

Women's Time?

Football is, as they say, a game of two halves. Sometimes you have a storming first half and it looks as if this time your team is really on top. Then, there is complete failure in the second half and it all goes wrong: another dreadful defeat. It can go the other way of course, but usually for fans, especially if, like me, you support a team that is often struggling, all the hopes and dreams of a good start are more often dashed. These tensions, which are so often experienced by football fans, are reflected in this article. The only difference is that for fans at a game, the two halves are chronological; one follows the other. In this article the two halves, the one positive and something to celebrate, and the other, a depressing manifestation of failure and the repetition of old mistakes, are happening at the same time.

Time matters in sport, as does the experience of time (Adam, 1994, 2004; Woodward, 2012c; Chasing Time, 2014-15). Time is not just a matter of progressing from A to B and, in sport measuring the time that takes; a game of two halves and the full 90 minutes. The passage of time is also experienced differently in different contexts. Time involves the past, the present and the future and the passage of time is constitutive of change, not only within the game, but over longer periods, for example of transformation, or maybe of continuity. In this paper, I want to explore some of the possibilities of women's time in football. Is the culture of football changing? What does the increasing popularity of the sport among women at grass roots as well as at competitive, international levels (UEFA Women, 2015), tell us about the how global and local football are gendered? Is football becoming a more equal and democratic playing field in terms of gender politics and opportunities? The popularity of soccer, for example among young women and in colleges and schools (Williams, 2007, 2013; FA Women, 2015) is one thing, but the enduring manifestation of traditional forms of masculinity and the reiteration of misogyny and social exclusion tell a different story and these are stories being told at the same time.

This article, which is based on a talk that I gave at a conference held in Oxford on July 23-24th, 2014, *FIFA World Cup and the Nation: Culture, Politics, Identity* (Oxford Conference 2014; Taylor

and Francis, 2014) just after the men's football World Cup in Brazil in 2014, uses an exploration of the state of play for women in football in such a big year for the sport, which saw the advent of the FA Women's Super League (Super League, 2014). 2014 was the men's competition, but did it augur any cultural change for the women's World Cup in 2015? (Women's World Cup FIFA, 2015). Could we be moving into women's time in football with greater recognition of the part played by women at all levels in the sport?

My focus is upon a particular timescale and draws upon a range of evidence from coverage of football during a limited period of time which, nonetheless cannot be seen as isolated, because the present although it carries distinctive features, is always informed by the past, and, in football always looks to the future. Change may not be entirely transformative but the progress of time usually includes elements of continuity and change and my purpose is to explore the extent of change and what form that change may take in relation to the sexual politics of football.

Sporting Times

Time is central to sport, not least football, through measurements and memories. The sophisticated technologies of recording time matter in training and on the pitch, the intensity of spectatorship at the stadium or watching the big screen and memories of being present at big games generate what makes football the beautiful game. There is also the amount of time athletes are able to devote to training and to improving performance (Chasing Time, 2014-15). What does a focus on time and temporality tell us about the women's game? The advent of the Super League might herald at least some incremental move towards women's time (Super League, 2014). Alternatively old values might be further entrenched through the exclusion and marginalization of women through their persistent invisibility, for example in lack of mainstream media presence. This is beginning to change, for example with Sky TV on going coverage of women's games, and in 2015, the BBC's commitment to broadcasting the women's FA Cup final at Wembley, but print media remain intransigent about including reports and comment on sports pages, which are dominated by the men's game. Even lower league men's matches gain precedence over any women's games,

including international events. The connections between past, present and future are experienced differently in women's football from men's, not least because of the legacy of memories of pivotal moments, record breaking displays and the construction of male heroes of the sport in the history of the men's game in public narratives, which are largely absent in women's football, as in many other sports. It will take time to build these memories and to put the women's game into discourse (Foucault, 1981), although part of this process is recognizing the role of women's participation in the past (Hargreaves, 1994).

Time and temporality are central to football in exploring some of the transformations, representations and experiences of women's football. A focus upon temporality in sport is particularly pertinent, because understanding of how memories make experience and how past present and future can be condensed in the 'real time' of spectatorship provides explanation of enduring inequalities. It is through time that heroes and made as well as records established-and broken. Brazil's disastrous early exit from the 2014 competition was so much more painful and distressing because of the legacy of football in that nation; a legacy generated and sustained over time. Similarly, when Argentinian Lionel Messi gets the ball, for example in recent games for Barcelona, the excitement (or fear if you support the opposing team) of the spectator and engagement in the real time of the present is enormously intensified because we know what he has achieved in the past; this is a moment which has a history and a heroes and goes beyond the embodied practices on the pitch, however skillful they may be. It is memories of past performance, future projections and the embodied practices of the present, including recovery of form in the real time of the game being watched, which generate debate about whether or not Messi might be the greatest player of all time.

The most obvious relevance of time to sport is through measurement of time and the increasingly precise mechanisms of setting records. As I stated at the start of this article, football is a game of two halves and time and expressions of temporality permeate the game; the full ninety minutes, extra time, injury time, playing for time, time out; in international competitions, there is talk of it

being a particular nation's time to succeed. Time however is always moving and always carries hopes for the future.

Past achievements are central to football culture and football fandom, for example current engagement in the action on the pitch connects to the promise of future success (or the threat of future failure and relegation to a lower division or league). Past records and performances are especially important in football and the past makes memories as well as generating expectations for the future. Memories connect people in the culture of football; fans recall past glories and even if they were not actually present at the game, much store is placed upon remembering where you were when it happened. This to and fro between past and future is also what makes the present so exciting; the confluence of times enhances the experience of the game you are watching. It is not only players who are immersed in the operation and experience of time on the pitch; spectators too are in a constant conversation with past and future in the real time of actually watching the game, whether in the flesh or virtually, for example on television or the big screen (Woodward, 2015). Legacies of past performances create expectations and fears in the present as well as the hierarchies of success and failure, promotion and relegation also particularly what make the men's game. Women's football has fewer legacies and heroic narratives from the past expressed within the public arena upon which to draw. This is why visibility is so important to effecting change. Visibility and audibility have to be appropriate however as I argue in the article. There is much more to a good second half and for the sexual politics of football than numbers of women playing and women being included in the coverage of competitions. In order for any claims for the emergence of women's time in the twenty first century, women have to be serious contenders in the sport, not just appendages, in the field of vision.

An exploration of temporality also raises questions about equalities and inequalities, not only about whose past counts and is recounted and whose is silenced and made invisible (Woodward, 2012a). Sport and politics are closely enmeshed and this is as true of football as most other sports (Woodward, 2012b). The management and organization of football manifests inequalities at many

different levels and thus football reflects and reproduces wider socio-economic imbalances and social inequalities, many of which are particular to specific periods of time (Goldblatt, 2015). The passing of time may be inevitable and relentless, but not everyone experiences time in the same ways. Some athletes report timelessness or being lost in time especially when they're 'in the zone' (Woodward, 2015; Chasing Time, 2014-15). This experience of timelessness and of being totally immersed in time is not available to everyone and access to the heightened state of peak performance, of being in the zone may not be entirely democratic.

In this article, I use the social dimensions of temporality and some of the ways in which time creates intensities to evaluate the extent to which changing times in football are possible and whether such changes might be redressing some of the imbalances of gendered time. The 2012 London Olympics was described as 'women's time' (Woodward, 2012a, 2012c). One example of this in 2012 was the inclusion of women's boxing in the games. I would draw attention to the way the sport was covered during the games and in the aftermath. In spite of tedious reiteration of old arguments about women's fragility, the dangers of voyeurism and the replacement of some of the men's events by women's, the outcome was mostly serious, informed discussion and commentary and some very entertaining boxing (Woodward, 2014).

The Olympics are much more egalitarian in terms of sexual politics than soccer, with almost equal participation for women and men, which is very different from football, but nonetheless the development of grass roots interest and of systems like the Super League and, for example, the positive encouragement of Premiership clubs like Arsenal (Arsenal Ladies, 2015; women are still called ladies, long after the category of gentlemen has been abandoned, even in cricket) suggest changing times. For example in the Football League women are no longer classified, for example in the bureaucratic structures of individual clubs, under the umbrella of community, within a charitable discourse of those who are in some way disadvantaged, for example on grounds of race, ethnicity or disability, or as deviant (Woodward, 2007), but as real players, even if they are called

ladies, who enjoy the game and want to play competitively and not as some form of therapy or in the promotion of social inclusion. Maybe the times are changing and it could be ‘women’s time, when the women’s world cup in Canada in 2015 begins to be anticipated in at least some respects more like the 2014 men’s?’

The Men’s World Cup 2014: time for change?

The men’s World Cup in 2014 might have signalled some small-scale transformations in the binary logic of sex and gender, which operates so powerfully in football. Not only is the sport divided into the men’s and the women’s games in the actual practice of the sport at all levels, but also its culture is dominated by patriarchal values and a traditional hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Woodward, 2012a). Hegemonic masculinity refers to a social and cultural version of masculinity which is constructed through associations with male, especially patriarchal, power which values traditionally male qualities of aggression and force, which are exercised not only over women, but also men who do not concur with its values and prescriptions. Hegemonic masculinity operates through networks and cultural practices, which in the contemporary world can include those of journalists and commentators as well as the governance of sport and players themselves.

Even though it was the men’s competition in 2014, it might have been possible to see some evidence of change. Women were included, if not in commentating on games, as experts who could be interviewed about the national team’s prospects. There was the usual discussion of players’ sexual partners under the category of wives and girlfriends, who even in 2014 were called WAGS (World Cup, 2014), sex workers (McKenna, 2014) and the customary visibility of attractive reporters who, unlike the vast majority of male commentators, tend to be appointed for their appearance, and clear enunciation, rather than experience of playing the game or particular expertise. Although all mega events attract some discussion of the working opportunities afforded by the presence of large groups of men a long way from home, in a configuration of hegemonic masculinity which is which is embedded in the culture of football, one hoped for change in 2014 and there were some glimmers of light and there was some evidence of incremental change.

These issues raise dilemmas for the football fan, who has a commitment to equality, not least in the negativity of such inequitable forces, such as those which sexualize women and deny them the right to be taken seriously as players, or indeed fans, which might be destroying enjoyment of the beautiful game (Woodward, 2012b). Some blogs have debated the extent to which feminists could support the men's World Cup and have engaged with discussion of the extent to which expressions of enthusiasm constitute collusion with women's exclusion and oppression (for example, *fbomb*, 2015). Whilst critical analysis is central, such an approach might be posing the wrong questions and a false set of alternatives. The point must be to continue to enjoy football and all the excitement it offers and to argue for change, which can make the sport more socially inclusive and broaden its base and widen its appeal (McKenna, 2015).

2014 was certainly not all negative; there were opportunities and possibilities, which promised transformations or at least marginal incremental shifts. This time women's presence at the men's World Cup was not without acknowledgement of expert knowledge. Women, such as statistician Dr. Susan Bridgewater, were recruited as expert commentators not on actual games, but in the run up, for example by the BBC prior to the big event itself (Bridgewater, 2015). Women footballers were also interviewed in the sports media. For example, Arsenal player Rachel Yankey was invited to comment on England's chances before the competition, as a serious pundit (Yankey, 2014) and there was some, if limited recognition that women contributors might have expertise.

Overall 2014 showed little departure from previous masculine dominated mega football events, however and the culture and practices of hegemonic masculinity remained pretty entrenched on the pitch and in the socio-cultural context and location of the competition. There were some great games and a focus upon the game itself, but any aberrance was attributed to provocation or deviation and some of the greatest football players in the world fought and bit their way through the tournament without any comment from sports commentators based on an analysis of the enactment of embodied masculinity. This tournament, like many mega events, suggests that gender in sport is more an outcome of masculinity than femininity. The resistance to women's time in football might

be less attributable to particular (Woodward, 2009) practices such as tackling like a girl to paraphrase Iris Marion Young's essay *Throwing Like a Girl* (2005), but more about kicking (and biting) like a boy. There is a case to be made that in evaluating the extent to which women's time is a possibility in soccer, attention should be focused upon masculinity rather than assuming the 'problem' to be femininity or that gender is just about women and in particular about empirical evidence of participation in the sport. The popularity of football and increased numbers of women who play is enormously important in democratizing the sport, but a concentration upon numbers is not the whole story of changing times. Nonetheless, football is very popular at all levels and its growth across the globe is encouraging for wider participation.

Women's football worldwide

World championships, which are the top-ranking competitions of national teams, as well as indicators of the development, performance level and the global spread of a sport, are also indicative of the extent to which women are playing a greater role in soccer worldwide. In the USA, women's soccer has had a sustained presence in recent years, with the US women's team having won more international competitions than any other national team with 10 million registered women players. ((Markovits and Hellerman 2003). Nonetheless, even with extensive media coverage the women's game is still subject to patriarchal and often sexualized constructions in the media. As Markovits and Hellerman argue, soccer in spite of its popularity in terms of numbers of participants, soccer occupies a relatively marginal space in the sports landscape in the USA.

Women's presence in international competition for example championships in sports, which have a relatively short history, such as women's soccer is also largely unremarked but nonetheless of considerable significance. The Women's World Cup, which has been organized by FIFA, since 1991, attracts an increasing number of teams, which participate in the qualification matches. The number of participants and their performance demonstrate that women's soccer has now spread to many parts of the world (Williams 2007), including China where there has been considerable recent growth ((Hong and Mangan 2003). Recent estimates suggest that there are 26 million women and

girls now playing soccer worldwide at some level (FIFA 2013). However, the recognition and support given to women's soccer, as well as its organizational bases, vary considerably from country to country; for example, although there were 120 football federations listed in the FIFA Women's World Ranking with an active national squad in 2013, women's soccer leagues exist in only 61 countries (Williams, 2013).

With an estimated 26 million female players globally and 6 million based in Europe, the numerical evolution of football has been dramatic. Growth in the women's game has led to more widespread player migration as new forms of professionalism emerge (Pfister et al, 2014; Williams, 2013).

The increases seen in the number of registered female players, the number of national associations organizing a national women's league, the number of football academies dedicated to girls and the number of associations adopting a strategy for women's football are all further signs of the steady progress that is being made (UEFA Women, 2015). The Football Association Super League (FA WSL) has only just begun, having been established in 2014, with two divisions.

More media coverage is promised. For example, in 2015 the FA Women's Cup final on Saturday, 1 August will be held at Wembley (BBC Women Wembley) for the first time in the competition's history and is to be shown live on the BBC. This is the beginning of mainstreaming and all part of incremental shifts towards changing times.

Unlike in the men's game, the professionalization process in women's soccer however, is in an incipient stage and the sport is thus not dominated by the global sport media nexus, which shapes developments in the men's game to a large extent, which may have advantages as well as disadvantages, for example in terms of visibility. The enduring inequalities which include the intersection of race, ethnicity and gender, although gender carries some distinctive aspects (Scruton et al, 2005), in the men's game through its governance and culture (Goldblatt, 2015) might yet invade the women's sport but so far, for women, what matters is performance and opportunities. The women's game, in spite of its popularity at the start of the twentieth century (Hargreaves, 1994), in the twenty first century is at an early stage.

What is the state of play in the year of the women's World Cup, and in the aftermath of the men's competition in 2014?

A Bad Second Half?

The signs on the pitch are encouraging with numbers of participating in the women's game increasing, but what about the culture of football? Is there evidence of any cultural shift towards a more inclusive sport or are there still manifestations of hostility to women? Misogyny remains well documented for example in instances of violence against women (World Health Organization, 2015), but one might not expect it in sport. It is one thing to exclude women from participation on the pitch and within regimes of governance and even the public space of media representation, but how far does hostility go? In the wake of the National Football League scandals in the USA in 2014 (NFL, 2014), there have sadly been myriad examples of misogyny in football too. In the UK, on going debate about the reinstatement at various football league clubs of the convicted rapist Ched Evans through 2014, on his release from prison on licence and cases of what was called sexist chanting at Premiership grounds, suggest that there remains deep antagonism against women in football. In spite of the UK priding itself on anti racist and diversity policies aimed at promoting social inclusion, the last bastion may indeed be prejudice against women. Apologists for such chanting which has been called 'banter', fail to acknowledge the hatred, which informs and underpins such practices (Gibson, 2015). Owen Gibson suggests more female role models and interestingly, highlights the temporal dimensions of contemporary sexist practices, especially in relation to the endurance of an unequal sexual politics. He suggests that the culture of football remains unchanged since the 1970s; it also remains framed by a defensive discourse couched in terms of good humour and the platitude that sexism is somehow a joke and not serious (ibid, 2015). Another aspect of the debate, which demonstrates a conversation with the past is the use of the term sexist, which has largely been abandoned in contemporary gender studies where other axes of power have been identified (Richardson and Robinson, 2015; Woodward and Woodward, 2009). The Football Association has called upon fans to report sexist abuse at games after being shown

disturbing scenes of women officials and staff being subjected to obscene chants. For example BBC footage showed Chelsea's doctor, Eva Carneiro and a female assistant referee Helen Byrne suffering taunts and extreme verbal abuse in 2015. FA board member Heather Rabbatts stated that such abuse should not be tolerated and pleaded with fans to report (BBC Sport, 2015). Whilst such behavior is formally unacceptable to clubs, which have a responsibility to implement equality legislation, as with anti racism programmes there is an element of paying lip service to statutory requirements and failing to address the embedded cultures of social exclusion and prejudice.

The club has no option but to state its opposition as Chelsea did in this case; 'The issue of equality is one that we take extremely seriously at Chelsea Football Club and we abhor discrimination in all its forms, including sexism. We find such behaviour unacceptable and we want it eradicated from the game' (BBC Sport, 2015). This is not only a matter of individual responsibility of fans or of clubs; it also demands an exploration of the persistence of such entrenched attitudes over such a long period of time and their eruption at this moment.

The greater participation of women in football, including line judges and medical staff at the pitch side forces the sport to confront these attitudes. In the 2014-15 English Premier league football season, there have, at the time of writing in March 2015, been 25 match-day incidents of sexist abuse have been reported to anti-discrimination campaign group Kick It Out (Kick it Out, 2015) and equality group Women in Football (WiF, 2015), whereas last season, there were only two. No action has been taken by football's governing bodies against the perpetrators due to lack of specific, direct evidence, but my point is that the reporting of these misogynous acts, including the documented abuse through mass chanting of Chelsea medical staff, suggests that this is structural, cultural and enduring and is a phenomenon which challenges the more positive features of the good first half and increasing popularity of football for women.

Manchester City, the club against which Chelsea was playing when the abuse was so loudly expressed as the doctor ran onto the pitch added that 'A new specific guidance on sexist abuse was introduced from the very next game and a new training programme implemented' (BBC Sport,

2015), which suggests, given the length of time that the UK has had anti-discriminatory legislation, either that the club thought battles against discrimination had been won or that gender equality was not something high on the club's agenda. Other clubs have argued that no formal complaints have been made and that consequently they have not taken any action.

Reflections on Researching Real Time

In this discussion of the possibility of changing times in football, I have drawn upon my experience of immersion in the 'real time' of the 2012 Olympic Games (Woodward, 2012c). One of the advantages of this auto ethnographic approach is that it is attentive to the affect and feeling of the process of engaging with the embodied practices of sport in the 'real time' of the moment, which provides a route into understanding at least in part what is so important about sport and for example, why football has such massive global appeal.

I drew upon this experience to inform my consideration of the impact of the men's World Cup and why it is the competition we want to watch and the one that generates such powerful emotions and passions. I mention this in order to explain the need to incorporate the relationship between spectators and performers in creating the affective event of the sporting mega spectacle. Football demands recognition of its affective dimensions and of some of the ways in which sport combines bodies and body practices with emotions, feelings, personal and collective psychic investments and social, cultural, political and economic systems. All of these elements, including different axes of power, combine and intersect at particular times and in particular places. Temporality provides a connecting strand, which locates culture, including the culture of football. It is impossible to consider the possibilities of women's time without some understanding of the operation and experience of time and temporality in football.

In seeking to make sense of inequalities in sport, conventional social science and sports studies suggests lack of media coverage of women's sport, lack of opportunities, lack of interest by young women (*Soccer and Society* 2011) demonstrates these reasons and such accounts very well. Also the intersection of gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and race underpin inequalities in football

(Caudwell, 1999, 2011). All these factors are relevant but not in equal proportion and I'd like to add time and temporality to the mix. Women's sport has not received anything like the prime time coverage, which men's has and this absence from the airways has been particularly marked in football. Sometimes women footballers in the news are there for familial reasons; for example the pregnancy of England and Arsenal defender Casey Stoney was described by BBC sport as her imminent transformation from footballer into 'gay mother' in 2014 (BBC 2014). There is often an elision of sex gender and sexuality although they are clearly not the same. Sex and sexuality do share the capacity to generate hostilities and prejudice however. A focus on the real time coverage of football and the lack of support and resource for the women's game is part of an assemblage of factors and of the intersection of power axes in which gender is not just about women and which is located temporally as well as spatially.

However, watching in real time demonstrates time and temporality as factors which play a part in the establishment and entrenchment of inequalities and imbalances of power which can have more purchase in sport because of the emotions and intense feeling a sport like football inspires. The excitement of football is generated in the moment of the event. It is being immersed in its intensities in the real time of the present, which brings together the memories of past performance the promise of the future. In 2014 the inclusion of a young German team in the men's World Cup invoked a whole new way of expressing support internationally in a new discourse of attachment and affiliation on a stage of global transformation, as well as the setting of records. This was manifest in the language of the commentators on the Germany Brazil game when they expressed the desire for Germany to score even more goals in order to break the record, so that the commentators too could lay claim to being part of the record.

Conclusion

In this article I have immersed myself in a particular period of time including the period immediately before the men's World Cup in 2014 up to the present, March 2015, in order to weigh up the possibilities of change in the gender politics of global football. My focus has been eclectic

but I have sought to interrogate cultural change and the ways in which new ideas and ways of thinking about the sexual politics of football might have been put into discourse, at least tentatively. I have used the concept of temporality to explore the possibility that the culture of soccer is changing and to evaluate the argument that, as was suggested in the case of the 2012 Olympic Games, this point in the twenty first century might herald women's time. Women's time is not an alternative to men's time but might suggest some incremental shifts in the patriarchal framework in which world football operates. Change is slow and marginal, but I have argued that it is possible if we engage with the inequalities of the present, to signpost a more egalitarian future.

It is time, not just the length of time of the competition and the records set but the experience of time, in the present and through memories of the past, which generate the intensity of sport's spectatorship. It is not just the body practices on the pitch, especially at a time when women in football are increasingly skilled and developing more sophisticated skills and tactics, especially in making the sport fast and entertaining, but it is only with time that the women's game will catch up with the commitment and enthusiasm which makes the men's game so powerful. Time is about inequalities in the present and tracing their genealogies in order to redress them in the future rather than utopian dreams or predictions. It is not a matter of women's time or men's time; football can accommodate people's time and further democratization of the sport can only enhance its excitement and significance.

A celebration of the embodied practices of the beautiful game might be more possible if we can concentrate on what is happening on the pitch unconstrained by hostility and hatred and a binary logic of sex; the people's game fits well with the beautiful game. And might open up the possibilities of an enjoyment of football unencumbered by some of its current social, cultural and economic constraints, when it might be feasible to focus upon what is happening on the pitch rather than off it.

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