

## The Beautiful Game

In 2014, more than one billion people watched the FIFA (football) World Cup Final between Argentina and Germany on television. Football (also known as soccer) is the world's most popular sport. There are football leagues in 208 countries of the world and billions of people play football worldwide each day. Some professional footballers are amongst the highest paid sports people in the world, receiving hundreds of thousands of pounds a week just for playing a game! How did this simple sport become so popular?

### The Origins of Football

Nobody is entirely certain where football began, but examples of ball games that are a bit like football date back as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC in China. It was actually a way of training soldiers, using a ball filled with feathers, which was kicked between a 'net' made of bamboo canes.

Later on, in Britain, football was associated with violence and drunkenness and some kings, such as James I of Scotland in 1424, tried to ban people from playing it! However, football was a very popular game and people ignored these laws. Football was extremely rough back then and it did not have any official rules like it does now.

### The Modern Game



Football as we know it today began in England in 1863. This is why Britain is known as 'the home of football.' The Football Association (FA) was formed. This was football's first ever **governing body**. Football started to have official rules and it was played in famous schools such as Eton. Soon there were 50 professional

football teams and in 1872, the first ever FA cup was played. Football soon became popular all over the world, particularly in countries that were part of the British Empire. The first World Cup was played in 1930.

Sometimes football is still associated with violence and unruly behaviour. However, it also brings people together, teaching them how to play by the rules, to be part of a team and helping them to stay fit and healthy. During

the First World War, in 1914, British and German soldiers were said to have had a 24-hour ceasefire on Christmas day and even played a game of football in **No-Mans Land**.

It is estimated that 2.65 billion people, both men and women, girls and boys, play football each year. Most play for enjoyment. Some of the popularity of football is probably down to the fact that you don't need much equipment to play it: just a ball, something to mark out goals (even a coat or a jumper will do!) and a surface to play on. Once you have these things, you're ready to go and have fun!

#### Glossary

**Governing Body** – An organisation that make rules and decisions about how something should be played.

**No-Mans Land** – An area between the two fighting trenches in the First World War.

#### Questions: Answer in full sentences.

1. Which teams played each other in the 2014 World Cup final?
2. Why is the phrase “(also known as soccer)” in brackets?
3. Why did they play a game like football in 3<sup>rd</sup> century China?
4. What equipment did the Ancient Chinese use in their game?
5. Why did James I of Scotland try to ban football?
6. Why is Britain known as ‘the home of football’?
7. Copy out and complete this table

	Fact	Opinion
There were 50 professional football teams.		
Football brings people together.		
The first World Cup was played in 1930.		

8. What helped football become popular in other parts of the world?
9. What **3** benefits of football are mentioned in paragraph 5?
10. What **3** things do you need to play football, according to paragraph 6?

## Answers

1. Argentina and Germany played each other in the 2014 World Cup Final.
2. The phrase is in brackets as it is extra information.
3. They played football to train their soldiers.
4. They used a ball filled with feathers and nets made of bamboo canes.
5. He tried to ban it because it was causing violence and drunkenness.
6. Britain is called the home of football because the first ever football association was set up here.

7.	Fact	Opinion
There were 50 professional football teams.	x	
Football brings people together.		x
The first World Cup was played in 1930.	x	

8. The British Empire helped football to become popular around the world.
9. A) Teaches you to play by the rules B) Teaches you to play as part of a team C) Keeps you fit and healthy.
10. You need a ball, something to mark out the goals and a surface to play on.