use. The badges of many of these organisations feature wheelchairs (with and without fans sat in them), such as that of Celtic Disabled Supporters Association (Scotland) and Charlton Athletic (England) whilst many supporters groups in the Netherlands and Belgium include 'Rollers' and 'Wheels' in their titles. Examples include Belgium's Lierse Rollerboys, SFCB On Wheels, RSCA Purple Wheels and Blue Army On Wheels and Groningen FC's 'The Rollyside' (Netherlands). The disabled supporters association

of England's Stoke City do not feature a wheelchair in their logo but they go under the title of 'Stoke City Wheels in Motion'. Newcastle United Disabled Supporters Association combine images of football and disability by replacing the wheel of the chair with a football, as do Birmingham City, whose logo features the club badge (a globe and a football) as the two wheels of the wheelchair. Although these images might be seen as assertive and inclusive of disabled supporters within the wider football family and the organisations cater for a wide variety of disabled supporters, their logos seem only define disabled supporters in terms of wheelchair users. The logos created by Yellow and Red Army on Wheels (Belgium) and Heart of Midlothian Disabled Supporters Club (Scotland) represent a broader pan-disability approach to disability by including images of supporters who are deaf, intellectual disabled and with restricted mobility alongside the more commonly seen wheelchair users. As such they may serve as templates for other disabled supporters groups to devise more inclusive logos that represent their full constituency of members.



Blue Army on Wheels (Belgium)



Heart of Midlothian Disabled Supporters Club (Scotland)

What is evident from the emergence of this range of supporters' organisations for disabled people is that clubs and national bodies are beginning to recognise their obligations towards welcoming disabled supporters into their grounds, both in legislative terms but also as equal members of the football family. However, much still remains to be done, even in those parts of the world where provision has improved dramatically since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a BBC investigation conducted in 2014 into disabled access to Premier League grounds in England illustrated. Only three of the 20 clubs failed to provide adequate number of wheelchair places and eight of these had less than half of the recommended number of places. Even here, the issue of access was restricted to wheelchair places, with little or no assessment of the provision for fans with other disabilities. Addressing the specific issues involved in welcoming disabled fans is now embodied within football planning and provision, so the challenges now are to extend such positive attitudes across the whole of football and turn these into positive action and improved access that considers disability as more than merely those fans who attend grounds in wheelchairs.

### **Case Study: Deaf Football**

The most easily accommodated disability group has been deaf footballers, who are much less restricted in playing the standard form of game and in competing with and against hearing players. Deaf football also has by far the longest history of organised competitions amongst disabled football bodies, with the first deaf football club established as long ago as 1871. Glasgow Deaf Football Club thus predates the city's more famous clubs Rangers (1873) and Celtic (1881) and all but five clubs in England. The first deaf football competition began in 1889 with the establishment of the Scottish

Deaf Cup, when Glasgow's victory over Edinburgh was witnessed by over 2,000 spectators. National associations were set up to run deaf football in a number of European countries during the first quarter of the 20th century. Whilst a national league was proposed in England in 1895, it was not until 1926 that a knock-out cup began. However, deaf football clubs have always been involved in local leagues, playing against teams of hearing players and there is also a long history of individual deaf players joining hearing teams. Research amongst deaf footballers indicates that most have played for both hearing and deaf teams; hearing teams provided a higher standard of competition whilst membership of a deaf team offered more social rewards due to the lack of communication difficulties. Hearing football is perceived to be faster, more skilful and of a higher technical standard, largely due to deaf footballers constantly needing to look up before passing the ball rather than being able to receive shouted instructions from team-mates (Atherton, Russell and Turner, 2000). Deaf football matches are controlled by referees using a flag rather than a whistle and experiments have been carried out to test the effectiveness of players wearing armbands to receive messages by the match officials sent by transmitters in their flags.

International deaf football dates back to a 3-3 draw between Scotland and England in Glasgow in 1891 and has been an integral part of the deaf equivalent to the Olympic Games since its establishment in 1924. Originally known as the Silent Games, football has featured in every four yearly event held since under the World Games of the Deaf and latterly Deaflympics banners. The first Deaf World Cup was held in Greece in 2008 and 16 countries contested the second event in Turkey in 2012 (Deaflympics, no date). There

is a European Championship for national sides and 2008 saw the introduction of the Deaf Champions League, featuring the national champions from eight countries (Deaf Champions League Football, no date).

Participation in deaf football teams is strictly controlled at all levels when playing against other deaf teams in deaf-only competitions, although no such restrictions apply to competition with or against hearing teams. Deaflympics' rules on hearing status, the use of hearing aids and drugs testing are all applied within segregated deaf football. In order to maintain the integrity of deaf sport, competitors must have a maximum audiogram reading of 55Hz in the better ear (to preclude receiving verbal instructions) and players receive an automatic ban of one year for using hearing aids in competition for the same reason. Subsequent offences can ultimately lead to a lifetime ban from all deaf sport, whilst Deaflympics rules on drug use comply with international standards (Deaflympics, 2013).

The integration of deaf footballers into mainstream football has even extended into the professional game, with a number of high profile and successful deaf players featuring over the years. Details of deaf professionals in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are scarce but there were a number playing in England. Billy Nesbitt was an FA Cup winner with Burnley and a member of their Football league championship winning side either side of World War One and he had a trial for the full England side. John Aldred appeared for Oldham during the First World War but lost his place soon afterwards as the hearing professionals returned but he went on to captain the Great Britain deaf football team at the 1928 Silent Games. There were several other instances of deaf professionals in the

inter-war years but by far the most famous was Cliff Bastin of Arsenal and England. Scorer of 179 goals for Arsenal (a record only broken in 1998) and holder of 21 England caps, Bastin was deaf throughout this career but became increasingly so with age. In his biography, Bastin cited his deafness as the main reason for his retirement, more so than his persistent knee problems. With increasingly sophisticated coaching and the increased speed of the game, opportunities for deaf players in the professional have gradually disappeared, with very few examples in the last fifty years. Ray Drake had one successful season at Stockport County in the 1950s but there are very few instances of deaf players reaching the first teams of top English clubs (Atherton, 1999).

Outside England, Damir Desnica played one game for the Yugoslavia international side, during a career which saw him play in the Yugoslav and Belgium leagues during the 1970s and 80s. More recently, Matt Eby played for Maryland Monarchs in the US Major League Soccer and Stefan Markolf was a member of the Mainz side in Germany's Bundesliga in the first decade of the 21st century and played for a number of other professional clubs. However, such examples are few and far between nowadays, despite the long history of deaf players playing with and against hearing opponents, often with a great deal of success.

### **Case Study: Blind and Visually Impaired Football**

Football opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired are organised into two classification groups: blind (B1) and visually impaired (B2 and B3). International competition is organised accordingly and has primarily been the responsibility of the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) who, since 1981, have worked

internationally to ‘encourage all blind and visually impaired people to get involved in different sports and physical activities’ (IBSA, no date). The origins of blind and visually impaired football precede the formation of IBSA with claims that blind football has been an organised sport since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with Brazil and Spain acknowledged as prominent pioneers (Mayr de Oliveira Silva, 2008: 16). It was not until 1996 that football was officially integrated into IBSA which led to internationally recognised and approved rules being formulated by a futsal subcommittee (IBSA, no date). Over the last decade blind football, in particular, has benefitted from increased exposure with its inclusion in the Paralympics since 2004.

Despite the relatively lengthy history in some nations, others have been slow to embrace blind football. For example, Germany made their first clear commitment to the sport following their hosting of the FIFA World Cup in 2006. The inaugural Blindenfussball Bundesliga, a collaboration between the Sepp Herberger Foundation (SHF), the German Football Association (DBF), German Disabled Sports Association (DBS) and German Blind and Visually Impaired (DBSV), took place in 2008 (Bose, 2012). The league now boasts nine teams and, by hosting games in the ‘central public places of several cities’, organisers have made attempts to raise social awareness of the sport and to use the league to promote social integration of blind people (Bose, 2012). The German national team played their first home game in 2010, as part of the German Football Association’s (GFA) ‘Day of Blind Football’, on an artificial pitch in front of the Reichstag parliament building in Berlin with the president of the German parliament, Norbert Lammert, opening the day’s activities (Hackbarth, 2010: no page). The day also included the presentation of a special prize by Angela Merkel to VfB Gelsenkirchen who were recognised for ‘the

integration of blind and visually impaired athletes into the club'. So despite a very recent history, in a relative short space of time stakeholders in Germany appear to be making considerable efforts to raise the profile of blind and visually impaired football amongst the general public.

In comparison to other forms of disability football, blind and visually impaired football teams are allowed to name fully sighted goalkeepers in their sides and, as the sport has gained more exposure, there has been recent discussions regarding the potential of ex-professional goalkeepers fulfilling this role. The profile of blind football might be increased further in Germany by recent reports that Jens Lehmann, 'tempted by the chance to win the first major international title of his career', has declared an interest in taking on the role of goalkeeper for the national side at the Paralympics in Rio 2016 (Reynolds, 2012: no page).

This section now turns to a brief discussion of developments in visually impaired football in England. The format of football played at all international visually impaired tournaments is Futsal, the official format of small-sided football endorsed by FIFA for all disability and able-bodied competitions. Futsal is also the traditional format played by visually impaired players in the majority of nations who compete internationally. However, the adoption of Futsal in the British Blind Sport Visually Impaired Football League (BBSVIFL) is a relatively recent development, one that was disputed by stakeholders and revealed the politics and power relations manifest within the sport in this context. Having finished sixth in the Partially Sighted World Championships (PSWC) in Manchester 2004, it was deemed by the team management, who were appointed by the

FA, that being exposed to regular Futsal is fundamental to bringing success at the elite level and improve England's chances of competing with the most successful teams (at this time Belarus, Russia, Spain and Ukraine) (Macbeth & Magee, 2006). This led to the FA recommending that the format of football in the BBSVIFL be changed from traditional five-a-side to Futsal in order to expose players to this format at the grassroots level.

There are two key differences between five-a-side and Futsal that have a particular relevance to partially sighted players. Firstly, whilst in five-a-side the ball can be played off surrounding walls, Futsal has distinct pitch boundaries which players are required to keep the ball within. Secondly, the ball is not allowed to be played above head height in five-a-side football whereas this is allowed in Futsal. Although BBS and the FA are joint stakeholders responsible for developing partially sighted football, BBS has focused primarily on grassroots developments and the FA has concentrated predominantly on the elite level. The FA has begun to gain more control over the BBSVIFL and contribute financially to the running of the domestic league. The Treasurer Report presented at the 2006 BBSVI Football Committee Annual General Meeting showed an FA contribution of £2300 to cover some of the basic costs for a league which between May 2005 and June 2006 cost approximately £7300 to run (Macbeth, 2009). After increasing pressure from the FA, it was decided at the BBSVI Football Committee Extraordinary General Meeting in 2006 to change the format of small-sided football from five-a-side to Futsal, despite valid concerns amongst many players that, at the grassroots level, Futsal may be a potentially exclusionary version of the game for those with more severe visual impairment (Macbeth, 2009). There were also specific concerns about the suitability of

existing facilities to accommodate Futsal and this concern was warranted since it took until 2009 for the BBSVIFL to secure the use of suitable venues and facilities via the Futsal UK Arenas across England (Futsal UK, no date). The implications of these developments for all players at the grassroots level and for success at the elite level remain to be seen, but the example reveals some of the challenges faced by those tasked with developing football for all whilst developing successful national teams.

### **Case Study: Amputee Football in Sierra Leone**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, with the exception of deaf football, there is a dearth of information regarding the historical roots of different disability groups' involvement in playing football, and amputee football is no exception. Despite acknowledging that the 1980s saw the development of 'Modern' amputee football, Frere (2007) does not discuss developments preceding this in any detail. It is asserted that the roots of the modern era can be found in the United States in 1980, when the game was used by a group of amputee skiers in order to keep fit during the summer. From this modest inception, the first international amputee 'soccer' tournament was held in 1984 in Seattle, USA and was contested between teams from America, Canada and Central America (Amputee Soccer, no date). Over the next few decades England, Uzbekistan, Brazil, Russia and Georgia joined the USA, Canada, El Salvador at the World Cup tournaments. Frere (2007) recognises that since these early developments, the game has suffered from turbulent times due to a lack of funding, a poor standard of refereeing and political issues within the sport. A thorough historical analysis of amputee football is certainly warranted but is outside the scope of this chapter. Instead, this section provides a brief case study of

amputee football and politics in Sierra Leone, the first African nation to compete in the Amputee World Cup and the first host nation of the All African Championships in 2007.

Soon after Sierra Leone's appearance in the 2005 Amputee World Cup in Brazil, there was sufficient participation within other African nations, Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria, for the formation of the All African Championships, held in Sierra Leone in 2007. The inaugural tournament profited from the support of FIFA and it is reported that 'the opening ceremony and first round matches produced a crowd of more than 10,000 in the National Stadium' (Frere, 2007: 12). The tournament also resulted in the formation of the Amputee Football Federation of Africa (AFFA) under the guidance of the World Amputee Football Federation (WAFF). In 2007 Sierra Leone were also supported by FIFA and the United Nations Development Programme (contributing \$21,000) to attend the Amputee World Cup in Turkey (United Nations, 2007). With this recent context in mind, it is to the complex relationship between civil war, amputees and football in Sierra Leone that this section now turns.

It is asserted by Hoffman (2006: 5) that the civil war in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002 was 'widespread and long enough that most Sierra Leoneans experienced it directly'. Young males, in particular, were heavily involved in the fighting and the war saw the prominent use of child soldiers by all factions, with participation 'often bound up in notions of masculinity' (Hoffman, 2006: 5). One prominent feature of the fighting was the intentional use of amputation, primarily by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), against government sympathisers (Richards, 1996). Berghs (2007: 79) recognises that amputation was used by all factions, however, as an 'effective cultural weapon of war

because it not only spread terror but it also deprived the enemy of the political and social capital of labor'. The war resulted in thousands of people being affected by amputation, most of which was inflicted intentionally, but for others resulted from gunshot wounds and landmines.

Following the civil war, many of the amputees that survived regarded their amputation as punishment for their support of the government and it was to the government that they looked for aid (Berghs, 2007). The government response was to set up contained, isolated camps where amputees would receive medical treatment. It was foreign NGOs and religious organisations that recognised the need to empower Sierra Leone's amputees in an attempt to challenge ideas that they had of themselves as 'silent or hidden victims' of war (Berghs, 2007: 82). Dependency on others, especially women, had significant implications for male amputees who were now presented with the risk of losing their masculinity and 'being viewed as feminine' (Berghs, 2007: 84). As Berghs (2007: 84) explains, it was through the organisation of recreational activities for amputees and their families, notably football, that 'camp structures successfully helped to aid in defusing these emotional tensions and frictions' that had emerged from the reversal of many traditional family roles and relations.

Whilst no reference is made to amputees, Richards (1997: 155) discusses how a shared enthusiasm for football presented the sport as a potential vehicle to reverse the 'radical desocialization' experienced by young fighters in Sierra Leone and neighbouring Liberia. Similarly, for amputees, organised football games were proposed by an American nurse and single amputee, Dee Malchow, who was doing charity work in Sierra Leone. The

idea was supported by Pastor Mambud Samai, a youth counsellor in the amputee camps, and this led to the creation of the Single-Leg Amputee Sports Club (SLASC, now the Single-Leg Amputee Sports Association [SLASA]) in 2001 (Berghs, 2007).

Since the formation of the SLASC, membership of the SLASA has grown to in excess of 320 male and female amputees and disabled people in six teams across the country (Freetown, Makeni, Bo, Kenema, Puhejun and Kailahun). The underlying aims of uniting and supporting the amputee community, contributing to the exercising of different types of capital and empowering amputees to gain control over their lives (Berghs, 2007), remain central to the SLASA. On 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2013, the SLASA organised a match in Eastern Freetown to commemorate the 'Invasion of Freetown' in 1999 by RUF rebels, an invasion that resulted in many of the current club members becoming amputees (Street Football World, 2013). Whilst it has been recognised that football has had a positive impact on the lives of many amputees in Sierra Leone, its impact and the attention it receives need to be considered more critically.

In the year when Sierra Leone became the first African nation to compete in the Amputee World Cup, there were widespread reports of amputees being neglected by the government and forced to make their living by begging, whilst ex-fighters who were responsible for mutilations were compensated for disarming (Fofana, 2005). Similarly, Berghs (2010) recognises that, whilst images of amputees and war-wounded in Sierra Leone have regularly been used to stimulate international aid, there has been negligible benefit to disabled people who continue to lack acknowledgment by the government in a country where no laws exist to protect their fundamental human rights. The amputee

footballers have similarly become used as political pawns, as Berghs (2010: 863-864) explains:

‘To this day almost every journalist that goes through Sierra Leone makes an almost obligatory pit stop to interview the amputee football players. Most of the players stay in Freetown and play on the beaches near the hotels to ensure that they continue to tap into this potential pool of aid and lobbying.’

This brief case study provides an example of how participation in football by a particular group of disabled people, in a particular context, is considerably different from the experiences of other disabled footballers. In this case, global interest in the developments of amputee football must be understood alongside some of the more pressing realities faced during the everyday lives of the players and other disabled people within Sierra Leone.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a very modest overview of disability and football, each aspect of which warrants exclusive in-depth attention in its own right. We have used selected case studies in an attempt to account for at least some of the diversity across disability football itself and to take account of the experiences of disabled spectators. What emerges is a very complex picture of potted histories, differential experiences for disabled footballers across impairment groups and cultural contexts and very dynamic political

contexts in terms of the organisation of national and international opportunities for plurality of disabled footballers and spectators.

The relatively recent commitment of major football authorities to disability football can be viewed as both a blessing and a curse. Whilst football authorities have considerable resources at their disposal in comparison to NDSOs and IOSDs, many stakeholders will be concerned about a potential shift of control towards football *for* people with disabilities, organised (predominantly) by the non-disabled. Any such transition needs to be managed very carefully. Reflecting on recent developments and power shifts within visually impaired football specifically, Macbeth and Magee (2006) stressed that key stakeholders face significant challenges to develop the sport in a manner that provides appropriate services and opportunities and adequately ensures ‘the needs of disabled people are taken into account’ (Oliver, 1996: 32). This is a challenge that rings true across all aspects of disability football and developments for disabled spectators. The nature and scale of future developments for disabled footballers and spectators remain to be seen but they deserve considerably more academic attention than they have received so far.

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