A "Soccer" Lesson

A few words from the States
on the most contentious of words

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December marks the 130th anniversary of one of the most traumatic events in British football. Lay historians may think I'm referring to the English Football Association's decision in 1885 to allow professional players into the game. I'm not. That decision ceased to be controversial almost as soon as it was made, when fans realized they'd rather watch the David Silvas of the day than the lads at Eton on break from their Latin declensions. Also, the FA made that decision in July.

No, the trauma I refer to is the first recorded use, in December 1885, of the word *soccer*—or, as the writer styled it, "Socker", double quotes and all—to describe what till then had been called *Association football*.[1] Only moderately controversial at the time, *soccer* has since become one of the great sources of rage in the Anglophone game, just behind the performance of any English men's national side of the last generation. We Americans know this because you Britons roundly abuse us for calling the world's game by the wrong name. Or, as one erudite analyst put it in a letter "To All Americans": "It seems that almost every American can't understand that there is no sport called soccer .... its FOOTBALL!"[2] Or, per another helpful critic: "Soccer. Sawker. I feel dumber just saying it."[3] And that's only half the controversy. The other half is a tussle,

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[1] Oxon., "Our Oxford Letter," *The Oldhallian*, vol. 5, no. 6, no. 25 (both numbers are listed on the document), Dec. 1885, p. 171, https://books.google.com/books?id=fPsHAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA171.

[2] Daniel Gooch, "To All Americans: Its Football NOT Soccer," *Bleacher Report: World Football*, Mar. 24, 2010, http://bleacherreport.com/articles/368301-to-all-americans-itsfootball-not-soccer.

[3] Ahmed Bilal, "7 Reasons Why Americans Suck At Soccer," *Soccerlens*, July 4, 2008, http://soccerlens.com/7-reasons-why-americans-suck-at-soccer/8115/.

in admittedly gentler tones, among historians, etymologists, and trivia buffs about just how *soccer* was coined.

These divisions between and within our two great nations pain me. That's why today, on this 130th anniversary of the word, I'm offering up a gesture of Anglo-American goodwill not seen since we took the Wright-Phillips brothers off your hands (not just one brother, I remind you, but both): I'm going to get to the bottom of it all.

One thing that is not in dispute, no matter how deeply it wounds those who think *soccer* a cheap American neologism (as I myself did for quite some time), is that the word originated in Victorian England. Indeed, nick the surface of *soccer*, and it bleeds the bluest of English blue, having been gestated in a few of the posher public schools and universities. The scholars at those seats of learning considered it the greatest fun to snip the ends off words and tack on the suffix *-er*, which says something about how hard it must have been to come by fun in an English public school after you had lashed the new boy a dozen times. Thus did a freshman become a *fresher*, a sickroom a *sicker*, exercise *ekker*, and breakfast *brekkers*. Oxford was so rife with the insufferable ending that it is now known as "the Oxford -er"—not that Oxonians invented it. The editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, no doubt happy to cast the blame elsewhere, say the *-er* came to Oxford by way of Rugby School during the Michaelmas term of 1875. That, however, is a bit of a slight to Rugby because the *-er* had been in wide use at Harrow since at least 1863, when it was recorded that Harrovians called the Duck Puddle, their swimming hole, the *Ducker* and their peculiar brand of football *footer*.[4] Surely Old Harrovians

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[4] "Harrow School," *The Tyro*, no. 2 (Nov. 1, 1863), p. 37, which is a review of "Harrow School," printed in *Blackwood's Magazine* (probably *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*), October 1863, which article apparently uses the word *Ducker*;

F. Y., "The Harrow Boys," *The Boy's Own Volume*, vol. 2 (new series) (Christmas 1863), p. 36, which is a reprint of the article from *The Boy's Own Magazine*, vol. 7, no. 2 (July 1863), http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082271457;view=1up;seq=54.

brought their *-er* with them to Oxford well before the Old Rugbeians brought theirs during the uncannily precise Michaelmas term of 1875.[5] (That precision is wobbly at best, based as it is on a single unattributed, unexplained line in a thin history of Oxford published half a century after the Michaelmas in question.)[6] But even Harrow doesn't deserve all the blame. Since at least the 18th century, some Britons had been calling a potato a *tater* and a pinafore a *pinner*. (A pinafore, incidentally, which is to say an apron pinned down the forefront of a dress, gives us the *pinny* that soccer players put on over their game shirts when warming up. Since learning this fact, I can't help but see Luis Suarez covered in flour and readying to bite into a man-shaped pie every time he puts on his pinny.) In short, my English friends, the rot was societal.

As you will perhaps have gathered, it was the Oxford *-er* that turned the two main branches of English football—Association football and Rugby football—into *soccer* and *rugger*. It's easy enough to see how Rugby became *rugger*, but it's not at all clear what would drive a fellow to lift the *soc* from Association and change its sound from /sohsh/ to /sock/ before adding the *er*. In fact, it's unintuitive enough that some astute observers, like Peter Seddon, whose 2004 book *Football Talk* chronicles the language of the sport,[7] have suggested that *soccer* surely arose from the fact that players *sock* the ball or that they do so with a *sock*-covered foot. The only trouble with such hypotheses is that not one historical document has emerged to support them. If *to sock* were indeed the origin, you'd expect boys to use the verb in the school periodicals where "socker" and "soccer" first appear. But search those sheets as you may—they are *The Oldhallian* (the unfortunately named journal of the Old Hall School,

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[5] "-er, suffix[6]," *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/63874, accessed Nov. 5, 2015.

[6] Falconer Madan, *Oxford Outside the Guide-Books*, 2nd ed. (Basil-Blackwell, 1925), p. 162. The first edition was published in 1923.

[7] Peter Seddon, *Football Talk: The Language and Folklore of the World's Greatest Game* (Robson, 2004), p. 99, https://books.google.com/books/about/Football_Talk.html?id=fPCBAAAAMAAJ.

where that first instance of "Socker" was used in December 1885), *The Carthusian* ("soccer", October 1886),[8] *The City of London School Magazine* ("Soccer", November 1886),[9] *The Oxford Magazine* ("Socker", February 1887),[10] and *Lancing College Magazine* ("Soccer", June 1887)[11]—and you will find boys *kicking* and *punting*, *dribbling* and *crossing*, *firing* and *shooting*, *passing* and *placing*, but never *socking*. Slang dictionaries of the era make clear that the foremost meaning of *sock* for public schoolboys was *refreshment*, especially one obtained outside of school; *to sock* was *to snack* or *to treat someone to a snack*.[12]

Happily, the road from *Association football* to *soc* and thence to *soccer* is not as shadowy as it first appears. For one thing, when Oxonians and other students converted a word to *-er* slang, they usually hacked it down to one essential syllable, which needn't have been the first. This, I'm relieved to report, is why we Americans today play *soccer* rather than *asser*, although anyone who has watched the excremental play of Major League Soccer might wonder whether the latter name would have been a better fit. Additionally, the students didn't much care if their extracted syllable kept its original sound. Thus an aspiring joker at Oxford could have a look at *unattached student* (the term for a student not attached to one of the university's residential colleges), pull out the *tach*, turn its flat /a/ into an /aw/, switch out the *ch* for a *sh*, stitch

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[8] "A Retrospect," *The Carthusian*, vol. 4, no. 127 (Oct. 1886), pp. 229, 236, https://books.google.com/books?id=ZQoIAAAAQAAJ.

[9] Faber Volans., "Our Oxford Letter," *The City of London School Magazine*, vol. 10, no. 65 (Dec. 1886, but letter dated Nov. 21, 1886), p. 289, https://books.google.com/books?id=H_oHAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA289.

[10] "Football," *The Oxford Magazine*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Feb. 2, 1887), p. 41, https://books.google.com/books?id=9FLnAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA41.

[11] Letter from A Voice from the Isis (i.e., Oxford), *Lancing College Magazine*, vol. unlisted, no. 49 (June 1887), p. 551, https://books.google.com/books?id=TwQIAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA551.

[12] Albert Barrère and Charles Godfrey Leland, *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant* (Ballantyne Press, 1890), vol. 2 (L–Z), p. 275, https://books.google.com/books?id=P51BAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA275.
C. T. Buckland, "Eton, Fifty Years Ago," *Macmillan's*, vol. 61, Nov. 1889, p. 65, https://books.google.com/books?id=VrI_AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA65.

on the *er*, and end up with *tosher*. In similar happy-go-lucky fashion, Jesus College became *Jaggers*, the Prince of Wales became *Pragger Wagger*, and a wastepaper basket a *wagger pagger bagger*. The wit knew no end. As it happens, changing /s/ sounds like the *c* in *association* and the *s* in *Jesus* to hard sounds like /k/ and /g/ also came pretty naturally to other English speakers of the age, as one Professor Robert Hausmann demonstrated in 1976 in a scholarly paper about how *bicycle* was truncated to *bike* instead of *bice*. The process, he informs us, is known as "velar hardening".[13]

The chap who coined *soccer*, however, might not have had to harden his own velar. An earlier abbreviation of *association* might have done that for him. Although today we abbreviate the word to *assn.*, in days gone by it was *assoc'n.* or *assoc.* At first, football writers ignored these abridgments even though it meant they had to make frequent use of the cumbersome "Association football" to make clear they weren't writing about Rugby football. Only in 1879, sixteen years after Association football was codified, did the *Eton College Chronicle* and *Cambridge Review* decide enough was enough and started lightly peppering their copy with "Assoc. Rules", "Assoc. Cup Ties", and the "Assoc. University" team.[14] Naturally, you would pronounce "Assoc." as /Ay-sock/ or /As-sock/. Just six years later, "Socker" turned up at Oxford—*voila*.

I should explain that it turned up at Oxford, not Old Hall, because although it was first printed in *The Oldhallian*, it was penned at Oxford. The penner was an anonymous Old Hall alumnus (who, were there any justice in the world, would be called an Old Oldhallian but instead is a mere Old Hallian, or so say the killjoys at the school) who had alighted at Exeter

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[13] Robert B. Hausmann, "An Etymological Brainteaser: The Shortening of Bicycle to Bike," *American Speech*, vol. 51, no. 3–4 (Autumn–Winter 1976), pp. 272–274, http://www.jstor.org/stable/454976.

[14] "School Matches, 1878," *Eton College Chronicle*, no. 289 (Feb. 7, 1879), p. 1156.
At Cambridge, the first use appears in "C. U. Assoc. F. C.," *The Cambridge Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Oct. 22, 1879), p. 24, https://books.google.com/books?id=A1BIAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA24. It appears in several other articles thereafter.

College, Oxford, and was sending back dispatches on university doings to his old schoolmates. In his letter of December 1885, after wishing Old Hallians who had gone to Cambridge "every success notwithstanding their bad choice", he reported that the 'Varsity lost to Aston Villa in what "was pre-eminently the most important 'Socker' game played in Oxford this term"—a phrase remarkable not only for the first use of *soccer* but for the last use, so far as scholars of the field have determined, of *preeminently important* to describe a game played at Oxford.

It would make for a tidy story if I could tell you that shortly after "Assoc. football" arose at Cambridge and Eton in 1879, the term popped up at Oxford, followed by "Socker" in 1885. But "Assoc. football" has yet to be found in any Oxford papers between 1879 and 1885. That deficiency is probably a mere quibble. The robust intercourse between Eton, Cambridge, and Oxford makes it not only plausible but probable that someone brought the abbreviation to Oxford and a later someone made the short hop from "Assoc." to "soccer".

As it happens, there is a tale about that later someone and his hop. The story goes that Charles Wreford Brown,[15] an Old Carthusian at Oxford, was breakfasting in the dining hall of Oriel College one morning when a friend asked, "Wreford, will you come and have a game of Rugger after brekker?" "No, thank you," our man replied, before adding waggishly, "I'm going to play a

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[15] Wreford Brown's name has often been mistakenly hyphenated as "Wreford-Brown," but the great majority of documents relating to him and published during his lifetime use no hyphen, such as, e.g., the registers of his prep school and university:

Charterhouse, *Charterhouse Register, 1872–1900* (R. B. Stedman, 1904), p. 170, https://books.google.com/books?id=cUU4AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA170;

Charles Lancelot Shadwell, *Registrum Orielense: An Account of the Members of Oriel College, Oxford*, vol. 2 (Henry Frowde, 1902), p. 645, https://books.google.com/books?id=M-NcAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA645.

game of Soccer."[16] The vignette is attractive to those who know a bit of history because Wreford Brown was no footballing dilettante but rather a father of the modern English game. After distinguishing himself at center-half for both Charterhouse and Oxford, he went on to a magnificent career with Corinthian FC, an amateur team so formidable they once filled out an entire English national side, which he captained more than once. He also seems to have been just an all-around good bloke. Once, when his team committed a blatant penalty, he ordered his goalkeeper to step aside and give the opposing player a free net to shoot at. Another time, having been wrongly awarded a penalty kick, he put the ball intentionally wide.[17] He cut a fine cricketer too and in later life was one of England's top chess players, although apparently not a calm one: at the British championships of 1933, he had to withdraw after two games (one win, one draw) upon having a heart attack.[18] At his death in 1951 he was a lifetime vice-president of the English FA, involved to the last in selecting the national side.

Skeptical minds, however, have long had their suspicions about the Wreford Brown origin story, partly because during his 85 years no one seems to have heard him tell it. Not until a decade after his death, three-quarters of a century after the supposed event, did it surface in all of three unsourced sentences in Terrence Delaney's 1961 compendium *The Footballer's Fireside*

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[16] Terrence Delaney, *The Footballer's Fireside Book* (Heinemann, 1961), p. 169. Delaney gives the story all of three sentences, and for citaion he writes only, "Anecdote retold." The story next appears in print, with very slight changes in detail, in Brian Glanville, *Soccer: A History of the Game, Its Players and Its Strategy* (Crown, 1968), p. 22. Glanville gives the vignette no more ink than did Delaney, from whom he likely got it; he names no source.

[17] Malcom Bailey, *From Cloisters to Cup Finals: A History of Charterhouse Football* (JJG Publishing, 2009), p.61.

[18] Letter from H. H. Cole, "Mr. C. Wreford Brown," (London) *Times*, Nov. 30, 1951, p. 8. Retrieved in the Gale News Vault (www.galegroup.com), Gale doc. no. CS138235262.

Book.[19] The anecdote could persist for the next fifty-odd years in part because during that time it was thought that *soccer* was first committed to the page in 1889 (in letters by the poet Ernest Dowson, who first spelled it "Socker", then "socca' ", and finally "socker").[20] The year 1889 was at the tail end of Wreford Brown's Oxford days,[21] which meant the timing was right for him to have coined the word. But the quaint apocrypha was undone by the cruelly practical Hathi Trust and Google Books, whose mass digitization of historic documents led to the discovery, last year, of "Socker" in 1885. Since Wreford Brown didn't get to Oxford until 1886,[22] he couldn't have made up the word—and so he becomes just another old man whomperjawed by technology.

Whoever coined the word, it wasn't quick to stick. General periodicals shunned *soccer* for years, and when they eventually came round—London's *Penny Illustrated Paper* seems to have had the honor of being the first, in 1889[23]—they did so with all the joy of a footman picking up a chamber pot. A report in the *English Illustrated Magazine* in 1892, for example, noted that a freshman at Oxford could expect to be asked on arrival "whether his game is 'Rugger' or 'Socker,' by which barbaric terms he has by this time learnt that the games of Rugby Union and Association football are intended."[24] But *soccer*'s two syllables, compared to *Association football*'s seven, would prove too

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[19] See Delaney, *op. cit*.

[20] Dowson spelled the word "Socker" on Jan. 18, 1889; "socca' " on Feb. 21, 1889; and "socker" on Feb. 23, 1890. Desmond Flower and Henry Maas (eds.), *The Letters of Ernest Dowson* (Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Pr., 1967), https://books.google.com/books?id=3FygQsGAzY8C&q=matches#v=snippet&q=socker&f=false.

[21] Wreford Brown was awarded his B.A. on Jan. 14, 1890, per Shadwell, *op. cit*., p. 645.

[22] See Shadwell, *op. cit.*, which says Wreford Brown matriculated at Oriel on Feb. 5, 1886.

[23] Banshee, "The World of Pastime," *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, no. 1476 (Sep. 14, 1889), p. 247.

[24] Montague Shearman, "Athletic Sports at Oxford and Cambridge Universities," *English Illustrated Magazine, 1891–1892* (vol. 9) (Macmillan, 1892), p. 442, https://books.google.com/books?id=TDI7AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA444.

useful in distinguishing the sport from rugby. In time, the grating association with the Oxford *-er* fell away, and what was left was a byname not just shorter but punchier (literally in this case, thanks to the homophone *sock*) and perhaps a little more fun than *football*. *Football*, after all, even without the bland modifier *Association*, is merely descriptive: a game played with foot and ball. Your ancestors took to *soccer*, I suspect, for about the same reason their ancestors took to *Geordie* notwithstanding the literalists who went in for *Novocastrian*.

Soccer's ascent began in earnest in the 1930s. A study of UK footballing books found that while almost none of their titles used the word *soccer* in preference to *football* before 1934, every one of them did in 1962.[25] That year, it must be said, was somewhat aberrant, but of 97 books on the sport in the 1960s, 55 went with *soccer*, 42 with *football*. And it wasn't just sportswriters doing it. Footballing greats John Charles, Jimmy Hill, and Matt Busby titled their autobiographies, respectively and just a touch immodestly, *King of Soccer* (1957), *Striking for Soccer* (1961), and *Soccer at the Top* (1973). This is not to say that *soccer* enjoyed universal currency. The *Times* of London, that guardian of stuffiness, used *soccer* instead of *football* in just 13 percent of articles during the peak year for *soccer* in its pages, 1980. (The percentage excludes references to the American game). At roughly the same time, *soccer* was peaking in the rest of Britain too—or, better said, was being cast down a dark well, so sheer and sudden was the decline. By 2008, the last year for which Stefan Szymanksi, a professor at the University of Michigan, ran the numbers, *soccer*'s use in the *Times* had fallen to 3 percent. By 1998, the last year for Szymanksi's data on books, *soccer*'s share of titles plummeted to 19 percent; it has no doubt dwindled to a smidge and a smudge since.

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[25] Stefan Szymanski, "It's Football not Soccer," unpublished, May 2014, http://bit.ly/SoNURe and http://ns.umich.edu/Releases/2014/June14/Its-football-not-soccer.pdf.

The cause of soccer's downfall was, ironically, its very popularity—not in Britain, mind you, but in the States. The problem took some time to emerge. Like you, we Yanks didn't take to *soccer* right away. It first showed up on our side of the Atlantic (so far as we know) in 1893 in the *Milwaukee Journal*, which reprinted some deathless epigrams from the *London Truth* on the difference between "Rugger" and "Socker".[26] Of Socker, the poet sang:

> *Not so rough this game, admitted,*
> *Milder form of dislocation;*
> *Accidental kicks or bruises—*
> *All one needs is embrocation.*

It doesn't get any funnier even after you look up *embrocation*. Over the next decade, we hardly used *soccer*, although, felicitously, one of those uses was in a story about the English fad of playing soccer on roller skates in barns ("nothing can be more amusing than the efforts of the players to avoid overrunning the ball and colliding with the walls")[27] and another was in an article about South African monkeys who played the game ("They Likewise Play Cricket, But Not According to Rule").[28] Apt foreshadowings, these, of the place soccer would occupy in American culture.

But if soccer didn't thrive in America, *soccer* eventually did—and for precisely the same reason it did in Britain: for its concise, punchy way of separating the game from the nation's other form of football. (The irony, I trust, will not be lost on even the dimmest *soccer*-phobes.) This was fine with you lot and probably would have remained so for all time had our soccer

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[26] "Football," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 15, 1893, p. 4. Retrieved in the Gale News Vault (www.galegroup.com), Gale doc. no. GT3001812798. (An identical article appeared in *The Times of Philadelphia*, Dec. 1, 1893, p. 3.)

[27] "Football on Wheels," *Portland Oregonian*, May 17, 1896, no. 20, p. 6. Retrieved in the Gale News Vault (www.galegroup.com), Gale doc. no. GT3006220725.

[28] "Monkeys at Football," *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier* (from *Brooklyn Times*), Mar. 4, 1898, no. 55, p. 6. Retrieved in the Gale News Vault (www.galegroup.com), Gale doc. no. GT3007631831

remained penny ante. But as the 20th century wore on, more and more of us listened to your protestations that Association football was superior to American football, and when a critical mass of us saw how right you were, we sired a sad little starveling called the North American Soccer League. It expired after just sixteen years, in 1984, but before its decease the league's New York Cosmos made an astonishing addition to their roster: Pelé. Even in 1975, in the dusk of his career, the great Brazilian had a lot of magic in his cleats. (*Cleats*, by the way, is another word we got from you—Middle English, *cletes*—but that you now give us grief for using. That, however, is another story.) Throughout Pelé's couple of years with the Cosmos, the world was treated to clip after clip of the wonders he was conjuring in the American *soccer* league. Contemporaneously, the U.S. men's team began their slow transformation from abomination to that particular species of mediocrity capable of a good run. We became the Tottenham of world soccer: not much in anyone's thoughts but impossible to ignore entirely. Then in the 1990s we hosted two World Cups. We won the women's and have dominated their half of the world game ever since—and in the bargain have done girls everywhere a world of good by showing what happens when you don't discriminate against them. Sometimes we Americans live up to our professed values.

The long and the short of the foregoing is that for forty years Britons have been hearing at least occasionally and sometimes more than occasionally about American soccer. And you will only hear more now that Major League Soccer has become a refuge for your cast-offs—a role, I am proud to say, that carries forward one of the noblest parts of our history. Might I gently suggest, however, that when our forebears offered to take in your tired and huddled masses, the wretched refuse from your teeming shores, the homeless and tempest-tost yearning to breathe free, they didn't really mean Liam Ridgewell.

You Brits, alas, haven't welcomed our interest in your sport as openly as we've welcomed your washed-up sportsmen. Your reluctance, I concede, is somewhat understandable. Who, after all, wants his or her national sport tainted by a breed of people who barely know how to play the game and, worse, belch up morons by the million who mock it as duller and sissier than the armored tedium that is American football? The (thankfully) late Republican Congressman, failed vice-presidential nominee, and draft-dodging quarterback Jack Kemp went so far as to declaim on the floor of the House, "I think it is important for all those young out there, who someday hope to play real football, where you throw it and kick it and run with it and put it in your hands, a distinction should be made that football is democratic, capitalism, whereas soccer is a European socialist [sport]."[29] Many younger Britons, hearing *soccer* time and again in such contexts and unaware of the nativity and long domestic use of the word, understandably came to see in it just one more locust in the unyielding and unyieldingly tawdry plague that is American culture.

So you dumped *soccer*. Had your revolt stopped there—had you settled for cutting off your nose to spite our face—all might have been fine enough. But it didn't stop there. Your understandable anti-Americanism opened a septic vein from which vitriol first trickled, then flowed, and now gushes in a torrent that sweeps away fact and reason before it—a sadly common progression for many a justifiable anti-Americanism, whether in Camden Town or Kandahar. Thus can an otherwise intelligent journalist (to pick just one from the legion) write, and his editors find fit to print: "Association football began its conquest of the world, and eventually everyone came to call the most ubiquitous game in the world football. And that was that. Except it wasn't,

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[29] David Nyhan, *Boston Globe* news service, "Football, soccer and the move toward atheism," *The Courier* (Prescott, Ariz.), May 13, 1983, p. 4A, https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=YeEuAAAAIBAJ&sjid=w0wDAAAAIBAJ&pg=6794%2C2408715.

because for reasons that are not immediately apparent, the Americans decided to invent a meeker, idiotic version of rugby, which they called American football." (A good line this, which I plan to use at the next interminable Super Bowl party I am forced to attend.) "And for that reason, what they should call football they call soccer. And as only Americans can, they have steadfastly refused to obey the rules of things. They always have an air of faint surprise that the rest of the world does not call it soccer."[30]

In fact, the rest of the world—the rest of the Anglophone world anyway—calls it *soccer*. Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and a goodly share of Ireland do. In South Africa, even the Afrikaners call it *sokker*, and in Canada, the Québécois, who loathe every other English word, use *soccer* unmodified by so much as a circumflex. Britain is alone among the world's major English-speaking countries in banishing the term. In fact, wipe us 320 million Americans off the map (a tempting thought, I know), and the world would still have more than 100 million *soccer*-inclined speakers in the above five countries. Rather puts your 64 million *football*-inclined speakers in perspective, what? Toss the United States back in, add countries where English isn't spoken but where *soccer* reigns supreme (as in Japan, which uses *sakkaa*) or where *soccer* has parity with *football* (as in the Philippines, where it's *saker*),[31] and the world's *soccer* speakers number more than half a billion. Truly the sun never sets on the British linguistic empire.

Lamentably, the word's global reach may not last. The salvos you have fired at *soccer* have been the shots heard round the world. In recent years, the Australian and New Zealand soccer federations have meekly fallen in behind

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[30] Sipho Hlongwane, "It's football, not soccer," June 24, 2013, *BD Live* (*Business Day* online), http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2013/06/24/its-football-not-soccer.

[31] Reuben Fischer-Baum, "Map: What Every Country Calls The Thing We Call 'Soccer,' " *Deadspin*, Dec. 30, 2013, http://deadspin.com/map-what-every-country-calls-the-thing-we-call-soccer-1491638984?trending_test_a&utm_expid=66866090-62._DVNDEZYQh2S4K00ZSnKcw.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com

you (a longstanding fault of those nations, despite our having shown them a better path in 1776) and renamed their game *football*.[32] This is especially imbecilic in Australia, where the most popular sport[33] is already called *football*. Japan is so cowed by your censure that they call their sport *football* to the outside world ("Japan Football Federation", the official English name) while maintaining *soccer* internally ("Nihon Sakkaa Kyokai", the official Japanese name). This woeful trend will likely only accelerate because as *soccer* declines in Britain and the less courageous parts of the Commonwealth, it is becoming associated with something even worse than Americanism: oldness. Soccer is now the game your granddaddy played—a game, as one Anglophone put it, regrettably evocative of "skimpy satin shorts", "black and white truncated icosahedron balls", and "the dreadful Soccer Sunday" of 1990s Welsh TV. *Football*, by contrast, speaks of "a classier, more substantial brand of the game".[34]

Grim times, these. Nevertheless, I can offer a grain of hope to enlightened Britons—to the cultured few among you who esteem *soccer* for its simple, sprightly utility, its proud English heritage, and, in late years, its charming underdog struggle against the newly snobbish *football*. The succor I extend is this: We Americans will keep your tradition alive. We will continue to use *soccer*, no matter the world's opprobrium. We are good at this. We have

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[32] AAP, "Soccer's Australian Name Change," *The Age*, Dec. 16, 2004, http://www.theage.com.au/news/Soccer/Soccers-Australian-name-change/2004/12/16/1102787198112.html;
Editorial, "Soccer—or should we say football—must change: Game's credibility at stake," *New Zealand Herald*, June 12, 2014, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=4&objectid=11272089.

[33] The most popular sport, by several measures, is Australian Rules Football.
"Battle of the codes: Australia's four sports leagues compared—interactive," *The Guardian*, Apr. 15, 2014;
Glenda Kwek, "AFL leaves other codes in the dust," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Mar. 26, 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/data-point/afl-leaves-other-codes-in-the-dust-20130326-2grkp.html.

[34] Unsigned author, "Wreford-Brown, soccer and generosity," *Before the 'D'. . . Association Football around the world, 1863–1937* (blog), Nov. 14, 2013, http://gottfriedfuchs.blogspot.com/2013/11/wreford-brown-soccer-and-generosity.html.

had practice. And later, in a future perhaps quite remote, when Britons of refinement have shown their countrymen the error of their ways, and your nation is ready to have its word back, we will give it to you as freely as a Tom Cruise blockbuster. In return we ask only that, next time, you send a single Agüero instead of two Wright-Phillipses.

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[35] https://wordery.com/a-kidnapping-in-milan-steve-hendricks-9780393065817