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**Title:** Book Review: The Palgrave international handbook of football and politics

**Year:** 2020

**Version:** Submitted version (Preprint)

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**Please cite the original version:**

Palonen, K., & Söderman, M. (2020). Book Review: The Palgrave international handbook of football and politics. *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 40(1), 131-133.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02606755.2019.1644752>

Review of *The Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics*.

Edited by Jean-Michel De Waele, Suzan Gibril, Ekaterina Gloriovova and Ramón Spaaij.  
London: Palgrave Macmillan 2018, 710 pages (ISBN 978-3-319-78776-3)

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The Palgrave Handbook is so far the most extensive effort to write a comparative political science of football. A programmatic introduction is followed by case studies on the history and politics of football in 32 countries and five continents. All the chapters follow the framework outlined in the introduction (the political origins of football, club rivalries, football fandom and contemporary issues, such as ‘religion, gender, corruption, geopolitical interests, social integration or economic dimensions’, p. 6). The examination of the Bosman ruling (pp. 31-33) within the EU, is a very valuable contribution.

The Football Association (FA) was founded in 1863, but ‘different variants of “football” were emerging through play and competition, discussion and debate until late 1880s (p. 182). Football as ‘an English game’ parallels the status of Westminster among parliaments. Its rules were indebted to members of the Cambridge Union Society, which followed Westminster-style parliamentary procedures in its debates and internal meetings. In parliament, fair and open debate is followed by a vote. A football match is fair only if its result remains open and the rules of the game are fair.

The fair play principle has been interpreted as amateurism (Sweden, p. 140) or as ‘the traditional Uruguayan tenacity (‘garra’, ‘garra charrúa’)’ (p. 573). The Ivorian club Stade Abidjan ‘had a reputation for being intellectual and cultivating fair play and style’ (p. 389), in Ukraine fair play formed the rules ‘for fights between football fans’ (p. 321), but in Argentina it was replaced by ‘a new concept of masculinity’ (pp. 471-72).

In Russia, the introduction of ‘the English game’ made ‘anti-British feelings’ to increase (p. 267) and in the United States football was ‘branded as foreign and “un-American” ’ (p 532). In the English colonies football was a tool ‘to promote good behaviour, sobriety, obedience, discipline and cooperation’ (p. 448). The locals frequently managed to invert these aims and create their own football. Against the French, ‘young male Ivorians ... defied the colonial policy by developing a strong interest in sports and particularly football’ (p. 386). When the contingency of results is the *raison d’être* of the game, a total control does not make sense. Accordingly, ‘football allowed Soviets to choose their leisure and the team they wanted to support’ (pp. 268–69).

Football took part in the politics of forming international institutions. The chapter on France mentions the founding of the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) in 1904 (p. 41). The World Cup was organized for the first time in Uruguay in 1930 (p. 561). Today football is a global game with numerous foreign players in the main leagues and an extraordinary visibility of major events. The inclusion of tables of tournaments, medallists, players and coaches into the Handbook would have facilitated the comparative reading of football politics.

The Argentinian coach César Luis Menotti in the 1970s suggested that there is a political aspect between left wing aesthetic and right wing result-oriented styles. In Nigeria the ‘ability to dance with the ball’ is considered more important than ‘simply putting the ball into the net’ (p. 408), a style also associated with Brazilian and Dutch football. Arrigo Sacchi’s AC Milan attempted to combine the styles at the turn of the 1990s and thus politicized the style choices in Italy, known for its emphasis on defence and cautiousness.

The Handbook interestingly suggests, that today also the players must have at least some political literacy. In the 2006 World Cup, Ivory Coast ‘players ... used the successful qualification as a chance to make political statements’ (p. 393), Didier Drogba being one of the most prominent figures in this regard. The successful Brazilian players Romário

and Bebeto have been elected to parliament after their playing career. The AC Milan icon, Giovanni “Gianni” Rivera, has served as a member of both the Italian and the European parliaments. Pia Sundhage is considered as a ‘norm-breaker in football’ (p. 156), as her careers as both player and trainer have contributed to football culture becoming more egalitarian.

The voices of the actors, of players and coaches and football journalists, their views on the game and its evolutions, are largely absent in the Handbook, as is the link between the changing rules of the game and tactical developments. An exception is the presentation of the origins of the Argentinian *criollo*, or *la nuestra*, style with its focus on the adversaries (pp. 473–75). The rules of football allow different opportunities to use the space, which has led to numerous tactical innovations over the years. Karl Rappan’s *verrou* introduced a system in which the defenders would outnumber the forwards, later used in the Italian *catenaccio*. A gradual withdrawal of forwards has been a major trend in football.

The role of women as football players, coaches and fans is a recurring theme in the Handbook. The game was often seen as ‘a strictly male preserve’ (p. 406), although in Nigeria women are reported to have played football by the 1930s (p. 407). In Sweden, ‘the first match between two women’s teams was played in 1918’, but the first Swedish championship for women took place only in 1973 (pp. 153–54). However, despite the increasing interest towards women’s football and the rise in both the number and quality of players, it is peculiar that in some big footballing countries (e.g. Italy) women receive only marginal attention. Pia Sundhage’s example (pp. 155–56) illustrates the barriers and stereotypes women still encounter in this male-dominated sport.

The Handbook examines in great detail the mobilization of the supporters inside and outside the stadium. The world famous term for fanatical supporters, *ultras*, seems to have originated among Sampdoria supporters in 1970s (p. 114). In Argentina and Uruguay, these fanatical supporter groups are called *barras bravas* (p. 478, 570), in

Brazil *torcidas* (pp. 492–94). The chapters also explore what kinds of measures have been adopted to tackle issues concerning violent and racist forms of fandom.

The politics of naming forms an unintended subtext of the book. The US term *soccer* (derived from ‘association football’) and the Italian *calcio* are well-known examples of giving a local colour to the game. The Handbook discusses extensively the political affiliations of football clubs. *Dynamo* was the club of the police in the Soviet Union (p. 271), in East Germany (p. 70) and in Romania (spelled *Dinamo*, p. 255), but not in Zimbabwe (pp. 450-51). *Spartak* Moscow (pp. 271-72) and the railway workers’ club *Rapid Bucharest* had a certain ‘aura of opposition from below’ (p. 256).

The Handbook explores both ‘politics in football’ and ‘football in politics’ (p. 640) and the contributions of the book will surely inspire further research into these topics. The quote from Grant Farred referring to football as a ‘language’ (p. 3) and a Weberian-style action-concept of politics as ‘the struggle for power and resources’ in the chapter on Nigeria (p. 403) contain, for instance, possibilities of reading football as a form of politics in itself. The fair play ideal and parliamentary rules as the historical paradigm for the game point to further possibilities to regard politics as a regular part of football matches.