



# SPORT AS A RECRUITING TOOL

Sport was an important recruiting tool to convince young men to join the army.

It was a common idea across Britain and its empire that sports, particularly ones that incorporated team spirit and a sense of patriotism, were good preparation for war.

Because of their popularity, football, rugby and boxing often featured on propaganda posters.

The Football Association also allowed recruitment efforts at matches that attracted large crowds.



*All Varsity men, Old Public School Boys - men who are hardened to the soldiers' life by strenuous pursuit of sport should enlist at once.*

*- The Times, August 1914*

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Australian First World War recruitment poster depicting boxer Albert Jacka, the first Australian to be awarded a VC in WW1.



# IMPACT ON SPORTING LIFE

Following the declaration of war in 1914, both rugby and cricket suspended matches and tournaments. Bowing to public pressure, football did the same the following year.

Many professional sportsmen, now released from their clubs, joined the army.

Sports Battalions were also formed for those who had made their name in sports but were over the normal enlistment age. For these men the maximum age was raised from 38 to 45.

The sporting world suffered many losses, and few teams retained all their members after the war.

*"This is not the time to play Games" (Lord Roberts)*

**RUGBY · UNION · FOOTBALLERS**  
are  
**DOING · THEIR · DUTY**  
over **90%** have enlisted



*"Every player who represented England in Rugby international matches last year has joined the colours."—Extract from *The Times*, November 30, 1914.*

**BRITISH ATHLETES!**

Will you follow this  
**GLORIOUS EXAMPLE ?**

*There was a time for games,  
there was a time for business  
and there was a time for  
domestic life. There was a  
time for everything, but there  
is only time for one thing  
now, and that thing is war.*

*If a cricketer had a straight  
eye let him look along the  
barrel of a rifle.*

*If a footballer had strength of  
limb let him serve and march  
in the field of battle.*

- Arthur Conan Doyle,  
recruitment speech,  
September 1914



# THE RISE OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

Women's football was established before WW1, but it wasn't well received. This changed when the Football Association suspended its men's matches at the end of the 1914-15 season.

Many women's football teams emerged from the munitions factories. At first, the novelty of women playing football was used to raise money for war charities. As more teams were formed, people started to enjoy the matches for the skill and ability of the players.

Women's football remained popular even after the Armistice, with huge crowds of 60,000 watching women's matches in 1920.

However, in 1921 the FA banned women from playing football on any of their club grounds. The ban was not lifted until 1971.

*I have heard some very uncharitable and uncalled-for criticism of the respectability of the young women playing these matches ... asserting that it is not decent for them to appear in public in "knickers!" .... May I say that these girls are doing an excellent work of charity in playing....*

*I am working with these girls and I am proud of it. Some of them are a bit boisterous, but they all have hearts as big as a lion. If some of the weak-minded and weak-kneed could only have seen them stick in ... they would feel reassured that there is no possible doubt of our winning the war while we have such women (heroines I call them) as mothers of the race.*

- a letter to the *Blyth News*, August 1917



The Dick, Kerr's Ladies FC, munitions workers in Preston, England.



# SPORT BEHIND THE LINES

Behind the lines, sports were important for recreation, maintaining fitness levels and boosting morale.

Football, baseball and rugby were popular and officers organised sports days for the men.

Sports day activities included wheelbarrow races, obstacle courses and even wrestling on mules!

*Out in France I could never escape from football ... I was glad of an opportunity to play. My first game was behind the Somme front, just after the big push in July 1916 at our camp....*

*No sooner had we started than German shells began to drop perilously near the field. So we packed up and restarted on another pitch. The game had to go on.*

- Charlie Buchan, English footballer and sports journalist.





# NEW SPORTS!

The arrival of soldiers from America and the Dominions saw the introduction of new sports such as baseball and Australian Rules football. Both became popular with troops and went on show to the public in Britain.

In 1916, two teams of Australian servicemen played an Australian Rules football match in London, in aid of the British and French Red Cross.

*The American game of base-ball is a fascinating to watch whether or not the spectator is an expert. Its great charm lies in the rapidity of the game, the action in which is continuous.*

- 'Base-ball - How it is played' by Frederic Coleman in *The London News*, July 1918

