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A Political History of Football in Iran*

IN LATE 1997 IRANIAN FOOTBALL MADE INTERNATIONAL HEADLINES. IN AN article on the Islamic summit held in Iran, *The Economist* wrote that almost "anything can become a political football in Iran, including football."[1] This attention was precipitated by the political ramifications within Iran of the national team's tie against Australia in Melbourne on November 29th, which secured it a place in the 1998 World Cup in extremis. Since then, major international soccer games have often given rise to massive street demonstrations by young people. That football should cause so much excitement in Iran is not astonishing if one looks at it from a global perspective. Football is a game in which each team works together to try to occupy as much of the "territory" of the other as it can, culminating in attempts symbolically to "conquer" the other side's stronghold by kicking the ball into the goal.[2] The playing field thus becomes a metaphor for the competition between communities, cities, and nations: football focuses group identities. The excitement that the game generates in Latin America is well known; Honduras and El Salvador even waged a brief "soccer war" in 1969.[3]

But ask any Iranian what Iran's national sport is, and the answer will be "wrestling," a discipline whose history in Iran goes back more than a thousand

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1. *The Economist* December 13, 1997: 37.

2. R.W. Pickford, "Aspects of the Psychology of Games and Sports," *British Journal of Psychology* 31 (1941): 285. For an analysis of how military metaphors pervade the language of football see Rainer Küster, "Kriegsspiele—Militärische Metaphern im Fußballsport," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 28 (1998): 53–70. See also Christian Bromberger, "Où il est question de guerre, de vie, de mort, de sexe, de l'autre," chap. 15 in *Le Match de football: Ethnologie d'une passion partisane à Marseille, Naples et Turin* (Paris, 1995).

3. For a discussion of the bellicose dimension of football see Simon Kuper, *Football against the Enemy* (London, 1995). For an interesting perspective on the short war between El Salvador and Honduras see Ryszard Kapuscinski, "The Soccer War," in *The Soccer War*, trans. William Brand (New York, 1990), 157–84. For a study of football in Latin America see Tony Mason, *Passion of the People? Football in South America* (London, 1995).

years, compared to the century that encompasses the presence of football in the country. Until the introduction of Western sports and physical education, Iranian sports consisted on the one hand of the various folk games specific to different provinces,[4] and on the other, of the exercises, including wrestling, practiced in the zurkhanehs, urban gymnasia found almost everywhere in Iran.[5] The only native team game of any importance was polo, which had thrived under the Safavids but disappeared during the troubles that followed their demise in the eighteenth century, only to be revived as a British import in the late Qajar period.[6] Physical exercises in Iran were therefore mostly individual in nature, which struck Iranian modernists as symptomatic of the individualism and lack of cooperative spirit that is commonly ascribed to the "national character" of Iranians,[7] leading them to make the popularization of team sports part of their agenda for change. Nonetheless, until the mid-1960s freestyle wrestling, which resembles traditional Iranian wrestling and was therefore readily adopted by Iranians, remained Iran's most popular sport.[8] Iran's greatest sports legend, Ghulamriza Takhti, was a champion in that discipline, and today in Iran not only sports halls but also many football stadiums are named after him.[9] Freestyle wrestling is the discipline in which Iranians have won the greatest number of medals since they started competing internationally at the 1948 London Olympics, yet Iran's first place in the 1998 world championships, held in Tehran, caused far less excitement in Iran than the country's mere participation in the 1998 soccer World Cup: "nationalism peaks because many consider collective action a truer test of a country's spirit than individual talent."[10] Given the Islamic Republic's persistent attempts to keep global culture at bay, the widespread popularity of football in Iran calls for some explanation.

Football is by far the most popular sport in the world, and scholarly attempts to make sense of this popularity go back almost a century.[11] In a very basic sense, football embodies modernity:

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4. Ghulamhusayn Malik-Muhammadi, *Varzishha-yi sunnati, bumi va mahalli* (Tehran, 1364/1986).

5. See Philippe Rochard's article in this issue.

6. See H. E. Chehabi and Allen Guttmann, "From Iran to all of Asia: The Origin and Diffusion of Polo," in *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present* (London, forthcoming).

7. Ali Banuazizi, "Iranian 'National Character': A Critique of Some Western Perspectives," in *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies* (Princeton, 1977), 210–39.

8. See, for instance, Curtis Harnack, *Persian Lions, Persian Lamb: An American's Odyssey in Iran* (New York, 1965), 121–137.

9. H. E. Chehabi, "Sport and Politics in Iran: The Legend of Gholamreza Takhti," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12 (1995). Although I tried to analyze the legend objectively, I was myself misled to some extent by the hagiographic nature of some of my sources. For an insider's account of how the legend was created by Iranian oppositionists, see Mahdi Sharif, "Az insān tā usṭūrah," *Irāniyān-i Vāshangtun* 2 (1998).

10. Janet Lever, *Soccer Madness* (Chicago, 1983), 29.

11. See for instance G. T. W. Patrick, "The Psychology of Football," *The American*

> Nineteenth century individualism found in the spirit of the club a certain compensation for its solitude; democracy has visibly diminished the borders between [socio-economical] milieux, [new modes of] transportation have lifted the limitations imposed by vital spaces. The popularity of a local, national, and international athletic game that allows for restrained masculine aggressivity and technical skill to manifest themselves in inoffensive enterprises, that offers sensible and moderate satisfactions, and that allows the development of "nationalist" and "regionalist" cults without grave consequences is especially well adapted to this new world. Football is a game of this sort... A technical culture values team work.[12]

While this may be an overly optimistic assessment of the "inoffensiveness" of football fever, written before hooligan violence became an everyday occurrence, the social transformations that favored the popularity of football in Europe also took place in Iran (and the rest of the Middle East), only later; the transition from wrestling to football as Iran's most popular sport therefore reflects the social and political changes that have occurred in the country. It is striking how this shift in tastes is congruent with the Durkheimian notion of transition from mechanic to organic solidarity: wrestling, in which all athletes do the same thing, has an elective affinity with mechanic solidarity, which is the solidarity brought about by the resemblance of the members of a group, while football (and other team sports) typifies organic solidarity, namely, solidarity on the basis of a complementarity deriving from the division of labor.[13] Christian Bromberger, the French anthropologist who has written extensively about both Iran and football, observed that "football values team work, solidarity, division of labour, and collective planning—very much in the image of the industrial world which originally produced it,"[14] but cautioned that football "also underlines the role of chance, of cheating, of a judgement that can be argued about, i.e., the referee's."[15]

My aim in this article is not to give a history of Iranian football, [16] nor to present an anthropological study of it, but to analyze the interplay between the popularization of football, social change, state policies, and politics *tout court*.

Journal of Psychology 14 (1903): 104–117.

12. F. J. J. Buytendijk, *Le Football: Une étude psychologique* (Paris, 1952), 48–49.

13. See Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York, 1984), 31–87.

14. Christian Bromberger, "Football as world-view and as ritual," *French Cultural Studies* 6 (1995): 296.

15. Christian Bromberger, "De quoi parlent les sports?" *Terrain* (1995): 6. See also his "Football, drame, société," *Sport* (150): 12–19.

16. In recent years a plethora of books has come out that document almost every single game played in Iran. See Bahram Afrasiyabi, *Sardārān-i pā bih tūp: Tārīkh-i muṣavvar-i fūtbāl dar Īrān az āghāz tā jām-i jahānī-yi 1998 Farānsih*, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1377/1998);

The Introduction of Western Sport to Iran

The introduction of Western sports in Iran is not well documented. At the Dar al-Funun, the first modern school, which was established in Tehran in 1851, the European officers on the teaching staff made their Iranian students exercise regularly. For this purpose, the school's theater, which had never been used for dramatic performances, was transformed into a gymnasium. Like so many other cultural innovations, various forms of modern physical exercise also reached Iran through the military. A German-educated officer by the name of Giranmayah taught Friedrich Ludwig Jahn's gymnastics at the old Military Academy (*Madrasa-i Niẓām*),[17] in the Gendarmerie Swedish officers taught Per Henrik Ling's Swedish method,[18] and at the school of the Cossack Brigade Russian gymnastics was taught.[19]

The utility of physical exercise for national progress became a matter of public discussion after the constitutional revolution of 1906. Persian publications, both inside and outside Iran, stressed the importance of sport and physical exercise for creating a healthy nation that could revive the glories of ancient Iran.[20] In 1916, a man who can be called the father of modern sports in Iran, Mir Mahdi Varzandah, returned to Iran from a lengthy stay in Belgium and Turkey, and began teaching physical education in Iranian schools. He met with resistance at first, but in 1919 the minister of education, Nasir al-Mulk, made physical education part of the official curriculum of Iranian schools.[21] In June 1921, Kavah, the influential journal published in Berlin, wrote:

> In the opinion of those who have immersed themselves in the secrets of nations' progress, [sport] is one of the main causes of national power, progress, independence, civilization, national survival, and especially chastity and seriousness of purpose, and is the origin of both individual and social virtues. Playing balls with the hands, *but especially with the feet*, horse riding, rowing, hunting, fencing, polo, and sledging. . .have a huge importance in the lives of Europeans, and a direct connection with their progress. It is not for nothing that many learned people have

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Husayn Yikta and Mahmud Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh-i fūtbāl-i Īrān* (Tehran, 1378/1999); Hamid-Riza Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl* (Tehran, 1379/2000), 15–90; and Mahdi ᶜAbbasi, *Fūtbāl-i Īrān: Tārīkh-i mustanad va muṣavvar* (Tehran, 1380/2001).

17. On Jahn, see Horst Überhorst, *Zurück zu Jahn* (Bochum, 1969).

18. On Ling, see Carl Diem, *Weltgeschichte des Sports und der Leibeserziehungen* (Stuttgart, 1967), 793–795 and Jan Lindroth, "The History of Ling Gymnastics in Sweden. A Research Survey," *Stadion* 19–20 (1993–94).

19. Abulfazl Sadri, *Tārīkh-i varzish* (Tehran, 1340/1962), 138–139. Sadri calls the Russian method *zakulski*, which in all probability refers to Sokol gymnastics.

20. See Cyrus Schayegh's article in this issue.

21. Sadri, *Tārīkh-i varzish*, 138–139.

said that "the secret of the grandeur, power, and progress of the British is football, i.e., playing ball with the feet."[22]

In spite of the special place that football occupied in the modernist imagination, when the Iranian parliament passed a law in 1927 authorizing the ministry of education to introduce compulsory daily physical education in public schools,[23] the system used was the calisthenics developed in Sweden by Per Henrik Ling, which became known in Iran as *varzish-i sū'īdī*, "Swedish exercises." Shortly thereafter, a physical education teacher training college was established under the directorship of Varzandah, and it operated until 1934.[24] It seems that the clergy and religious opinion opposed the 1927 measure, as the exercises struck some traditional people as frivolous inasmuch as they resembled dancing.[25]

Competitive Western athletic games were introduced to Iran by Iranians returning from Europe and by Europeans living in Iran. As elsewhere in the world, British expatriates played a major role in the introduction of football to Iran.[26] In the Ottoman Empire the first football games had been played by British residents and non-Muslims,[27] and in Iran, too, the first record of any football game that I have found involved British expatriates in Isfahan playing a team of Armenians in 1898. The sons of the prince-governor of the province, Zill al-Sultan, watched and then took to the game, which they found more enjoyable than cricket.[28] But as far as the general public was concerned, football was

22. "Khiyālāt," *Kāvah*, n.s. 2 (1921): 1, emphasis added. Iran was of course not the only country in which reformers associated national effeteness with insufficient taste for physical exercise. For the case of France see Eugen Weber, "Faster, Higher, Stronger," chap. 11 in *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, 1986). For India, see John Rosselli, "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in 19th Century Bengal," *Past and Present* 86 (1980): 121–48.

23. For the text of the law see *Ta'līm va tarbiyat* 3 (1306/1927): 1; or Sadri, *Tārīkh-i varzish*, 139. For a glimpse of Ling's reception in Iran see M. M. T. T. [Muhammad Muhit Tabataba'i ?], "Līng: shā'ir va varzishkār 1776–1839," *Amūzish va parvarish* 10 (1319/1940): 15–16, 58.

24. Sadri, *Tārīkh-i varzish*, 140, 142.

25. Sadri, *Tārīkh-i varzish*, 139, and *Dānish-i varzish* 2 (1367/1989): 43.

26. On Britain's export of football to the rest of the world see Allen Guttmann, *Games & Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York, 1994), 41–70; James Walvin, "Britain's Most Durable Export," chap. 2 in *The People's Game: The History of Football Revisited* (Edinburgh and London, 1994), 96–117; and Tony Mason, "English Lessons," chap. 2 in *Passion of the People*, 15–26.

27. Kurthan Fişek, "The genesis of sports administration in Turkey," in Horst Ueberhorst, ed., *Geschichte der Leibesübungen* (Berlin, 1989), 6: 626.

28. Wilfrid Sparroy, *Persian Children of the Royal Family: The Narrative of an English Tutor at the Court of H. I. H. Zillu's-Sultán, G. C. S. I.* (London, 1902), 255–56. I am grateful to John Gurney for bringing this book to my attention.

introduced to Iranians through three conduits of modernization: missionary schools, the oil industry, and the military.

In British missionary schools, games, including football, were part of the curriculum.[29] The same was true for the St. Louis School, run by French Lazarists, which had one of the earliest varsity soccer teams.[30] And although nowadays one does not associate football with the United States, American missionaries preferred it to American football.[31] Physical education was an important part of the curriculum of the American School (later Alborz College), which was founded by Presbyterian missionaries.[32] In a conscious effort to inculcate the value of cooperative effort, insufficiently fostered by traditional Iranian exercises, the director of the school, Dr. Samuel M. Jordan (1871-1952), concentrated on ball games and made students take up pick and shovel to help build the school's football field.[33] In 1935 Jordan wrote:

> Iranian statesmen for years have mourned, "We Iranians do not know how to cooperate." But how do you teach people to cooperate, how do you teach them to "play the game"? Obviously by playing games, and so we introduced football, baseball, volley-ball, basket-ball—all those group games that we are using here in America, and naturally the boys took to them just as boys do everywhere in the world. The result is that physical education with all these group games is a regular part of the school program for all the schools of Iran, and a year ago the Minister of Education took out from Columbia University a Ph.D. in physical education to head their department of Physical Education. Throughout the whole Empire, Young Iran is learning to 'play the game' of life.[34]

While missionary schools introduced football to the sons of the elite, working class Iranians became acquainted with the game through the British employees of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. These played football (as well as cricket, hockey, tennis, squash, and golf) in the oil fields of Abadan and Masjid

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29. See, for instance, R. W. Howard, *A Merry Mountaineer: The Story of Clifford Harris of Persia* (London, 1935), 82–83. I am grateful to J. A. Mangan for this reference.

30. Sipahbud Ahmad Vusuq, *Dāstān-i zindagī: Khāṭirātī az panjāh sāl tārīkh-i muᶜāṣir 1290–1340* (Tehran, n.d.), 15.

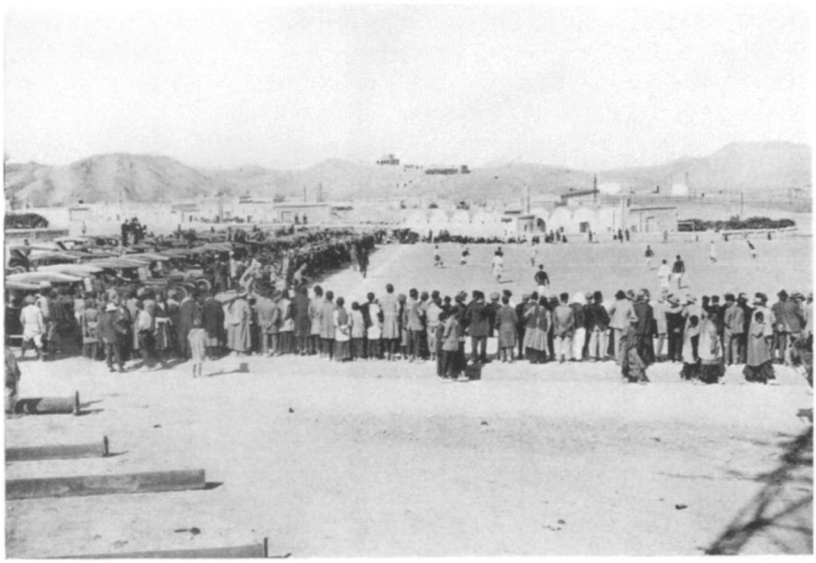
31. In the 1930s, for instance, soccer was also the major sport at the Syrian Protestant College, later renamed the American University of Beirut. Stephen B. L. Penrose, Jr., *That They May Have Life: The Story of the American University in Beirut* (New York, 1941), 286.

32. See J. Armajani, "Alborz College," *EIr s.v.*

33. Arthur C. Boyce, "Alborz College of Tehran and Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan, Founder and President," in *Cultural Ties between Iran and the United States* (N.p., 1976), 193–94 and 198.

34. Samuel M. Jordan, "Constructive Revolutions in Iran," *The Moslem World* 25 (1935): 350–51.

Sulayman; the latter area even boasting a football league and an annual international match between England and Scotland.[35] The local Iranian employees of the company first looked on, and then began replacing individual players on the teams, until they formed their own teams. These young Iranian football players met some hostility from their social environment for participating in the games of the "infidels," and were at times beaten up and pelted with stones. One reason



Soccer Field at Masjid Sulayman

for this hostility was that the players' shorts violated traditional dress codes, for the shari'a advises men to cover their legs from the navel to the knee.[36] Elsewhere in the south of Iran, football was introduced by the British officers of the South Persia Rifles (1916-1921) to the Iranian troops they commanded, who then spread the game among the population.

In Tehran, British residents connected with the legation, the consulate, the Imperial Bank, and the Indo-European Telegraph Department held matches,

35. J. W. Williamson, *In a Persian Oil Field* (London, 1927), 164. For the "international" character of games between England and Scotland see H. F. Moorhouse, "One State, Several Countries: Soccer and Nationality in a 'United' Kingdom," in J. A. Mangan, ed., *Tribal Identities: Nationalism, Europe, Sport* (London, 1996), 55–74.

36. This, incidentally, was also an issue in Europe around the same time. In 1913 the yearbook of the German football association carried an article complaining about the shorts worn by football players, which it deemed *sittlich empörend* (morally disgraceful), and suggested that players wear trousers that did not constrain the knees but covered the thigh muscles. Heike Egger, "'Sportswear': Zur Geschichte der Sportkleidung," *Stadion* 18 (1992): 136.

mostly on the Maydan-i Mashq, which later came to be known as Tupkhanah. Their games attracted the attention of young men who came to watch, and around 1908, Iranians started replacing individual players on the British teams. Soon Iranian football players formed their own teams, but faced a major problem in that balls were difficult to find. Some made due with inflated cow udders,[37] others endeavored to make off with out-of-bounds balls at British games. The onset of World War I in 1914 put an end to the organized games among the British teams in Tehran, but by 1918 they started once more, again with some Iranian players, and in 1920 a number of Iranians formed the first all-Iranian football club, which they called "Iran Club." Soon the alumni of the American college and the students of the School of Political Science also formed teams.[38] In 1919 or 1920, a number of Iranian and British football enthusiasts founded the Iranian Football Association (*Majmaᶜ-i Fūtbāl-i Iran*) to encourage Iranian players and to popularize the game. The director of the Imperial Bank of Persia, James McMurray, became its president, and he was assisted by the legation doctor, A.R. Neligan; they each donated a cup to be awarded to winning teams. A year later the Iranian members of the association decided to take it over. They renamed it the Association for the Promotion and Progress of Football (*Majmaᶜ-i Tarvīj va Taraqqī-yi Fūtbāl*), and Reza Khan agreed to become its honorary president.[39] It became the first association to be registered at the State Registry, the newly founded *Daftar-i asnād-i rasmī*, and the first modern Iranian sports organization. It translated into Persian and published the rules of association football, and beginning in 1923, it organized soccer tournaments in Tehran.

To sum up, the British presence in Iran was instrumental in popularizing football in Iran, but other Westerners, like the Americans and the French, also furthered its popularity through the schools they established. In places that had not entertained a significant foreign presence, such as Ardabil, it seems that the game was introduced in the 1920s by young men who had spent some time in the Caucasus.[40] Football matches also were occasions on which Iranians, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and Europeans met. Perhaps it was precisely this that aroused the suspicion of some traditional circles. In March 1925, for instance, police had to step in when a group of youngsters, all bearing names that indicate their backgrounds as artisans and small shopkeepers, created disturbances at a game between a Tehran club and an Armenian team and insulted the Armenian

37. Cf. pre-modern European games in which players kicked an inflated pig's bladder around. Norbert Elias, "Der Fußballsport im Prozeß der Zivilisation," in Rold Lindner, ed., *Der Satz "Der Ball ist rund" hat eine gewisse philosophische Tiefe* (Berlin, 1983), 16.

38. Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 19–22; *Kayhān-i varzishī* 631 (1346/1967–68): 10, as quoted in Ismaᶜil Shafiᶜi Sarvistani, "Dāstān-i varzish-i mudirn," *Ṣubḥ* 76 (1376/1997): 33.

39. Sadri, *Tārīkh-i varzish*, 153. Sadri was the secretary of the association.

40. Baba Safari, *Ardabīl dar guẕargāh-i tārīkh* (Ardabil, 1371/1992), 3: 240.

woman spectators. The hooligans *avant la lettre* were arrested and condemned to fifty whip lashes.[41]

Football under Reza Shah

By the mid-1920s football had become a symbol of modernization, and soon the game was promoted at the highest levels of the state. In the summer of 1924, Reza Khan ordered regular athletic competitions, including football matches, to be held by the armed forces. Some of these took place in the provinces, such as one between members of the *tīp-i mukhtaliṭ-i Kurdistān*, at which players still wore traditional *gīvas*.[42] But the development of the game was hampered by the shortage of playing fields, most of which belonged to British or American institutions.[43] In the winter of 1925, at a session attended by the then speaker of parliament, Sayyid Muhammad Tadayyun, in his capacity as head of the Association for the Promotion and Progress of Football, one of the players pointed out that it was a shame that the British had facilities but the Iranians did not. Tadayyun used his influence in the Majlis, and in the spring of 1926 the legislature approved a bill whereby a piece of land near the Darvazah Dawlat, on which

Playing Football in *gīvas*

young men had played informally for a number of years, was purchased for 10,000 tomans by the government to establish a permanent soccer field.[44]

After ascending the throne in late 1925, Reza Shah continued showing an interest in football. In early 1926 he attended a match between an Iranian team and a team of British expatriates in Tehran, in which for the first time, the Irani-

41. ʿAbbasi, *Fūtbāl-i Īrān*, 17–23. The original police reports are reproduced.

42. *Akhbār* (28 Tir 1377/ July 19, 1998): 5. On the traditional footwear of Iran see Jamshid Sadaqat-Kish, "Giva," *EIr* s.v.

43. ʿAbbasi, *Fūtbāl-i Īrān*, 76.

44. Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 34–35, 41.

ans beat the Britons at their own game.[45] Having thus gained confidence in their football prowess, in the autumn of 1926, as a sign that relations between Iran and the Soviet Union had improved, the Iranian cabinet decided to send a team of fifteen Iranian football players led by the director of the School of Physical Education, Mir Mahdi Varzandah, to an international tournament in Baku.[46] The team played four matches against different teams from Baku, losing three and drawing one. Upon their return to Tehran, a satirical magazine, *Nāhīd*, made fun of their defeat in its front page cartoon. Having expected a warmer welcome, a number of players took it upon themselves to ransack *Nāhīd*'s editorial offices, for which they were arrested and jailed for a night.[47] One of the team members who had played in Baku, Husayn Miftah, drew a more constructive lesson from the losses. Later he wrote:

> That trip had the advantage that we learned that dribbling and individualism (*takravī*) are of no use. . .each of us was good at individual moves. . .this was what the people liked. But when we saw the foreign games and the Baku team[s], we learned that the purpose of football is something different from what we had pursued until then.[48]

In 1929 it was time for a return visit, and so a team from Baku was invited to play in Tehran in late November.[49] To impress the visitors, grass had been planted on the state-owned football field. The last of the three games, all of which were won by the visitors, was attended by ᶜAbd al-Husayn Taymurtash, the powerful minister of court. The humiliating defeats (by scores of 11-0, 3–1, 4–0!), suffered on home grounds to boot, caused great consternation, so much so that some young men gave up football altogether. In subsequent years the interest in football waned, and newspapers hardly reported on those matches that did take place.[50] The activities of the Association for the Promotion and Progress of Football fizzled out, and beginning in the early 1930s a number of new organi-

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45. Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 38. Apparently Reza Shah was so upset by the first British goal that he wanted to leave the game, but was deterred by an army officer who argued that the ruler's departure would discourage the players. He stayed, and the Iranians scored two goals. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 21–22 and 84, n. 13.

46. The entire correspondence between various ministries is reproduced in Abbasi, Fūtbāl-i Īrān, 25–56.

47. *Kayhān-i varzishī*, 631 (1346/1967–68): 10, as quoted in Sarvistani, "Dāstān-i varzish-i mudirn," 33; and Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 56

48. *Kayhān-i varzishī*, 637 (1346/1967): 10, as quoted in Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 24–25.

49. For the significance of these games for Soviet diplomacy see Victor Peppard and James Riordan, *Playing Politics: Soviet Sport Diplomacy to 1992* (Greenwich, 1993), 101.

50. Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 78–79.

zations were formed to replace it.[51] These turned out to be ephemeral, but in 1934 a new impetus was given to sport and physical education.[52] In January of that year, to remedy the inefficiency of previous ad hoc associations, the ministry of education set up a special Office of Physical Education. Its main function was to encourage schools to establish football teams and then organize inter-school competitions.[53] Competitions began a few weeks later, but teams again faced a severe shortage of playing fields.[54]

The Office of Physical Education was only in charge of school sport, however, and so a number of Iranian statesmen and educators founded the National Association for Physical Education (*Anjuman-i Millī-yi Tarbiyat-i Badanī*) in the spring of 1934.[55] From the outset, the association was placed under the patronage of the crown prince, who had become the president of the Association for the Promotion and Progress of Football in 1929,[56] but was now studying in Switzerland. To reorganize Iranian sports and scouting, an American and recent graduate of Columbia University by the name of Thomas R. Gibson was invited to come to Iran. For Gibson, who stayed until 1938, sport meant team sports: when a Japanese judo master offered to introduce this discipline to the Iranian public, Gibson refused the offer, arguing that what Iran needed was team sports.[57] Gibson instituted competitions between school teams, mostly in soccer. Within a few months after his taking charge, twenty-four teams had been formed, all of them connected with educational establishments. The tournaments were attended by the highest dignitaries of the state,[58] but ʿIsa Sadiq relates that in the beginning the public was so indifferent to spectator sports that the Office of Physical Education had to resort to serving free tea and sweets to lure people to the football games.[59] Gibson also systematically sent coaches to the provinces to propagate modern sports, mainly football.[60] They formed football clubs all

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51. Ibid., 22–23.

52. Ibid., 92.

53. *Iṭṭilāʿāt* (14 Day 1312/January 4, 1934): 2, as quoted in Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 103.

54. Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 106–108.

55. At the association's first meeting, on April 22, 1934/ Urdibihisht 1313, the top brass of the regime were present: Ibrahim Hakimi, ʿAli-Asghar Hikmat, Husayn ʿAlaʾ, Amanullah Jahanbani, ʿIsa Sadiq, Sulayman Asadi, Ibrahim Shamsavari. Nasrullah Hajj-ʿAzimi and General Dr. Izadpanah, Hajj-ʿAzimi and Izadpanah, *Tārīkh-i varzish-i Īrān* (Tehran, n.d.), 135.

56. *Tihrān Muṣavvar* (23 Azar 1308/ December 14, 1929): 9, as quoted in Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 77.

57. Hajj-ʿAzimi and Izadpanah, *Tārīkh-i varzish-i Īrān*, 137.

58. "Ākharīn jashn-i musābaqa-i fūtbāl," *Taʿlīm va tarbiyat* 4 (1313/1934): 117. See also *Taʿlīm va tarbiyat* 5 (1314/1935–1936): 549–551.

59. ʿIsa Sadiq, *Yādigār-i ʿumr: Khāṭirātī az sarguzasht*, (Tehran, 1975), 2: 172.

60. *Tārīkh-i farhang-i Āẕarbayjān* (Tabriz, 1956), 318. When the German Orientalist Walther Hinz visited Ardabil in 1938, the local director of education (a representative of

over the country and established playing fields,[61] sometimes on abandoned cemeteries.

In May 1936, the crown prince returned to Iran. As a boy growing up in Iran, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi had enjoyed playing football. At the Rosey School in Switzerland, where he spent five years, his athletic prowess had outshone his scholarly achievements, and he had captained both the school's football and tennis teams.[62] Upon returning home, he took a personal interest in sports. An article published in 1936 by the official organ of the ministry of education reports that after he joined the football team of the Officers' School which he now attended, that team never again lost a match and became the champion of the league of university faculties and high schools. Noting that matches in which he played attracted the enthusiastic attention of a public that thereby showed its deep attachment to the monarchy, the article added:

> His Highness the crown prince plays center forward, which is the most difficult and most technical position. Those who are familiar with this game, who are aware of the degree of difficulty of the center forward's duties, and who have had the honor of watching [the crown prince], will happily confirm that His Highness is a master and true champion in the way he defeats the opposing team by adroitly changing the attack line and distributing the ball to his teammates so as to put all of them to work and form a five-player attack line. The other point that all members of teams that have played against the Officer's School and spectators have noted is his sense of justice, nobility, and fair play."[63]

In 1939, for the first time in Iranian history, national championships were held in a number of disciplines, including football. This was followed in 1940 by first attempts to create separate federations for each discipline, including football, attempts that bore fruit only after the war.[64]

To sum up the history of soccer in pre-World War I Iran, until the mid-1930s Western sports appealed to a small minority of Iranians and officially sponsored football remained largely an elite activity. This is apparent, for

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the ministry of education) "proudly showed [him] photos of football teams he had created." Walther Hinz, *Iranische Reise: Eine Forschungsfahrt durch das heutige Persien* (Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1938), 60.

61. For details see Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 162–250.

62. Gérard de Villiers, *L'Irresistible ascension de Mohammad Reza Shah d'Iran* (Paris, 1975), 69–70. See also His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi Shahanshah of Iran, *Mission for my Country* (London, 1960), 53, 60, where the shah writes that he "was very proud of winning prizes in. . .throwing the discus, putting the shot, throwing the javelin, the high jump, the long jump, and the 100-metres."

63. "Shirkat-i vālāḥażrat-i humāyūn vilāyat-i ʿahd dar musābaqa-hā-yi fūtbāl," *Taʿlīm va tarbiyat* 6 (1315/1936): 796–99.

64. Yikta and Nurinizhad, *Tārīkh*, 325, 350–351.

instance, from the names of referees in the early period, where we find the scions of major land-owning families like Sardar Akram Qarahghuzlu, Arsalan and Abdullah Khal^{c}atbari, and Izam al-Saltanah Zulfaqari.[65] The age of Reza Shah was the golden age of varsity sports in Iran. The state's sponsorship of football in the rapidly expanding armed forces and in the equally rapidly expanding public educational system turned soccer into a popular pastime for young people. The result of these efforts was that, in spite of traditionalist resistance, football caught on. In 1935 an English observer wrote,

> [Football] has conquered Persia too and is played all over the country . . . in towns and tiny hamlets, by most of the schoolboys and a few men. And it was a smart game, fast, clean, intelligent. . . ."

And he added the usual refrain about teamwork,

> Many Persian schools play football several times a week, not only for its physical value, but because it is believed to be a fine education in learning to play 'fair,' a quality which Persians know the boys lack but which they wish to create, as they have seen, in the contact with Europeans, both in Persia and in Europe, how much it means in creating better human relationships.[66]

Football under Muhammad Reza Shah

Reza Shah left Iran in 1941, and only a few weeks after his departure, Ayatollah Kashani complained in a letter to the prime minister that the state had shamelessly turned a mosque into a football field and organized sports classes on its grounds.[67] But power was still largely in the hands of modernists, and so the state's promotion of football continued, although with less intensity than under Reza Shah.

During World War II, the presence of many Allied soldiers in occupied Iran allowed young Iranian men to measure their skills against foreigners. As a result of this experience, Iranian officialdom sensed a need to reorganize Iranian sports according to international criteria.[68] In 1947, in anticipation of the 1948 Olympic

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65. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl,* 25.

66. O.A. Merrit-Hawkes, *Persia: Romance and Reality* (London, 1935), 164–165. The practice of covering one's head made hitting the ball with the head difficult, and the author reports that at one game he saw that the boys would "come on the field wearing their hats, and. . .take them off only when they thought they could get in a hit." Ibid., 166.

67. Hisamuddin Ashna, ed., *Khushūnat va farhang: Asnād-i mahramāna-i kashf-i ḥijāb (1313–1322)* (Tehran, 1992), 30. According to Sadriddin Ilahi, one of Iran's foremost scholars of sport, Kashani may have been thinking of a sports field that had been established on the abandoned cemetery of Imamzadah Yahya in the ^{c}Udlajan quarter of Tehran.

68. Sadri, *Tārīkh-i varzish,* 155.

Games in London, a national Olympic committee was founded, and it published guidelines for separate federations to be set up for each discipline. The national football federation was finally established in Iran in 1947, and soon thereafter joined the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, FIFA, the world governing body of soccer.

In the 1950s and early 1960s the Iranian national team lost most of its international games, including a highly politically charged one against Iraq in 1962, which angered the shah and caused Prime Minister ᶜAli Amini to declare that if one had the "honor of the homeland and the health of the young people" at heart, money earmarked for sending the Iranian soccer team to the Fourth Asian Games in Jakarta would better be spent at home.[69]

The fortunes of the national team began improving in 1964, as the Iranian side beat the national teams of Pakistan, Iraq, and India to qualify for the Olympic Games in Tokyo. When the team returned to Tehran after a victorious game in Calcutta against India,[70] the government arranged a major welcome for them at the airport. Each player was driven to the city in an open jeep with a garland of flowers around his neck and an Iranian tricolor on each side.[71]

However, Iran's successes on the world's soccer fields paled in comparison with its triumphs on the world's wrestling mats. In the 1950s and 1960s Iranian freestyle wrestlers won many medals, culminating in the national team's win at the world championship of 1965 in Yokohama. These international successes combined with the sport's long tradition in Iran to make freestyle wrestling the most popular sport in Iran throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s.

It was only in the late 1960s that football became a major spectator sport. Iranian society was changing, as millions moved to the big cities, especially Tehran. A mass society resulting from urbanization favors a sport like football, which can be followed by tens of thousands of spectators in a stadium, spectators for whom the teams provide foci of loyalty and collective identification at the time when traditional community ties and rituals are weakening.[72] Moreover, beginning in the mid-1960s, television, which had come to Iran at the start of the decade, began broadcasting football games into people's homes.

The year 1968 stands out as a watershed in the history of Iranian football. For one thing, the death of Takhti in that year deprived wrestling of its most

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69. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 30–31. In the end Iran did not send a delegation to these games at all, probably because Indonesia had incurred the displeasure of the International Olympic Committee by refusing to invite Israel and the Republic of China. Bizhan Ruʾinpur, *Īrān dar bāzī-hā-yi āsiyāʾī (1951–1970)* (Tehran, 1377/1998), 1: 97–99.

70. As is well known, Calcutta is the football capital of cricket-loving India. See Tony Mason, "Football on the Maidan: Cultural Imperialism in Calcutta," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 7 (1990): 85–95.

71. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 31–33.

72. Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Game —An Introduction to the Anthropology of Football," in Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti, eds., *Entering the Field* (Oxford, 1997), 12.

admired figure. But more importantly, in 1968 Iran and Israel were the finalists in the Asian Nations Cup, a quadrennial event, older than the European Nations Cup, that took place between the world championships, and the game was to be held in Tehran. Only a year earlier, Israel had defeated its Arab neighbors in the Six Day War, and the event had swung most Iranians' sympathies firmly behind the Arabs. Now, at a time when Arab sports teams were boycotting Israel, Iran, ever eager to espouse an independent line on the Arab-Israeli issue,[73] hosted a championship game.[74]

On May 19, the day of the game, Tehran was rife with tension. Rumor had it that Habib Ilqanian, a rich Jewish industrialist who was later executed in 1979, had bought 16,000 tickets to distribute to Jewish Iranians so that they could cheer for the visitors. As it happened, before the game the gates of Amjadiyah Stadium were opened and the public was let in free of charge, generating new rumors that the shah wanted to prove his pro-Islamic and pro-Iranian sentiment by making sure that Muslim Iranians cheered for the Iranian team.[75] During the game spectators were delirious, and anti-Semitic chants were heard, confirming the link between modern anti-Semitism in the Middle East and the creation of the state of Israel.[76] In the end the hosts beat the guests 2–1, and as Iran became Asian football champion, the fans in the stadium were overjoyed. *Nuql*, sugar-covered almonds traditionally served on happy occasions, were thrown onto the field, and spectators remained on the grounds of the stadium for two hours chanting patriotic slogans, as police cavalry nervously guarded the nearby U.S. embassy. The victory led to rumors that the government had bribed the Indian referee to let Iran win, or alternatively that the Israelis had lost on purpose, so that their ally, the shah, might bask in the glory of having accomplished what the Arabs had failed to do—beat Israel.[77] From the point of view of many Iranian spectators, however, the match had not been a contest between nations but a contest between religious groups.[78]

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73. Robert B. Reppa, *Israel and Iran: Bilateral Relationship and Effect on the Indian Ocean Basin* (New York, 1974).

74. The football matches between Iran and Israel and their impact on Iranian Jews are discussed in greater detail in H. E. Chehabi, "Jews and Sport in Modern Iran," in vol. 4 of *Yahūdiyān-i Īrānī dar tārīkh-i muʿāṣir* (Beverly Hills, CA, 2001).

75. Gustav Edward Thaiss, "Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The Drama of Husain" (Ph.D dissertation, Washington University, 1973), 226–27. The story was confirmed to me by informants in Iran.

76. Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York, 1986).

77. This conforms to a widespread pattern of football matches experienced by the spectators as substitutes for war. See Kuper, *Football against the Enemy*, especially the Introduction, which relates Dutch reactions to the 1988 victory of the Netherlands' team against the German team, a victory that was celebrated by otherwise quite reasonable and liberal-minded people as a revenge for the German occupation of the Netherlands more than four decades earlier.

78. This is confirmed by the fact that when bazaar merchants collected money to buy

The 1968 victory, witnessed by millions of people on television, made soccer a true mass phenomenon in Iran. Two popular singers, Vigen and Dilkash, recorded songs to the glory of Iran's team. Players became frequent guests on radio shows and their photos were traded on street corners. More and more youngsters began playing informal games with cheap plastic balls on improvised fields with portable goals, a game that came to be known as *gul kūchak* (little goal).

In 1974, the year after the October War, Iran and Israel again faced each other in Tehran, this time as finalists in the Asian Games. Only one year after the quadrupling of oil prices had enriched the Iranian regime, it wanted to use the hosting of the Asian Games to enhance the country's international profile. If successful, the event might presage the Olympic Games, the hosting of which in 1964 had confirmed Japan's standing among the industrialized countries. The shah's objective was to place second in the overall medal count, after Japan, and he and his minister of court, Amir Asadullah ʿAlam, followed the game on the radio.[79] This made the People's Republic of China, which, ironically, had been admitted to the Asian Games thanks to Iranian brokerage, the country to beat. To enhance its chances, Iranian officials persuaded the organizers (allegedly by dispensing liberal amounts of caviar and rugs) to give a medal to each one of a team's players in team sports: thus a victory against Israel would net Iran seventeen medals, enough to place second. In the game only Israel scored, but on their own goal, and so Iran won 1–0. Of course rumors immediately circulated that the Israelis had lost intentionally.

Domestically, too, football had a political charge. General Khusravani, a military man with close connections to the regime, was proprietor of a club named Taj (crown) which had a major soccer team. In the football league of Tehran Taj was the perennial rival of another team, Shahin. Taj and its offshoots, Afsar and Dayhim (both synonyms of "crown"), were, associated with the regime, because of their owner's affiliation with the army, while Shahin had a more intellectual membership: its owner insisted that players not neglect their studies and many went on to become, to use a Persian expression, "doctors and engineers." The rivalry between Taj and Shahin thus had a political dimension, as oppositionists tended to cheer for Shahin. The latter team fell victim to intrigue and was dissolved in 1967, but its players formed a new team, Pirspulis (Persepolis).

The rivalry between Pirspulis and Taj, the reds and the blues, dominated Iran's prerevolutionary football scene, especially after a national soccer league was started in 1974 (*Jām-i Takht-i Jamshīd*); even today, video cassettes of their

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gifts for the Iranian players after the game, they refused to accept the contribution of Jewish merchants, ostensibly on religious grounds. Thaiss, "Religious Symbolism," 227.

79. On September 16, 1974/Shahrivar 25, 1353 ʿAlam noted in his diary that on the final day of the Asian Games, Iran had come second, which corresponded to the shah's wish that in Asia there should be two developed nations, Japan in the East and Iran in the West. *Yaddāsht-hā-yi ʿAlam* (Bethesda, n.d.), 4: 197–98.

legendary matches can be purchased in Los Angeles.[80] The two teams had very different playing styles: Pirspulis had an English coach and played a more spontaneous game, while Taj's coach was Yugoslav and gave the team a more Central European playing style.

In the 1970s, Khusravani built up a chain of about three hundred Taj clubs around the country, and the members of these clubs would perform in the annual rallies organized in Iran's stadiums on such occasions as the shah's or the crown prince's birthday. Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi was a Taj fan, and he made his support for the team known during television broadcasts of matches, further identifying Taj with the regime. Also, in the mid-1970s, Taj began publishing a sports periodical, which tried to gain readers by printing photos of players in the company of female film stars and singers. These two initiatives gave further pretext to religious oppositionists to identify official football as yet another aspect of the moral corruption propagated by the Pahlavi regime. Pirspulis, however, although having a number of religious players on the team, could by

no means be identified with the religious opposition: Princess Fatimah Pahlavi was reputedly one of its major share-holders.[81]

80. The other major football rivalry is between the teams of Bandar Anzali and Rasht, an expression of the rivalry between the two main cities of Gilan province. This sort of rivalry between two teams in the same city or region is very common, to wit the Celtics and Rangers in Glasgow, Boca Juniors and River Plate in Buenos Aires, and Hapoel and Maccabi in Tel Aviv.

81. Manouchehr Sabeti, personal communication.

In the last years of the shah's regime, oppositionists sometimes alleged that the regime actually promoted football to keep the population apolitical, and for some of the Islamists who were becoming active on the political scene, the football craze of the 1970s was a sinister plot by the shah to divert public attention from "serious" matters. On occasion Islamist militants would even disrupt games.[82] Revolutionaries often have an ascetic streak,[83] and so the idea that recreational pastimes detract from "serious" pursuits and should therefore be rejected is voiced by many of them, religious or not.[84] Let us remember the three F's which Portuguese leftists claimed the Salazar regime used to keep people in line: Fátima, *futebol*, and fado.[85]

But by the mid-1970s football had taken root in Iran. At the apex of society, the imperial family continued being directly involved in football. The national team's captain in 1947 was Muhammad Khatami, who later became a four-star general, commander of the air force, and a brother-in-law of the shah,[86] and in the 1970s another close relative of the shah, Kambiz Atabay (his uncle was the husband of the shah's oldest sister, Hamdam al-Saltanah), came to head the Football Federation, and used his influence to promote the game more effectively.[87] The crown prince, born in 1961, was a keen player and spectator, and often made the minister of court, Amir Asadullah ʿAlam, play with him.[88] But Iranians of *all* social classes were passionately interested in soccer, as either players or spectators, including seminarians: in Qum, Sayyid Ahmad Khumayni, the Ayatollah's younger son, played on the local Shahin team.

Under the first Pahlavi ruler, the state had promoted football for the educational value ascribed to it, but under the second ruler the game became above all a spectator sport, occasionally used to promote nationalism. This shift in emphasis is congruent with developments elsewhere in the world:

> Educators know that young people can discover in exemplary fashion the value of joint social membership, obligingness, camaraderie, and fair play, as well as the value of fitness, initiative, vigor, and physical

82. I have this information from Ali Muradi, who as an Islamist militant disrupted football games in Isfahan. Personal communication, Berlin, March 1993.

83. This is analyzed in Bruce Mazlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic: Evolution of a Political Type* (New York, 1976).

84. For a left-leaning analysis of Brazil's football craze see Janet Lever, "Soccer: Opium of the Brazilian People," *Transaction* 7 (1969).

85. Fátima refers to the site on which the Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children in 1917, and fado is the popular music of Lisbon and Coïmbra.

86. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 29.

87. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 37

88. ʿAlinaqi ʿAlikhani, ed., *Yāddāsht-hā-yi ʿAlam*, (N.p., 1993), 2:376; 3:194–195; and 4:321.

> agility, thanks to [practicing] football in a pleasant club atmosphere, but that is not 'real' football . . . 'real' football is the spectator sport.[89]

In the revolutionary upheavals of 1978 athletes played a minor role. Parviz Qilichkhani, arguably the country's best football player at the time, held a press conference in California, where he played for the San Jose Earthquakes in the now defunct North American Soccer League, to announce that he would not join Iran's national team for the World Cup in Argentina (the first time Iran participated in that championship), to protest against repression in Iran. With the triumph of the revolutionaries in early 1979, soccer fell on hard times.

Football in the Islamic Republic of Iran

At a meeting with sportsmen soon after his return, Ayatollah Khumayni said: "I am not an athlete, but I like athletes," a phrase that became a mantra for sports functionaries of the new regime. But on the whole it is safe to say that sports did not feature very prominently on the agenda of the revolutionaries.

Athletic contests are not expressly mentioned in the Koran. One game, *maysīr*, however, is expressly forbidden (*Qurʾān* 2: 219 and 5: 90–91),[90] and in compendia of jurisprudence the only sports that are mentioned are horse racing and archery, *sabaq* and *ramāyah* in Arabic. The reason is that it is permissible for the competitors to bet on the outcome, and for third parties to set a prize.[91] According to the hadith, the Prophet practiced many sports in public, and encouraged his followers to do likewise.[92] Among Shiᶜites, the first Imam, ᶜAli b. Abi Talib, has a formidable reputation as an athlete. But the founders of the Islamic republic were not traditionalists intent on turning the wheel of history back, but puritans reacting against what they saw as the hedonistic excesses of Iran's westernized elites. For instance, equestrian sports were at first frowned upon because of their elitist image, even though horse races are doctrinally approved, and Iranians' football fever met with a lot of suspicion on the part of the revolutionaries, as did footballers in England two centuries earlier. A comparison with the English experience is instructive.

When James I and Charles I of England legalized a certain number of popular amusements on Sunday, as contained in the *Book of Sports*, puritans were furious. They accepted sport "if it served a rational purpose, that of recreation necessary for physical efficiency. But as a means of the spontaneous expression of undisciplined impulses, it was under suspicion; and in so far as it

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89. Buytendijk, *Le Football*, 17.

90. See A. F. L. Beeston, "The Game of *maysir* and some modern parallels," *Arabian Studies* 2 (1975).

91. See, for instance, Sayyid ᶜAli Husayni, *Tarjumah va tawżīḥ-i Lumᶜah*, (Qum, 1994), 2:393–96.

92. M. Naciri, "Die Einstellung des Islam zum Sport," in *Sport in unserer Welt: Chancen und Probleme* (Berlin, 1972), 652–54.

became purely a means of enjoyment, or awakened pride, raw instincts or the irrational gambling instinct, it was of course strictly condemned."[93] When the Puritans came to power in England they had an opportunity to put theory into practice. "Between the over-throw of the king and the restoration was much the most thorough-going governmental attempt to amend the sporting habits of the people that [England] has experienced." But in the end even Oliver Cromwell had to come to terms with what Adam Smith might have called people's natural propensity to play and compete, and sport and games never completely disappeared, except on Sundays.[94]

Religiously inspired puritanism combined with revolutionary asceticism to affect sport policies in the Islamic Republic in its early years. Elite sports such as horse racing, fencing, and bowling were temporarily eliminated. Given the affiliation of many owners of sports clubs with the previous regime, all private clubs were nationalized. Chess, boxing, and kung fu were forbidden, the first because most Muslim jurists associate it with gambling, the latter two because they inflict physical injury, which is contrary to the shari^{c}a. At the same time martial arts like karate and tae-kwon-do were positively encouraged, so much so that training facilities were provided in mosques. Yet, women's sports competitions were discontinued until further notice, the reason being the athletes' insufficient covering during the competitions.[95] In Tehran, as if to avenge Reza Shah's seizing of mosque land to build sports facilities, the football field of Tehran University was appropriated to hold the weekly Friday prayers at which the high theocratic dignitaries of the state address the nation on social and political matters.[96]

As for the major football teams, they were nationalized and renamed after the revolution. Taj became Istiqlal (Independence), and Pirspulis became Piruzi (Victory);[97] players were not allowed to wear shirts with Latin letters on them. The rivalry between the "blues" and the "reds" continued, and for a while it manifested a new political dimension: Istiqlal had a few mujahidin among its members (the club endorsed Mas^{c}ud Rajavi for the presidential elections in 1980),[98] while Piruzi, which most people never stopped calling Pirspulis, was more diverse. With the elimination of political pluralism in the early 1980s, the political dimension of the rivalry diminished somewhat, but the rivalry itself

93. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, 1958), 166–67.

94. Dennis Brailsford, "Puritanism and Sport in Seventeenth Century England," *Stadion* 1 (1975). The quote is on 324–25.

95. *Iṭṭilā^{c}āt-i haftagī*, 1980 (Isfand 24,1358/ March 15, 1980): 23.

96. I am grateful to Hamid Dabashi for pointing this out to me.

97. Which led supporters of both teams to cover the walls of Tehran with somewhat counter-intuitive graffiti like "death to Independence" and "death to Victory"!

98. One member of the Huma team, Habib Khabiri, who had briefly been captain of the national team and was a Mujahid, was executed in 1983.

remained and games between the two teams continued to attract huge and intensely partisan crowds.

In early 1980, while the national team was in Bushire preparing for the Asian Games, it became the target of attacks. Demonstrators chanted the slogan "The National Team's Training Camp is a Treason to the People," and a local Islamic propaganda organization published a pamphlet that asked: "Would it not have been better if instead of spending a lot of money on this sort of entertainment, it were spent on sending some of our nations's young people abroad to acquire skills that our country needs? Would it not have been better if instead of spending this innocent and oppressed nation's blood on such useless pursuits, clinics were built and villages electified? Would it not have been better if instead of clowning around like the British and the Americans in order to "shine" in international arenas, [the players] shone in the company of the brothers of the Construction Jihad in our villages, where the simplest amenities are lacking? Have all our political, economic, and cultural problems been solved that we have turned to sport?"[99] Not only were they not solved, but soon a new problem was added to them: war.

On September 22, 1980, while the national team was in Kuwait playing in the Asian Nations' Cup, Iraq invaded Iran. Iran lost the game 2–1, inaugurating a long series of losses suffered by the national team in the 1980s.[100] The new head of the national physical education organization said in the autumn of 1980, that under conditions of war, there was no reason to hold football games.[101] But young men wanted to play, and so despite the official indifference to soccer, they organized neighborhood games (*gul kūchak*). The popularity of these games in neighborhoods inhabited by people who formed the social basis of the new regime worried the men now in power, who would have preferred to see youngsters in the mosques rather than on the playing fields. When mosques were not full enough during the Ramadan months of the early 1980s, critical articles began appearing in the press that accused the counterrevolution of organizing these games and creating distractions from religious observance. As one eye-witness explained it, the popularity of "little goal" football had no political overtones, but signified merely that playing football was more fun than listening to preachers.[102]

The revolution had put an end to the Takht-i Jamshid Cup, but in 1981 a number of provincial leagues were formed, whose champions would then play each other for the national championship. Reflecting the ideology of the new regime, the cup was called the Quds (Jerusalem) Cup. The continued popularity of football riled the fundamentalists, and in the autumn of 1983, an article in the

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99. *Kayhān-i varzishī* 1327 (Bahman 20, 1358/February 9, 1980), as quoted in Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 43–44.

100. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 47.

101. *Kayhān-i varzishī* 1366 (Azar 15, 1359/December 6, 1980), as quoted in Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 44.

102. Personal communication.

organ of the ruling Islamic Republican Party complained bitterly that during the mourning month of Muharram 110,000 spectators had cheered and clapped for Istiqlal and Pirspulis, and that spectator sports were a legacy of the shah's regime which the revolution should have replaced with participatory sports.[103] A few months later the prime minister echoed this view when he called the cult of champions a legacy of imperialism.[104]

Major football games presented difficulties for the regime. They often led to troubles, and were sometimes canceled.[105] In a country in which most public entertainment had been banned, attending football matches was one of the few remaining leisure activities for young men. From 1981 on, women were excluded from stadiums, and the presence of tens of thousands of frenzied young males occasionally led to riots, one of the worst of which occurred on October 9, 1984. A game that had been scheduled for the Azadi Stadium, where the Asian Games had been held a decade earlier, was transferred to the Shahid Shirudi (formerly Amjadiyah) Stadium in central Tehran because the city did not have enough buses to transport fans to the Azadi sports complex. The Shirudi Stadium had a much smaller capacity, however, and many ticket holders were denied admission to the grounds, precipitating the riot. The game had to be stopped midway, spectators went on a rampage, and nineteen were injured in clashes with security forces.[106] The underground or exiled opposition readily ascribed a political significance to the riots which they probably lacked, but like seventeenth-century English puritans, who reported in 1647 that "under pretence of football matches [there] have been lately suspicious meetings and assemblies at several places made up of disaffected persons,"[107] the Islamic republicans feared large gatherings of excitable young men.[108] Sport per se was healthy and therefore a good thing, but the excitement it generated was not. Following the October riot, the official newspaper of the Islamic Republican Party published an article arguing that the event was the result of pandering to football fever and paying too much attention to European football.[109] A few months later, after more research on the incident, another article analyzed the destructive role of football in the Third World, argued that football fever was a colonialist plot, and

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103. *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī* (Mihr 27, 1362/October 19, 1983/12 Muharram 1414): 11.

104. *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī* (Isfand 18, 1362/March 8, 1984): 15.

105. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 44–47.

106. The events were analyzed in detail in a series of articles in *Kayhān* (Mihr 18 1363/October 10, 1984): 19; (Mihr 19, 1363/October 11, 1984): 19; (Mihr 21, 1363/October 13, 1984): 23; (Mihr 22, 1363/October 14, 1984): 19.

107. Quoted in Brailsford, "Puritanism and Sport in Seventeenth Century England," 325.

108. Interestingly enough, nine decades earlier the government of Sultan Abdülhamit had forbidden football games played by non-foreigners in Istanbul on the same grounds, and disbanded the first Turkish football clubs (Black Stockings and Kadiköy) before the first game was over. Fişek, "The genesis of sports administration in Turkey," 626.

109. *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī* (19 Mihr 1363/October 11, 1984): 10.

concluded that the corruption that had beset Iranian football in the shah's time was still present. The article claimed that football games between two important clubs created a black market in tickets and drugs, that the supporters were well organized in their insubordination, and had come with prepared chants, and that, worst of all, when members of the Islamic Propaganda Unit tried to get spectators to chant Islamic slogans at the beginning of the match, spectators had made fun of them![110]

However, if the regime tried to stop football, it would antagonize precisely the popular classes on whose support it depended most.[111] The result was constant attempts in the press to contrast traditional Iranian values of chivalry with the commercialization, exploitation, and hooliganism that characterized sports in the corrupt West.[112] Football remained the most popular sport among the young, and was a means of diffusing Western cultural influence into the country. Maradona's ear ring, Chris Waddle's hair cut, and the German national team's uniforms were all imitated, much to the chagrin of regime hard-liners. For the young men increasingly impatient with the officially enforced puritanism, football matches provided a means to vent their frustrations. Football, like many sporting events, is in many ways a ritual, and shares certain characteristics with a religious ceremony,[113] and it is perhaps precisely because of this that it was perceived as a threat by the hard-liners in the regime.

In the late 1980s, some of Iran's leaders began to realize that the post-revolutionary policy of disapproval of all forms of entertainment was self-defeating, as it gave rise to illicit practices far more objectionable than the ones outlawed. One of the results of this was a greater emphasis on sports, presumably because a *mens sana* resides in a *corpore sano*. Iranian television was hard pressed to produce programs that people actually liked, and sporting events seemed innocuous enough, except that neither football players nor wrestlers cover their legs between the navel and the knee, and so conservatives were con-

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110. *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī*, (Azar 22, 1363/December 13, 1984): 5; and (Day 3, 1363/December 24, 1984): 7.

111. It is noteworthy that Iranian adolescent POWs at an Iraqi prison camp, who had volunteered for the war, knew all about British football, and that soccer competitions were one of the main attractions of camp life. Ian Brown, *Khomeini's Forgotten Sons: The Story of Iran's Boy Soldiers* (London, 1990), 9, 54, 57, 74–75.

112. For instance two articles titled "The role of politics in football" in *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī* (Urdibihisht 30, 1365/May 20, 1986): 5; and (Urdibihisht 31, 1365/May 21, 1986): 5, which called football an instrument of imperialism. See also a children's story titled "Who is the champion?," which contrasts the violence between supporters of rival football teams at a game set in 1977 with the harmony and solidarity witnessed by the story's little hero during the ᶜAshura demonstrations of December 1978, a key event in the revolution. Riza Shirazi, *Qahramān kī-eh?* (Tehran, 1988).

113. The similarities between attending a football match and attending a religious ritual are explained in Robert W. Coles, "Football as a 'Surrogate' Religion?" *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* (London, 1975); and Bromberger, "Football as world-view," 305–11.

stantly criticizing the head of the radio and television organization, Muhammad Hashimi, younger brother of ᶜAli-Akbar Rafsanjani. In the end, the matter of sports broadcasts was referred to Imam Khumayni himself, who in late 1987 issued a fatwa authorizing television not only to broadcast films featuring only partially covered women, but also sports events, provided viewers watched without lust.[114] After this ruling sports coverage expanded to the point where in 1993 a third channel was set up to broadcast sports. This policy still occasionally ran into opposition from revolutionary purists, for instance in 1994, when coverage of the football World Cup in the United States prompted the newspaper *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī* to write that by broadcasting the games, television provided propaganda for America, Iran's enemy.[115]

A few months after the war with Iraq ended in 1988, the national teams of Iran and Iraq played to a draw in Kuwait, in a show of peace replete with white pigeons. Politicians were finally becoming alert to the use of football.[116] In 1989, a new national soccer league was formed, named Lig-i Azadigan, after the POWs who had come home. But the league did not function regularly, since teams that played in international championships were excused from playing as often as others, leading to highly unconventional decisions that were regularly criticized by other teams and the press.[117] Once the football teams were nationalized, the Armenian club, Ararat, was for a long time the only privately owned club, but in 1994 a new club, Bahman, was founded in Karaj and briefly became quite successful. The remaining top clubs are now affiliated with companies, many of them state-owned, ministries, or other state organs. Pirspulis is part of the ministry of industry, while its perennial rival Istiqlal is associated with the organization of physical education.[118] Other teams' names reflect their affiliations: Traktursazi-yi Tabriz (Tabriz Tractor Works), Sanᶜat-i Naft-i Abadan (Abadan Oil Industry), Fulad-i Khuzistan (Khuzistan Steel), and, reflecting Isfahan's role as cradle of Iran's textile industry, Poliakril-i Isfahan (Isfahan Polyacrylic).[119]

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114. *Risālat* (Day 1, 1366/December 22, 1987): 1, 2. Khumayni merely acknowledged what is well known but not commonly talked about in the West. See Allen Guttmann, *The Erotic in Sport* (New York, 1996).

115. The article also claimed that because of these broadcasts government employees came to work tired, having stayed up all night to watch TV. *Iran Times* (July 15, 1994): 6, 12. On that world cup see John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson, eds., *Hosts and Champions: Soccer Cultures, National Identities and the USA World Cup* (Aldershot, 1994).

116. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 50.

117. Ludwig Paul, "Der iranische Spitzenfußball und seine sozialen und politischen Dimensionen," *Sozial- und Zeitgeschichte des Sports* 12 (1998): 77–78.

118. Gilles Paris, "Tout Téhéran vibre pour les 'Rouges' du Pirouzi," *Le Monde* (June 25, 1998): 3

119. Paul, "Der iranische Spitzenfußball," 79; and Christian Bromberger, "Le football en Iran," *Sociétés & Représentations* (1998): 107.

In the early 1990s, women's sports were revived through the initiative of Fa'izah Rafsanjani, the daughter of the then president. After women's sports became more established,[120] the question of women's presence at male games was reopened. In July 1994, on the occasion of preliminary matches in the Asian Youth Cup, it was announced that women could attend football matches. The conservative newspaper, *Risālat*, objected on the grounds that the disputes, fights, and foul language prevalent at football matches made them inappropriate venues for families, an allusion to the bawdy chants of sports fans that usually elaborate metonymically on the fact that in a team sport the object of each team is to penetrate the other side.[121] *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī*, objected to women watching men in shorts. Nonetheless, on July 18, about five hundred women, seated in a special section of the stadium separate from the men, attended a game between India and Bahrain. Only three days later the football federation rescinded its decision, stating that unfortunately some football fans had not been able to adapt themselves to the Islamic norms that governed Iranian society: apparently a few women had surrounded players and asked for their autographs.[122] The controversy would not go away, however, and on February 22, 1995, the head of the Physical Education Organization announced that he was personally in favor of allowing women to attend football matches but not wrestling and swimming events, in which men are not "appropriately dressed." Conservatives disagreed. The weekly sports paper *Pahlavān* pointed out that according to the shari'a, obligatory coverage for a man extended from the knee to the navel, whereas the shorts of football players left players' thighs uncovered. To settle the question, the paper asked Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatullah Khaminah'i, for a fatwa on whether it was permissible [for men] to play team sports dressed in t-shirts and shorts in the presence of unrelated women, and whether women could watch them if they did not feel lust. On both issues Khaminah'i ruled that "an unrelated women may not look at the naked body of an unrelated man, even if the intent is not deriving lust."[123] Even this restriction did not satisfy one particularly sensitive cleric, Hujjat al-Islam Qara'ati, who called on Iranian athletes to foreswear shorts and tight-fitting uniforms.[124]

Gradually, then, Iran's rulers came to accept that football was undoubtedly Iran's most popular sport. By the early 1990s, a number of companies were spe-

120. Women's soccer was declared to be unobjectionable by a number of senior clerics in 1998, and in 1999 the first female indoor tournament was held. But no men were allowed to attend.

121. This is a worldwide phenomenon and has received considerable scholarly attention. See Alan Dundes, "Into the Endzone for a Touchdown: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of American Football," *Western Folklore* 37 (1978); Marcelo Mariò Suárez-Orozco, "A Study of Argentine Soccer: The Dynamics of its Fans and Their Folklore," *The Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology* 5 (1982).

122. *Iran Times* (July 15, 1994): 6, 12; (July 29, 1994): 6, 14.

123. *Pahlavān* (Shahrivar 7, 1374/August 29, 1995): 7.

124. *Iran Times*, June 1998, at a seminar on sport and spirituality.

cializing in selling football videos, posters, and magazines. International football lore was eagerly adopted by young Iranians in spite of all the government's exhortations to resist the West's "cultural aggression." Even newspapers published by regime figures reported extensively on international football, so much so that in 1993 the head of the Wrestling Federation, who doubled as Iranian defense minister, said in an interview that although the only sport in which Iran was successful internationally was wrestling, the press emphasized football, adding, "if we're not careful, football will destroy wrestling."[125] It is only natural that the two disciplines became entangled in the factional struggles of the 1990s. The newspaper *Salām*, mouthpiece of the liberal wing of the regime until it was closed down, emphasized football in its sports coverage, while *Risālat*, the organ of the conservatives, stressed wrestling.[126] In the presidential election of May 1997, many football players endorsed Muhammad Khatami, while ᶜAli Akbar Natiq Nuri, the official candidate after whose martyred brother a major annual wrestling tournament is named, was endorsed by some of the country's top wrestlers. Khatami won in a landslide.

The greater support of the state for sport in general, and soccer in particular, after the end of the Iran-Iraq war led to the improved performance of the national team in the early 1990s. At the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing, the Iranian team won the gold medal in football, a turning point for the sport in Iran.[127] The man who had led the national team to victory, ᶜAli Parvin, was himself a popular former player of pre-revolutionary times, but he ran afoul of the hard-line head of the football federation, who reportedly resented the renewed ascendancy of pre-revolutionary figures, and was forced to resign from the team after a series of defeats in 1994.[128] In the second half of 1997, football fever in Iran acquired a new political importance in part due to the openness of the political struggle between the different factions in Iran. The head coach of Iran's national team, Mayili-Kuhan, who was identified with the conservative faction, did not allow some of Iran's star players, who played in German Bundesliga teams, to join the national team. The result was a dismal performance of the team in the last qualifying games for the World Cup. When Iran lost 2–0 to Qatar in Doha on November 7th, the matter became an affair of state and was discussed in parliament. Mayili-Kuhan was dismissed and replaced by the recently arrived Brazilian head coach of Iran's Olympic football team, Valdeir Vieira, a former head coach of the Costa Rican national team. Under his supervision the team achieved two ties against Australia, allowing it to become the thirty-second and last team to qualify for the World Cup.

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125. Interview, *Arzish* (28 Tir 1372/ July 19, 1993): 12.

126. This division parallels the situation in Turkey, where football is the emblematic sport of the secularists, while wrestling is preferred by more traditional people. See Martin Stokes, "'Strong as a Turk: Power, Performance and Representation in Turkish Wrestling," in Jeremy MacClancy, ed., *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity* (Oxford, 1996).

127. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 50–53.

128. Morteza Qolamzadeh, "Whatever Happened to Ali Parvin?," at http://www.iranian.com/Nov95/Parvin.html.

When the news of the "victory" reached Iranians around the globe, they celebrated everywhere. As soon as the referee blew the final whistle, people poured into the streets in Tehran and the country's other big cities and celebrated, defying the official insistance on somberness in public places.[129] In Ardabil, Tabriz, and Mashhad people went to the homes of the parents of Iran's star players, ʿAli Daʿi, Karim Baqiri, and Khudadad ʿAzizi, and paid homage to their parents. These celebrations should be interpreted in light of the presidential election of May 1997. By December the millions who had cast their ballot for Muhammad Khatami felt that the change they had voted for was being stymied by the political establishment, and they leapt at the opportunity to let off steam that was patriotic in tone, since the regime could not very well criticize their joy at their country's success. But *Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī*, ever the guardian of ideological purity, characterized the celebrations as a "cultural fall" (*suqūṭ-i farhangī*).[130]

From Melbourne the team flew to Dubai, where it was greeted with acclaim by thousands of Iranian expatriates. Before the athletes' return to Iran, the government requested that the people not greet them at the airport, as is customary, but to proceed to the big Azadi Stadium instead, to which the footballers would be brought by helicopter. But sexual segregation at the stadium was to be upheld: "sisters" were asked to stay at home and watch the event on television. In spite of this, of the seventy thousand fans who turned up at the stadium to greet the returning heroes, about five thousand were women—they literally crashed the gates.[131] The mingling of the sexes at the stadium was of course a break with post-revolutionary practice, and it was reported that a few women took off their veils in defiance of the very strict dress codes that had been enforced since 1981. A football stadium, wrote Bromberger, "is one of those rare spaces where collective emotions are unleashed, where socially taboo values are allowed to be expressed."[132] In the aftermath of this event, the feminist press pressed the issue of women's presence at soccer matches, arguing that women should be allowed to voice patriotic feelings as well.[133]

After the exuberant celebrations of December, Iran's leading politicians finally learned what South American presidents have known all along, namely that by associating themselves with a popular activity they show that they share the passions of the people.[134] The speaker of parliament, Natiq Nuri, let it be known that he was a football fan, and—such is the beauty of deliberative politics in which politicians compete for the same vote—Khatami attended a wrestling meet and proclaimed his support for the traditional discipline.

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129. Bromberger, "Le football en Iran," 102.

130. Bromberger, "Le football en Iran," 103.

131. *The Independent* (December 6, 1997): 22. This may also have been because the government had given boys' schools a day off, but not girls' schools.

132. Bromberger, "Football as world-view," 302.

133. See, for instance, *Zanān* 39 (1376/1997).

134. Mason, *Passion of the People*, 61.

In January 1998, Valdeir Vieira, in spite of his popularity, was fired, and a Croatian, Tomislav Ivic, was chosen instead to coach the national team.[135] But under the pressure of conservatives he was dismissed in May 1998 and replaced by an Iranian who had returned after a long stay abroad to coach Bahman, the rising team of Tehran.[136] The interval between Iran's qualification for the World Cup in November 1997 and the game with the United States in Lyons on June 21, 1998 was marked by intense infighting among Iran's sport functionaries. In the end followers of President Khatami emerged victorious, and before the Cup, spokesmen for the team proclaimed that they would surprise the world. The tradition of Takhti also played a role here: it provided a reservoir of values and attitudes embedded in traditional Iranian culture that could be called upon to correct the image of the "ugly Iranian." In France the Iranian players came to the grounds well groomed and clean shaven,[137] and presented their counterparts with a bouquet of flowers before each game. The United States-Iran game had been built up as a grudge match by the media, but American and Iranian officials had instructed their players to be polite, and FIFA, the world governing body of football, had declared June 21st "Fair Play Day." President Clinton taped a message that was broadcast before the game, a message in which he expressed the hope that the game would be a "step toward ending the estrangement between our nations."[138] When the big moment came, the two teams exchanged gifts and eschewed the customary pre-game team photos in favor of a joint one with the twenty-two players intermingled. The two teams jointly received the FIFA Fair Play award on February 1, 1999.

In Iran, people celebrated the victory of their team rather than the defeat of the United States, and public revelry was devoid of any anti-American flavor. Again, the joyous atmosphere was in direct defiance of the culture of mourning and sobriety that hard-liners in the regime promoted.[139] Elsewhere in the Middle East, however, crowds celebrated the defeat of the United States, especially in the Shi'ite areas of Lebanon and in the West Bank. In the United States, the game was hardly noticed.[140]

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135. *Iran Times* (January 16, 1998): 2; (January 23, 1998): 1.

136. From 1973 to 1976 the national team had been managed by the Manchester United coach Frank O'Farrel, but those were more cosmopolitan days.

137. N[awid] K[ermani], "Gut rasiert," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (July 11, 1998): 32.

138. Jere Longman, "Diplomacy and Urgency as the U.S. Faces Iran," *The New York Times* (June 21, 1996): C2.

139. Elaine Sciolino, "Singing, Dancing and Cheering in the Streets of Tehran," *The New York Times* (June 22, 1998): C9; and Behzad Yaghmaian, *Social Change in Iran: An Eyewitness Account of Dissent, Defiance, and New Movements for Rights* (Albany, 2002), 49–54.

140. See Andrei S. Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman, *Soccer and American Exceptionalism* (Princeton, 2001).

Many Iranians and Americans hoped that this game, and others that followed, might lead to a thaw in US-Iranian relations. While President Clinton in the United States congratulated the Iranian team on its victory; in Iran the official reaction was Janus-faced, like the government. President Khatami put the accent on sportsmanship and commented that "what counts is the endeavor, hard work, solidarity, skill and intellect displayed by our young people," but admitted that "of course, one feels even happier when the result of this worthy endeavor is victory." Ayatollah ʿAli Khaminahʾi, by contrast, likened the victory to the revolution and the war against Iraq, and stated: "tonight, again, the strong and arrogant opponent felt the bitter taste of defeat at your hands."[141] In the end, nothing came of "sports diplomacy" at the state-to-state level,[142] but in Iran the celebration had a cathartic effect. For Iranian youth, Iranian participation at the World Cup meant that their pariah nation had rejoined the international community, and parallels were drawn between *Jām-i jahānī* (World Cup) and *Jamīʿah-yi jahānī* (world society). The integration of Iranians in world society was symbolically furthered in the aftermath of the 1998 World Cup when many top Iranian players started playing on foreign soccer teams, mostly in Germany, where longtime Iranian residents began acting as middlemen and agents.[143] Soccer fans in Iran now had an emotional stake in the fortunes of European football teams. Conversely, some Iranian players abroad, like Khudadad ʿAzizi, used their newly acquired wealth to fund projects at home.[144]

The soccer fever of the late 1990s undoubtedly gave a boost to national integration in Iran. Secular and religious Iranians, men and women, people from the capital and from the provinces, were all united in their support of the national team, and followed its uneven fortunes with joy and anxiety. This enthusiasm was even shared by members of the Iranian diaspora, whose relations with their home country have not been free of tension.[145] This rapprochement may yet have ramifications for political developments inside Iran.

In the autumn of 2001, the Iranian national team fared badly in the qualifying matches for the 2002 World Cup. Again people poured into the streets, this time to vent their frustrations. Disappointment over the team's loss mingled with disappointment over stalled reforms in Iran, and, fueled by Persian language radio broadcasts from Los Angeles, rumors circulated that the government had

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141. *Iran Times* (June 26, 1998): 2.

142. For a more detailed account see H. E. Chehabi, "US-Iranian Sports Diplomacy," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12 (2001): 89–106.

143. Hans-Günther Klemm, "Traum aus 1001 Nacht," *Kicker: Sonderheft* (1998): 74; and idem, "Deutschland als Ziel, Daei als Pionier," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (August 20, 1999): 39.

144. Bromberger, "Le football en Iran," 108.

145. See, for example, Manuchehr Sanadjian, "'They Got Game'—Asylum Rights and Marginality in the Diaspora: the World-Cup and Iranian Exiles," *Social Identities* 6 (2000): 143–63; and "Watching with Pride: Iranian soccer fans excited about match," *San Jose Mercury News* (January 16, 2000): 3B, 7B.

deliberately instructed the national team to lose so as to prevent a repetition of the celebrations of 1998. The demonstrations turned into riots in which a number of buildings were ransacked and hundreds were arrested.[146] That young Iranians should pour into the streets both when their team won and when it lost is not astonishing, for

> [f]ootball is full of vicarious achievement and vicarious 'frustration.' Where achievement is frustrated, the 'unjustified defeat' is usually ambiguous enough to permit further argument and redefinition, in similar style to the ways in which religious systems have previously legitimized other hostile worlds to their adherents . . . . Just as sects developed as 'religions of the oppressed,' so football offers an attractive and exciting interlude to those whose economic or 'profane' life is dominated by lack of hope, lack of realistic ambition, and lack of any means through which they can feel achievement or fulfillment."[147]

Conclusion

As this article has attempted to show, the history of football in Iran has been intimately intertwined with politics, both domestic and international. Successive Iranian regimes have tried to use sports for internal and external legitimation. But under both the Pahlavi and the Islamic regime this effort has been hampered by the appalling state of the sports bureaucracies, which have been inefficient, corrupt, nepotistic, and riven by personal rivalries and jealousies. The rapid turnover of functionaries has made planning all but impossible. While it is perhaps exaggerated to claim that "sports is one of the disaster areas of the Iranian way of life,"[148] the fact that Iranian athletes gain any medals at all at international competitions is a minor miracle, if one compares the conditions under which they train with the facilities at the disposal of people in industrialized nations. In 1998, the head of the Iranian Football Federation summarized the woes of Iranian football as follows: the state does not provide sufficient support, there are no real clubs, the state enterprises that sponsor a club do so illegally and their directors can be taken to task, there are far too few grass-covered playing fields, ticket prices are too low to generate any significant revenue, there are no scientific centers to help players enhance their performance, the input of the educational system is nil, and Iran has no voice at the international level.[149]

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146. Nazila Fathi, "Soccer Melees Keep Erupting in Iran, With a Political Message," *New York Times* (October 26, 2001): A7.

147. Coles, "Football as a 'Surrogate' Religion?" 75.

148. William H. Forbis, *Fall of the Peacock Throne: The Story of Iran* (New York, 1980), 170. For a revealing aperçu of sports life under the shah, see 170–74.

149. Muhandis Sayyid Mustafa Hashimi-Taba, *Dāstān-i yak ṣuᶜūd* (Tehran, 1376/1997–98), 102–106.

There can be little doubt that it was the Pahlavi state that created contemporary Iran's "field of sport practices," to use Bourdieu's term.[150] But once created, a demand was generated for the products of this field that survived the demise of the monarchy. The passion for football became a sign of dissent, and its manifestations reflected the counterculture that the official puritanism generated.[151]

The privileging of team sports, especially football, was initially a deliberate act to foster a spirit of cooperation among Iranians. Durkheim recognizes that the passing of mechanical solidarity does not necessarily herald the advent of organic solidarity, and can instead lead to what he termed "anomie."[152] It would seem that social change in Iran has produced at least as much anomie as organic solidarity. A sports team is ideally more than the sum of its parts, but in Iran one has the uncanny impression that the team is at times less than the sum of its parts. In the 1930s, an English observer wrote about football players in Kerman that while the idea of team-spirit was growing, "on less important occasions ... some men will not pass the ball."[153] Three decades later, in 1967, the American basketball coach of the national Iranian team noted that he had to work with individuals who related atomistically. The key relationships, he reported, were not cooperative patterns of teamwork but rather competitive interpersonal relationships that extended well beyond the basketball court.[154] Another facet of anomie is the violence all too often displayed by spectators. Conservatives have a point when they point out that from the attack on the headquarters of *Nāhīd* to the scuffles that regularly mar soccer matches in Iran there is a long thread of violence that weaves through the history of Iranian football.[155] But even writers critical of the conservative establishment have recently become more candid about the violence that attends many games, especially those that pit the "Reds" and the "Blues" against each other.[156] The hostility between Istiqlal/Taj and Pirspulis fans would remind one of the traditional rivalry between urban Haydari and Niᶜmati factions in Iranian cities,[157] were it not for the fact that such hostil-

150. Pierre Bourdieu, "Comment peut-on être sportif?" *Questions de sociologie* (Paris, 1984).

151. On the concept of counter-culture in contemporary Iran see Asghar Schirazi, "Gegenkultur als Ausdruck der Zivilgesellschaft in der Islamischen Republik Iran," in *Probleme der Zivilgesellschaft im Vorderen Orient* (Opladen, 1995), 135–63.

152. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor*, 291–309.

153. Merrit-Hawkes, *Persia*, 165.

154. James A. Bill, "The Plasticity of Informal Politics: The Case of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 27 (1973): 139–40, quoting Donald J. Linehan, who coached Iran's team 1966–67.

155. See for instance Sarvistani, "Dāstān-i varzish-i mudirn," *Ṣubḥ* 76 (1376/1997).

156. Sadr, *Rūzī, rūzigārī, fūtbāl*, 74–80.

157. On this phenomenon see John R. Perry, "Artificial Antagonism in Pre-Modern Iran: The Haydari-Neᶜmati Urban Factions," in Donald J. Kagay and L. J. Andrew Villalon, eds., *The Final Argument: The Imprint of Violence on Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Woodbridge, 1998) and John R. Perry, "Toward a Theory of Ira-

ity is endemic in the world of soccer and by no means unique to Iran. The triumph of football worldwide is a facet of the globalization of culture,[158] and by now football has conquered most of the world, with the exception of the United States of America, but even here it is progressing steadily.[159] The game's persistent popularity in Iran shows that Iranians' gradual immersion into global culture has continued unabated.

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nian Urban Moieties: The *Haydariyyah* and *Niʿmatiyyah* Revisited," *Iranian Studies* 32 (1999): 51–70.

158. Guttmann, chap. 2 of *Games & Empires*.

159. Markovits and Hellerman, *Soccer and American Exceptionalism*.