

**BA (Hons) History**

**EMA for A329: The Making of Welsh History Dissertation**

**Sept 2021**

**The Open University**

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**'It would be a great impetus to the pastime in Wales': An investigation  
into why a national association football league did not develop in  
Wales until 1992**

7694 Words

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### Abbreviations:

FA :- The (English) Football Association

FAW :- Football Association of Wales

FIFA :- Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Association Football)

IFAB :- International Football Association Board

LoW :- League of Wales

UEFA :- Union Européenne de Football Association (Union of European Football Associations)

## Introduction:

On Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1992, the newly formed English Premier League kicked off.<sup>1</sup> Its formation, driven by the clubs' desire for a greater revenue share than available within the Football League, was deemed 'a new era of English football' in the press.<sup>2</sup> Yet this wasn't the only new era dawning that day. With Bangor City travelling to Abergavenny Thursdays, Inter Cardiff making the trip to Mold Alexandra and Haverfordwest County venturing to Llanidloes Town, the LoW, the first truly, nation-wide, single division competition, began.<sup>3</sup> With this competition, the desire of 'Referee', *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality* reporter, to see a league that would 'be a great impetus to the pastime [*sic*] in Wales' and 'effect a complete transformation on the game' was finally fulfilled, one hundred and two years after his request.<sup>4</sup> This dissertation will explore the reasoning behind this delay, by investigating the factors that impacted the creation of a national league within Wales, in an effort to add to the 'limited literature' on the game in Wales.<sup>5</sup> To fully explore the topic, the development of the league structure of the game will be studied in both North & Mid and South Wales, in an effort to highlight any regional differences that may have inhibited a national system forming. Alongside this, comparisons with England and Scotland will be made to discover if these factors were unique to Wales and to decipher why their systems evolved into a nation-wide system not seen in Wales.

While the Lancashire and Midland based Football League and the Central Belt based Scottish Football League rose to dominance by the acquisition of clubs from other leagues, this

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<sup>1</sup>Taylor, M. (2013) *The Association Game: A History of the British Game*, Taylor & Francis pp.455-6 of 669 [Google Books Edition]. Available at <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=5aGMAQAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT454.w.2.0.146> (Accessed 27 Mar 2021)

<sup>2</sup>Anon, (1992a) 'Football Focus' in *Hammersmith & Shepherds Bush Gazette*, 14 Aug 1992, p.24 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002485/19920814/182/0025> (Accessed 27 Mar 2021)

<sup>3</sup>Anon, (1992b) 'Rest of the Results' in *Sunday Mirror*, 16 Aug 1992, p.48 [Online] Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002137/19920816/314/0048> (Accessed 27 Mar 2021)

For the locations of all twenty teams that formed the LoW, see Appendix A

<sup>4</sup>'Referee', (1890a) 'Football Notes and News' in *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 1 Feb 1890, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4454495/4454500/36/> (Accessed 07 Apr 2021)

<sup>5</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.28-29 of 669

did not occur within Wales, with regional leagues operating across the country.<sup>6</sup> The FAW did attempt to form a Welsh National League in the 1920s with multiple, regional sections which would eventually form a unified national division, yet this system was troubled from the start and had collapsed by 1930.<sup>7</sup> The notion was raised at various times after the Second World War but the difficulties with, and cost of, travel were cited as reasons against such action.<sup>8</sup> Without a national league, UEFA barred Welsh clubs from the top continental competition and the FAW formed various plans to satisfy UEFA, including recognising the southern Welsh Football League as the national league or a competition between the professional, English based, Welsh clubs to identify a champion but all were dismissed.<sup>9</sup> Only a national league would satisfy UEFA, and even with its formation blocking the English based teams to represent Wales in Europe, the FAW, faced with a threat to its existence from 'third world countries, backed by some Europeans' were forced to create a national league.<sup>10</sup>

Sport history has suffered from an 'intellectual snobbery', fuelled by a belief that it would not 'foster new knowledge or explain important historical questions'.<sup>11</sup> Yet sport is 'one

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<sup>6</sup>For England, the final proof of the Football League's national status was the capture of all twenty-two Southern League First Division clubs on mass to form the Third Division before the 1920/21 season. Taylor does claim that this event took place in 1909 in his work yet all the evidence points to this being a typing error. Anon, (1920a), 'A Football Surprise' in *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 1 Jun 1920, p.2 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000327/19200601/001/0002> (Accessed 28 Mar 2021) In Scotland, the formation of the Second Division with a large contingent from the Scottish Alliance league in 1893 cemented the Scottish League as the national league, even if it was still confined to the populous Central Belt at this time. Crampsey, R. A. (1990), *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, The Scottish Football League, Glasgow p.26

<sup>7</sup>'Citizen' (1921a) 'The Welsh League's Annual Meeting' in *Western Mail*, 3 Jun 1921 p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19210603/072/0003> (Accessed 28 Mar 2021); Anon, (1929a) 'New Welsh League' in *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 16 Feb 1929, p.10 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000669/19290216/244/0010> (Accessed 28 Mar 2021); Anon, (1930a) 'Welsh League Schemes' in *Liverpool Echo*, 21 Mar 1930, p.10 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000271/19300321/252/0010> (Accessed 28 Mar 2021)

<sup>8</sup>See. 'T.E.J.' (1959) 'All Wales League idea flops' in *North Wales Weekly News*, 12 Mar 1959, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003119/19590312/154/0006> (Accessed 28 Mar 2021); Williams, J. (1978) 'Sportsview' in *North Wales Weekly News*, 14 Sep 1978, p.40 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003119/19780914/492/0040> (Accessed 28 Mar 2021)

<sup>9</sup>Stead, P. (2012) '1984 European Championship' and '1978 World Cup', *The Red Dragons – The Story of Welsh Football*, Y Lolfa, Talybont, [Kindle edition]. Location 3775 and 3383 of 5840

<sup>10</sup>Stead, '1992 European Championship', *The Red Dragons*, location 4195 of 5840.

<sup>11</sup>Bass, A. (2014), 'State of the Field: Sports History and the "Cultural Turn"' in *The Journal of American History*, 101(1), p.149, [Online]. Available at <https://www-istor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/44285952> (Accessed 31 Mar 2021)

of the most obvious features in the general background of life',<sup>12</sup> and as such interacts with identities of place, class, ethnicity and gender so the history of sport can contribute to a wider understanding of the past.<sup>13</sup> While individuals such as Peter McIntosh and J. A. Mangun provided the foundation, it was Tony Mason's 1980 book, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915*, that, while focused on social history, elevated the field into the mainstream. This link to social history caused the field to fixate on class, with the focus generally on the interplay between the working class and sport. Within Britain, sport history was identified as being able to assist in exploring experiences of not only sport but also wider life due to it being a 'class-based society and class shaped people's experiences and perceptions'. Indeed, such is the importance of class, Steven Reiss remarked that it was 'the central issue in British sport historiography'.<sup>14</sup> The impact of other factors on sport have also been academically explored, from Vamplew and Tranter highlighting the role of economic factors on association football to Metcalf's work on how sporting clubs helped build a sense of community identity, one that could be multi-tiered, with amateur teams promoting village identity while professional clubs could invoke a regional or even a national identity.<sup>15</sup>

Within Britain, soccer has dominated sport history, due to being the most popular sport during the last century, yet, studies into the game have generally focused more on the English game than any other nation, due to 'practical and intellectual reasons' and can suffer from drawing 'British' conclusions from 'English' evidence.<sup>16</sup> Major works on the game in Britain include James Walvin's 1975 *The People's Game*, Dave Russell's 1997 *Football and the English* and Matthew Taylor's 2008 *The Association Game* while several short period studies have also provided further insight into the nature of the game, including, Mason's aforementioned work, Nicholas Fishwick's study of the English game between 1910 and 1950, Neal Graham's work on Irish football until the 1920s and Martin Johnes' book on inter war South Wales. The professionalising of the game has been scrutinised by the likes of Eric Dunning, Kenneth Sheard,

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<sup>12</sup>Darwin, B. (1940) in Johnes, M. (2010) ' Historiography of Sport in Britain ', in S.W. Pope & John Nauright (eds), *Routledge Companion to Sports History*, London p.1 (Pre-publication version) [Online]. Available at [https://www.academia.edu/197884/Historiography\\_of\\_Sport\\_in\\_Britain](https://www.academia.edu/197884/Historiography_of_Sport_in_Britain) (Accessed 31 Mar 2021)

<sup>13</sup>Johnes, ' Historiography of Sport in Britain ', p.2

<sup>14</sup>Johnes, ' Historiography of Sport in Britain ', pp.1-2

<sup>15</sup>Johnes, ' Historiography of Sport in Britain ', p.7; Johnes, M. (2002a), *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, p.174.

<sup>16</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.18-20 of 669

Stephen Tischler and Robert Lewis. Later studies have focused on the hooligan problem of the 1980s and 90s but this is slowly being corrected by the input from other fields, such as economics, anthropology and media studies, yet these still suffer from the Anglocentric focus seen in the past.<sup>17</sup>

While studies on football within Wales are few in number, those that have been produced generally cover four themes, individual clubs, player biographies, the national team and academic studies into the social impact of football within the wider community. Yet the first two of these themes generally focus on Welsh clubs and players operating within England due to the heightened profile. This factor also impacts the coverage of the national team, due to the inability for Welsh clubs, apart from those within the English system, to support professional wages and the conflict between English clubs and the FAW on the availability of players for internationals.<sup>18</sup> The final theme is generally comprised of work that investigates how the sport became established, both national and regionally, and the way in which it interacted with various factors of Welsh life, including class and identity.<sup>19</sup>

## Chapter One: North & Mid Wales

Due to the influence of the Shrewsbury School on the public and grammar schools in the area, the game found popularity around Wrexham, with a Ruabon school team established by 1864 and a Wrexham Football and Athletic Club playing against the Volunteer Fire Brigade in March 1866.<sup>20</sup> In the North West, 'clwb Caernarfon' were playing 'clwb Porthmadoc' by 1873 while it 'spread like wildfire' in Mid Wales, with the creation of teams in Kerry, Welshpool,

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<sup>17</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.15-20 of 669

<sup>18</sup>The Anglocentric nature of secondary work on Welsh teams and players can be found in the bibliographies of works including *Red Dragon and Soccer and Society*.

Stead, 'Bibliography', *The Red Dragons – The Story of Welsh Football*, location 5503 of 5840; Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.220-31

<sup>19</sup>Harris, J. (1995) 'The Early History of Association Football in Breconshire' in *Bryncheinog*, Vol. 28 1995-96 pp.134-5 [Online]. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/1380216/1384844/128> (Accessed 9 Mar 2021); Johnes, M. and Garland, I. (2004), 'The New Craze': Football and Society in North-East Wales, c.1870-90' in *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 22 p.296 [Online]. Available at [https://www.academia.edu/199114/The\\_New\\_Craze\\_Football\\_and\\_Society\\_in\\_North\\_East\\_Wales\\_c\\_1870\\_90](https://www.academia.edu/199114/The_New_Craze_Football_and_Society_in_North_East_Wales_c_1870_90) (Accessed 9 Mar 2021)

<sup>20</sup> Johnes and Garland, 'The New Craze', p.281; Stead, 'The earliest football clubs in Wales', *The Red Dragons*, location 203 of 5840

Llanidloes and two in Newtown by 1876.<sup>21</sup> Flintshire is described in 1880 as having 'nine or ten good teams, besides numerous minor clubs'<sup>22</sup> and 'ten town clubs' are reported at Aberystwyth in 1889 as opposed to a single 'somewhat feeble' team ten years earlier.<sup>23</sup> This growth in clubs shows that the game was accepted by the working class both on and off the field.<sup>24</sup> It also created a demand for more important fixtures, and the FAW created a Welsh Cup competition, inspired by the FA Cup, which had expected Welsh teams since 1876, in 1877.<sup>25</sup> Nineteen teams entered in its first year, and with ten of these based in the Wrexham area alongside Oswestry and Northwich, it shows the strength of the game in the North East and the cross-border ties of the Welsh game. Of the nineteen, Aberystwyth were the most southerly team to complete a fixture while Swansea withdrew when they discovered it was not a rugby competition.<sup>26</sup>

By this time, clubs were charging for attendance at games and clubs that saw two thousand attend a cup tie would to get 'barely a hundred' for a friendly and this impacting their revenue.<sup>27</sup> Even before the legalisation of professionalism within the English game in 1885, Welsh clubs were losing players to clubs in Lancashire and Cheshire due to offers of money and work. Once they were able to be paid, this movement only increased. Welsh clubs also looked to poach the best talent from each other using offers of the team captaincy or 'travel expenses' to circumvent the illegality of direct payment.<sup>28</sup> This 'shamateurism' went against the middle-class ethos of the FAW and they were keen to defeat this 'hydraheaded monster'.<sup>29</sup> Yet some of the clubs had grown too powerful by this point. Wrexham, Druids, Chirk, and Newtown were all

<sup>21</sup>Stead, 'The earliest clubs in Wales' *The Red Dragons*, locations 203-19 of 5840.

<sup>22</sup>'Dribbler', (1880) 'Football in Flintshire' in *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 30 Oct 1880, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000924/18801030/019/0003> (Accessed 2 May 2021)

<sup>23</sup>Angus, J. M. (1899) 'Association Football' in *The University College of Wales Magazine*, Vol. XI, No 2 – January 31, 1889, p.58 [Online]. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/2045456/2049155/33> (Accessed 2 May 2021)

<sup>24</sup>Johnes and Garland, 'The New Craze', p.286

<sup>25</sup>Anon, (2014), 'The FA Cup has never been an English-only competition' [Online]. Available at <https://www.thefa.com/news/2014/dec/06/fa-cup-preview-wrexham-maidstone> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>26</sup>Stead, 'The earliest clubs in Wales' *The Red Dragons*, location 220 of 5840; Johnes and Garland, 'The New Craze', p.285

<sup>27</sup>Johnes and Garland, 'The New Craze', p.292 and p.300

<sup>28</sup>Johnes and Garland, 'The New Craze', p.298

<sup>29</sup>Tomlinson, A. (2010) 'Corinthian Spirit' in *A Dictionary of Sports Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press [Online]. Available at <https://www-oxfordreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199213818.001.0001/acref-9780199213818-e-302?rskey=kxNZnX&result=1> (Accessed 10 May 2021); Croll, A. (2004), 'Chapter Twenty-Four Popular Leisure and Sport' in Williams, C. (ed) *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, p.405 [Online]. Available at <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/10.1002/9780470997147.ch25> (Accessed 10 May 2021); Johnes and Garland, 'The New Craze', p.298



regular participants in the English FA Cup by 1885 and this contact with English teams only strengthen their desire for more revenue and professionalism in Wales.<sup>30</sup> A number of clubs met on 15th March 1890 and decided to form a league, to increase competitiveness, attendances and revenue. Wrexham, claiming that the teams selected would not provide the attendances they required, shunned the league and joined the Combination, a league that was founded with Manchester and Cheshire based clubs the same year.<sup>31</sup> By selecting this league, described by another of its founding members, Chester, as a means to ‘get into the [Football] Alliance in the following year’, over the Welsh League, Wrexham are showing that the standard of the Welsh game was viewed as well below that of the English leagues.<sup>32</sup> Corwen, Chirk and Flint also pulled out of the competition between March and June, leaving eight clubs, six from around Wrexham alongside Rhyl and Bangor, despite concerns about the travel costs due to the latter’s location.<sup>33</sup> These concerns seem to have been well placed as Bangor, along with Mold, failed to meet many of their fixtures and both resigned from the league in March 1891.<sup>34</sup> Due to the lack of completed fixtures, the league committee voted to disband at the end of the first season but it reformed for the 1892-3 season, but with a solely North East focus with the only team involved from outside Wrexham being Denbigh, twenty miles from the town.<sup>35</sup> Wrexham entered their

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<sup>30</sup> Johnes and Garland, ‘The New Craze’, p.293 and p.299

<sup>31</sup> Anon, (1890a), ‘The Welsh Football League’ in *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 22 Mar 1890, p.7 [Online]. Available at

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4454558/4454565/67/football%20AND%20league> (Accessed 10 May 2021);

Anon (1890b), ‘Wrexham Football Club’ in *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser and Cheshire Shropshire and North Wales Register*, 21 Jun 1890, p.5 [Online]. Available at

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4591084/4591089/37/> (Accessed 10 May 2021); Anon, (1890c), ‘Football News’ in *Cheshire Observer*, 24 May 1890, p.7 [Online]. Available at

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000157/18900524/015/0007> (Accessed 10 May 2021)

<sup>32</sup> Anon, (1890d), ‘Chester Football Club Annual Meeting’ in *Cheshire Observer*, 17 May 1890, p.5 [Online].

Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000157/18900517/018/0005> (Accessed 10 May 2021)

<sup>33</sup> Anon, (1890e), ‘Football - The Welsh Football League’ in *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 7 Jun 1890, p.5 [Online]. Available at

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4454657/4454662/40/football%20AND%20league> (Accessed 10 May 2021);

‘Referee’ (1890b), ‘Football Notes and News’ in *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 22 Mar 1890, p.7 [Online]. Available at

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4454558/4454565/67/football%20AND%20league> (Accessed 10 May 2021)

<sup>34</sup> ‘In Touch’, (1891) ‘Football Notes’ in *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 14 Mar 1891, p.4 [Online]. Available at

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3725312/3725316/17/> (Accessed 10 May 2021)

<sup>35</sup> ‘In Touch’, (1891) ‘Football Notes’ and Anon, (1892a), ‘Welsh League’ in *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser and Cheshire Shropshire and North Wales Register*, 17 Sep 1892, p.3 [Online]. Available at

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4593560/4593563/17/> (Accessed 10 May 2021)

reserve team into the competition while their first team continued in the Combination, which further cemented the subservient nature of the Welsh League.<sup>36</sup>

For those clubs further west, the failure of Bangor to fulfil their fixtures seems to have made them weary of joining the reformed Welsh League but they still desired a competition. The answer was their own league, and clubs along the North Wales, including Rhyl, Bangor and Flint sent representatives to Rhyl on 22 March 1893 to form the North Wales Coast League. Just like the formation of the Welsh League three years earlier, clubs were selected on a mixture of reputation and location and a league of seven teams kicked off in September and before the end of the season, the North Wales Coast Football Association had been formed to administer the sport in the region.<sup>37</sup> The league quickly reached equivalence with the Welsh League, shown by Bangor defeating Wrexham in the 1896 Welsh Cup final.<sup>38</sup> Yet, like Wrexham, the more successful clubs in the league set their sights on bigger prizes. Bangor, Llandudno Swifts and a Rhyl team formed from an amalgamation of the town's two top sides, joined the Combination in 1898 and left their reserve teams within the league.<sup>39</sup>

Further regional leagues were formed, including a 'back-end' league for Denbighshire in 1894, Anglesey in 1895, Caernarfon in 1900 and a Flintshire competition in 1902.<sup>40</sup> Successful clubs within these leagues would apply for entry into leagues with higher reputations, such as Llanrwst and Holyhead's acceptance into the North Wales Coast League in 1899.<sup>41</sup> All this was made possible by the increase in clubs and players in the area. The Welsh League attempted to live up to its name by accepting both Aberystwyth and Newtown in 1896 before disbanding in 1898 while the North Wales Coast League expanding to include Porthmadoc in 1902 alongside

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<sup>36</sup> Anon, (1892b), 'Football' in *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser and Cheshire Shropshire and North Wales Register*, 5 Nov 1892, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4593623/4593626/16/> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>37</sup> Davies, G. M. (1994), *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994: The Centenary Book of the North Wales Coast Football Association*, Circular Press Ltd, Colwyn Bay, pp.9-10

<sup>38</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.13

<sup>39</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.14; Stead, 'The Age of the Missionaries' *The Red Dragons*, location 607 of 5840

<sup>40</sup> Anon, (1894), 'Football' in *Wrexham Advertiser*, 24 Feb 1894, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000496/18940224/009/0003> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

'Sphere' (1894), 'Local Football Notes' in *Cheshire Observer*, 3 Mar 1894, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000157/18940303/066/0007> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.13 and pp.16-7

<sup>41</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.15

adding a second division in 1905.<sup>42</sup> Yet issues with the expense and reliability of travel were always present, for both big and small clubs. The professional clubs constantly needed big gates and plenty of season ticket sales to cover the heavy costs involved in their cross-border competitions while the smaller clubs believed they 'worked for the railway companies' due to the travel costs to fulfil their fixtures.<sup>43</sup> The lure of the English system was great and Welsh teams continued to move to the Combination, which has lost the majority of its English clubs by this period. Even Aberystwyth and Newtown believed the enormous travel costs were worth the potential attendance increases, joining for the 1899-1900 season.<sup>44</sup> For the first decade of the twentieth century, The Combination occupied the position of the prime football competition in North Wales, with only Wrexham absent after being elected into Birmingham and District League in 1905, described as the 'third league in the country'.<sup>45</sup> Interest in the Combination collapsed in 1911 and despite the efforts of clubs, it was never revived.<sup>46</sup> The majority of the Welsh Combination clubs entered the Wrexham and District League, founded in 1903, and to show its improved status, it rebranded as the North Wales Alliance.<sup>47</sup> With Bangor choosing to play their first team in this league and their reserves in the North Wales Coast League, it can be deduced that the North Wales Alliance was viewed by the clubs as the premier league of North Wales.<sup>48</sup>

The Great War caused a pause to football across the country and its resumption saw the situation unchanged, with the North Wales Alliance generally focused on the North East and the

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<sup>42</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.17 and p.19; Anon, (1896), 'Football - the Welsh League' in *Wellington Journal*, 6 Jun 1896, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000405/18960606/180/0006> (Accessed 11 May 2021); Anon, (1898), 'Annual Meeting of the Football Club' in *Montgomery County Times and Shropshire and Mid-Wales Advertiser*, 13 Aug 1898, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000907/18980813/028/0005> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>43</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.18

<sup>44</sup> 'Chiel', (1899), 'Football Notes and Jottings' in *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 2 Sep 1899, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000925/18990902/051/0005> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>45</sup> 'Brum', (1905), 'Midland Notes' in *Athletic News*, 29 May 1905, p.8 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000986/19050529/161/0008> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>46</sup> Anon, (1912), 'The Football Prospects: The Combination Position' in *Flintshire County Herald*, 28 Jun 1912, p.8 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003153/19120628/119/0008> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>47</sup> Anon, (1903), 'Welsh Football Association' in *Wellington Journal*, 6 Jun 1903, p.9 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000405/19030606/172/0009> (Accessed 11 May 2021); Anon, (1912a), 'The Football Prospects: The Combination Position'

<sup>48</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.26

North Wales Coast League concentrated in the North West. 1921 saw the FAW, under the guidance of Ted Robbins, attempt to create a Welsh National League, consisting of regional sections. This system would replace the current leagues in North Wales with one top division and two tiers, split into East and West, below this. Wrexham, after gaining admittance to the new English Third Division North, only committing their reserve team while the rest of the top clubs supported the move and despite concerns from the smaller clubs about travel costs, the system was approved.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, the project was mistimed, as the 1920s saw an economic downturn that saw the clubs playing to dwindling crowds.<sup>50</sup> With the number of clubs in the top division reducing season on season, the league fixtures were over by February in 1930 and threatened to bring an end to Welsh National League experiment in North Wales.<sup>51</sup> Possible solutions were proposed, including splitting the top division into East and West sections or having two league competitions a season, but none were agreed and the league disbanded that year.<sup>52</sup> The aftermath of this was a chaotic period of leagues forming and reforming, with efforts to create a new Combination as well as a new Welsh League in the North East.<sup>53</sup> Bangor, Rhyl, and even Wrexham reserves sort the stability and competitiveness of the Birmingham League, much to the disappointment of the FAW.<sup>54</sup> The situation was resolved by creating a regionalised system in the North West, with a top division, named the Welsh League (North) and five regional second divisions and the North East being serviced by the Wrexham and District

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<sup>49</sup> Anon, (1921a), 'National Football League' in *North Wales Weekly News*, 14 Jul 1921, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003119/19210714/031/0003> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>50</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, pp.54-6

Anon, (1927), 'North Wales Clubs & the Cash Problem' in *Western Mail*, 03 Dec 1927, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19271203/115/0005> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>51</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.56

<sup>52</sup> Anon, (1930b), 'Welsh League' in *Daily Herald*, 18 Mar 1930, p. 19 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000681/19300318/418/0019> (Accessed 11 May 2021);

Anon, (1930c), 'Welsh Football Schemes' in *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 Mar 1930, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000525/19300329/103/0005> (Accessed 11 May 2021);

Anon, (1930d), 'Welsh League to disband' in *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 05 Apr 1930 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000525/19300405/103/0004> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>53</sup> Price, A. H. (1930) 'North Wales Solution' in *Liverpool Echo*, 15 Apr 1930, p.14 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000271/19300415/339/0014> (Accessed 18 May 2021);

Anon, (1930e), 'The New Combination' in *Liverpool Echo*, 9 Jun 1930, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000271/19300609/185/0006> (Accessed 18 May 2021)

<sup>54</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.57

League, which renamed itself the Welsh National League (Wrexham Area) after the Second World War.<sup>55</sup>

This system provided the game the stability it needed after the Welsh National League collapse and it endured until the early 1980s. During this time, some of the regional leagues were merged into larger units, a Clwyd League was formed in 1972 and one covering Gwynedd in 1983.<sup>56</sup> Yet, the Welsh League (North) was struggling to field more than ten teams and a plan was formed to expand to cover all of North and Mid Wales and rebrand as the Welsh Alliance, with the winners to play the South Wales champions.<sup>57</sup> This coincided with a reorganisation of English non-league football and Colwyn Bay, who had won three of the last four Welsh League (North) titles, took the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Caernarfon Town at the start of the decade and move into the English system.<sup>58</sup> While the Welsh Alliance failed in its mission to become the top league in for North and Mid Wales, the FAW were under pressure from UEFA and FIFA to set up a national league system and a second attempt at a North and Mid regional league, named the Cymru Alliance occurred in 1990, with the Welsh Alliance becoming the North East feeder league to it.<sup>59</sup> This reorganisation was seen by Flint Town United as the opportunity to transfer into the English system but the FAW had toughen its stance due to threats to its existence from FIFA and went to court to keep them in Wales.<sup>60</sup> Other clubs, such as Nantlle Vale and Bethesda Athletic refused to join the league, citing the strain of the addition travel costs in a league that stretched from Anglesey to Knighton. Yet others filled these voids and the Cymru Alliance was able to act as a secure foundation for the LoW, with the league

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<sup>55</sup> Anon, (1935), 'New Welsh League' in *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7 Sep 1935, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000525/19350907/172/0006> (Accessed 11 May 2021); Jones, D. (2020a) 'Farewell to the Welsh National (Wrexham Area) League – a tribute' [Online]. Available at <https://nwsport.co.uk/2020/05/27/farewell-to-the-welsh-national-wrexham-area-league-a-tribute/> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>56</sup> Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.85 and p.88

<sup>57</sup> Jones, D. (2020b) 'End of an era: goodbye to the Welsh Alliance League' [Online]. Available at <https://nwsport.co.uk/2020/06/01/end-of-an-era-goodbye-to-the-welsh-alliance-league/> (Accessed 11 May 2021); Davies, *A Coast of Soccer Memories, 1894-1994*, p.57

<sup>58</sup> Anon, (1980a), 'Soccer Preview' in *North Wales Weekly News*, 14 Aug 1980, p.44 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003119/19800814/546/0044> (Accessed 11 May 2021);

Draper, A. (1983), 'Pyramid Game on new level' in *Liverpool Echo*, 19 Feb 1983, p.18 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000271/19830219/522/0018> (Accessed 11 May 2021);

Jones, D. (2020b) 'End of an era: goodbye to the Welsh Alliance League'

<sup>59</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, p.517-19; Jones, D. (2020b) 'End of an era: goodbye to the Welsh Alliance League'

<sup>60</sup> Walker, N (1990) 'Linnets plummet from top flight' in *Liverpool Echo*, 23 Jul 1990, p.19 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000271/19900723/140/0019> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

providing eight teams to the national competition.<sup>61</sup> As to the North Walian clubs that operating in England, the FAW demanded that those clubs operating in English non-league football return to fill the new national league. These clubs refused and a standoff occurred, with the FAW banning the clubs from playing in Wales or against Welsh teams.<sup>62</sup> Bangor, Newtown and Rhyl did bow to the pressure and join the Welsh system, but Rhyl missed the application window and were placed into the second tier Cymru Alliance.<sup>63</sup> Caernarfon Town and Colwyn Bay held out and won the right continue in the English system in April 1995 but Caernarfon changed their mind and joined the LoW a few months later.<sup>64</sup>

The picture in Mid Wales is far more difficult to chart. A Builth side entered the Welsh Cup in 1888 and they were present at the formation of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Football Association in 1893, alongside Brecon and Hay Town.<sup>65</sup> Newtown were members of the Shropshire League for the 1892-3 season and they, Aberystwyth and Welshpool are among the founders of the Montgomery & District League in 1904, which was renamed the Cambrian League the following year.<sup>66</sup> Four years earlier, a Mid Wales League involving clubs such as Brecon, Builth and Llandrindod has been formed.<sup>67</sup> Both were absorbed into the Welsh National

<sup>61</sup> Townsend, S. (n.d.), 'History: FAW Championship North and Mid' [Online]. Available at <https://huwsggrayalliance.pitchero.com/articles/history-110> (Accessed 11 May 2021)

<sup>62</sup> Anon, (1992c), 'Block on Caernarfon' in *Dundee Courier*, 17 Jul 1992, p.24 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000564/19920717/470/0024> (Accessed 14 May 2021); Anon, (1992d), 'Appealing' in *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 8 Feb 1992, p.19 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000726/19920208/313/0019> (Accessed 14 May 2021) (N.B. the author has confused Caernarfon Town with Carmarthen Town in this article); Stead, '1992 European Championship' in *The Red Dragons*, location 4139 of 5840.

<sup>63</sup> Bangor City (n.d.), 'Club History' [Online]. Available at <https://www.pitchero.com/clubs/bangorcfc/a/bangor-city-fc-history--honours-44574.html?page=1> (Accessed 14 May 2021); Newtown AFC (n.d.) '1990s' [Online]. Available at <https://www.newtownafc.co.uk/history/testing-2/> (Accessed 14 May 2021); CPD Y Rhyl 1879 (n.d.), 'Club History' [Online]. Available at <https://www.rhylfc.co.uk/clubinfo/club-history> (Accessed 14 May 2021)

<sup>64</sup> Anon, (1995a), 'Exile ends' in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 14 Apr 1995, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000578/19950414/088/0006> (Accessed 14 May 2021); Anon, (1995b), 'Lawler takes on Bay watch' in *Liverpool Echo*, 12 Aug 1995, p.58 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000271/19950812/594/0058> (Accessed 14 May 2021)

<sup>65</sup> Harris, 'The History of Association Football in Breconshire', p.132

<sup>66</sup> Anon, (1892c), 'Annual Meeting of the Newtown Club' in *Montgomeryshire Express*, 06 Sep 1892, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001938/18920906/114/0007> (Accessed 12 May 2021); Anon, (1904a), 'Football Jottings', in *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 09 Sep 1904, p.2 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000401/19040909/046/0002> (Accessed 12 May 2021); Anon, (1905a), 'Football League' in *Cambrian News*, 3 Mar 1905, p.8 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002072/19050303/123/0008> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>67</sup> Anon, (1900), 'A new football league for Mid Wales' in *Radnor Express*, 3 May 1900, p.2 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003129/19000503/025/0002> (Accessed 12 May 2021);

League as a Central and a Mid Wales Section in 1922.<sup>68</sup> Other minor leagues also developed, including a Cardiganshire League in 1921 and an Aberystwyth League in 1934.<sup>69</sup> It seems that both Welsh National League sections combined around 1930 with discussions held about splitting the top division into a northern and southern section to cut the travel costs, which would hopefully attract more clubs but tracking the league is difficult both Mid Wales League and Central Wales League are used in the press interchangeably to describe the competition.<sup>70</sup> This split had not occurred by 1933 and many of the Brecon and Radnorshire clubs joined the North Herefordshire League.<sup>71</sup> Aberystwyth Town did leave the league for the southern Welsh League in 1951, leaving their reserve team in the Mid Wales League, but returned in 1963.<sup>72</sup> The Mid Wales League disappears from the press after the 1950s, only being mentioned when their clubs concede sixteen goals in a cup tie or ask for assistance to pay their travel expenses to Llandudno.<sup>73</sup> This decline in the reputation in the league seems to have driven Aberystwyth back into the south in 1987 and Newtown to the English Northern League a year later until both teams joined the LoW in 1992.<sup>74</sup>

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Harris, J. (1996), 'Association Football in Breconshire, 1900-1929' in *Brycheiniog*, Vol.29, 1996-7, p.105 [Online]. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/1380216/1384991/108> (Accessed 14 May 2021)

<sup>68</sup>Anon, (1922), 'Association in Central Wales' in *Western Mail*, 15 Jun 1922, p.4 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19220615/079/0004> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>69</sup> Anon, (1921b), 'The Cardiganshire Football League – Minutes of meeting held at Lampeter – Aug 17 1921' [Online]. Available at [http://www.ceredigionleague.co.uk/CCL-Images-Folder/1921\\_Meeting\\_Scan.pdf](http://www.ceredigionleague.co.uk/CCL-Images-Folder/1921_Meeting_Scan.pdf) (Accessed 12 May 2021); Jenkins, G. (1984), *The History of the Aberystwyth & District Football League 1934-84*, reproduced on the Welsh Football Data Archive website. Available at

[https://www.welshsoccerarchive.co.uk/league\\_aber\\_district\\_index.php](https://www.welshsoccerarchive.co.uk/league_aber_district_index.php) (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>70</sup> Anon, (1930f), 'Breconshire Clubs Rebuffed' in *Brecon County Times*, 28 Aug 1930, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002867/19300828/043/0003> (Accessed 12 May 2021);

Anon, (1938), 'Mid Wales League' in *Sports Argus*, 31 Dec 1938, p10 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000653/19381231/258/0010> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>71</sup> Anon, (1933), 'Local Notes' in *Kington Times*, 16 Sep 1933, p.4 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002545/19330916/062/0004> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>72</sup> Anon, (1951), 'Welsh League' in *Western Mail*, 20 Aug 1951, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19510820/071/0005> (Accessed 12 May 2021);

Aberystwyth Town FC, (n.d), 'Club history' [Online]. Available at <https://www.atfc.org.uk/history.html> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>73</sup> 'Mirror Sport Reporter', (1961) 'Upset - after a 16-goal win!' in *Daily Mirror*, 30 Jan 1961, p.16 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000560/19610130/080/0016> (Accessed 12 May 2021);

Anon, (1980b), 'Supporters Needed' in *North Wales Weekly News*, 9 Oct 1980, p.47 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003119/19801009/538/0047> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>74</sup> Aberystwyth Town FC, (n.d), 'Club history'; Harper, C. (1988), 'Leek Town plan to weld the axe' in *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 18 Mar 1988, p.30 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000525/19880318/668/0030> (Accessed 12 May 2021); Y

## Chapter Two: South Wales

While viewed as the domain of rugby, it was the ‘dribbling code’ that first laid claim to the region, with the now rugby clubs of Swansea, Cardiff and Newport initially formed to play football. These clubs were converted to the handling code due to the immigration from the West Country and the adoption of the game in the leading South Walian schools.<sup>75</sup> Yet, some clubs continued with the game, including the clergy of St. Margaret’s Church, Cardiff, who were described as ‘one of the strongest teams in Wales’. They joined with twelve teams from as far afield as Caerleon, Abergavenny and the Rhondda and founded a league in October 1890 and matches began before the end of the month.<sup>76</sup> The season was an absolute flop, with no team completing more than thirteen matches and St Margaret’s only playing once.<sup>77</sup> To find an overall champion, the league conducted a play off between the top three teams, which was won by Treharris.<sup>78</sup> This poor start was almost the end of the league but six clubs competed for the title in the following season and by 1893 the South Wales and Monmouthshire Football Association was created to administer the league and game in the south.<sup>79</sup> From this, the league, after a break between 1894 and 1896, grew in size, both numerically and geographically, and added a second division in 1899.<sup>80</sup> This increase also saw the creation of other leagues and by 1903 Cardiff,

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Clwb Pel-Droed, (n.d.) ‘1992/93 – League of Wales – Results and Table’, [Online]. Available at <https://clwbpeldroed.org/1992-93-league-of-wales-results-and-table/> (Accessed 17 May 2021)

<sup>75</sup> Lile, B. and Farmer, D. (1984), ‘The Early Development of Association Football in South Wales, 1890-1906’ in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1984, p.195 [Online]. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/1421693> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>76</sup> Lile and Farmer, ‘The Early Development of Association Football in South Wales, p.197; Anon, (1890f), ‘South Wales Football League’ in *Western Mail*, 7 Oct 1890, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4322124/4322131/133/football%20AND%20league> (Accessed 12 May 2021); Anon, (1890g), ‘Football - South Wales League’ in *South Wales Daily News*, 28 Oct 1890, p.4 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3718749/3718753/73/> (Accessed 12 May 2021)

<sup>77</sup> Axell, C. (1981), ‘South Wales League (Association)’ in *Star of Gwent*, 17 Apr 1891, p.12 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003169/18910417/190/0012> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>78</sup> Anon, (1891), ‘Football’ in *South Wales Daily News*, 30 Apr 1891, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000919/18910430/125/0007> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>79</sup> Anon, (1892d), ‘Football -South Wales League’ in *South Wales Echo*, 13 May 1892, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000902/18920513/055/0003> (Accessed 13 May 2021); Lile and Farmer, ‘The Early Development of Association Football in South Wales, p.198; Anon, (1893), ‘South Wales Football League’ in *South Wales Daily News*, 5 Jun 1893, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3728988/3728991/19/> (Accessed 14 May 2021)

<sup>80</sup> ‘Old Stager’ (1896), ‘Football - Notes on the Game’ in *South Wales Daily News*, 16 Nov 1896, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000919/18961116/144/0006> (Accessed 13 May 2021); Anon, (1899), ‘South Wales League, First Division Fixtures’ in *South Wales Daily News*, 3 Aug 1899, p.6



Newport, and the Wye Valley had leagues operating under the jurisdiction of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Association while Pembrokeshire had its own independent league.<sup>81</sup> Professionalism was legalised in the area in 1900 and by the next season it was deemed a success, as 'the style of the game has undergone a great change for the better'.<sup>82</sup> Yet the increase in expenses that professionalism brought forced the clubs to boost their turnover and some Valley clubs created a Rhymney Valley League in 1904 to an effort to increase their number of fixtures, with the likes of Aberdare and Treharris participating in both.<sup>83</sup> This league grew in stature and range, rebranding itself as the Glamorgan League in 1909 and then the Welsh League in 1912, with a goal of being as 'strong and as important' as the Football League.<sup>84</sup>

Yet the loss of clubs to the English system has already begun six years previously with both Treharris and Newport joining the Western League, which catered for teams in the South West of England and they were joined by both Aberdare and Barry within two years.<sup>85</sup> The reasoning behind the move was, as seen in the North, the opportunity to play 'high class teams' and 'largely increased gates' and such was the lure, Merthyr and Ton Pentre were also league members by 1909.<sup>86</sup> The Welsh clubs left the Western League in the summer of 1910 amidst claims that the league administrators were 'anti-Welsh' and moved to the Southern League.<sup>87</sup> The Southern League actively recruited clubs from South Wales during this period and not just

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[Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000919/18990803/124/0006> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>81</sup> Lile and Farmer, 'The Early Development of Association Football in South Wales, p.212; Anon, (1905b), 'Football - South Wales Association' in *Western Mail*, 8 May 1905, p.7 [Online]. Available at

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19050508/197/0007> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>82</sup> Lile and Farmer, 'The Early Development of Association Football in South Wales, p.207

<sup>83</sup> Anon, (1904b), 'Football - Rhymney Valley League' in *Evening Express*, 27 Jun 1904, p.4 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4143235/4143239/127/> (Accessed 13 May 2021); Anon, (1905c), 'Rhymney Valley League – Aberdare v. Treharris' in *South Wales Daily News*, 10 Apr 1905, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000919/19050410/167/0007> (Accessed 13 May 2021); Anon, (1905d), 'South Wales League – Treharris v. Aberdare' in *South Wales Daily News*, 6 Mar 1905, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000919/19050306/140/0007> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>84</sup> Anon, (1909), 'Ebbw Vale Association Football Club' in *Merthyr Express*, 28 Aug 1909, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002970/19090828/052/0003> (Accessed 13 May 2021); Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.194

<sup>85</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.35

<sup>86</sup> Anon, (1906), 'Treharris Notes – Football Club' in *Bargoed Journal*, 12 Jul 1906, p.8 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003104/19060712/098/0008> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.36

<sup>87</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.197

established clubs. The promise of impressive fixtures resulted in the creation of clubs from scratch including Swansea Town, Mid Rhondda and Newport County, to take advantage of the opportunities the league provided.<sup>88</sup> The Southern League's efforts relegated the Welsh League to a secondary status, as the top teams in the league were the reserve sides of those clubs playing in England. Yet the success of Cardiff City, Merthyr Tydfil and others encouraged the creation of many semi-professional clubs, many of which viewed the Welsh League as a stepping stone towards the English system.<sup>89</sup> Yet the strain of even part time wages caused trouble for some teams in the Valleys, and Aberdare, Caerphilly, Pontypridd, Treharris and Ton Pentre were suspended temporarily from the FAW in 1914 for payment arrears.<sup>90</sup>

After the war, the Welsh League was quickly reformed, consisting of two divisions with the reserve teams of the Welsh Southern League clubs featuring heavily in the top division.<sup>91</sup> This period also saw the creation of a West Wales Football Association in 1922, which managed the competitions in Neath, Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire.<sup>92</sup> Pembroke Dock were also competing in the Welsh League by this time, showing the professional game had reached the rural west at last.<sup>93</sup> The success of the sport and its league system in the South led Ted Robbins, the FAW secretary, to use it as the model for the future of the game in Wales, and his Welsh National League scheme would attempt to recreate this system in both Central and North Wales, which were covered by multiple leagues.<sup>94</sup> The Welsh National League (Southern Section) was formed in 1921 and comprised of two divisions with a plethora of regional leagues

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<sup>88</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.38-9; Johnes, M. (2002b), 'Mushrooms, Scandal and Bankruptcy: the Short Life of Mid Rhondda Football Club' in *The Local Historian*, Vol.32 (1), pp.42-43 [Online]. Available at

[https://www.academia.edu/281928/Mushrooms\\_Scandal\\_and\\_Bankruptcy\\_the\\_Short\\_Life\\_of\\_Mid\\_Rhondda\\_Football\\_Club](https://www.academia.edu/281928/Mushrooms_Scandal_and_Bankruptcy_the_Short_Life_of_Mid_Rhondda_Football_Club) (Accessed 18 May 2021)

<sup>89</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.42

<sup>90</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.45-6

<sup>91</sup> Anon, (1919a), 'The Welsh League' in *Western Mail*, 23 May 1919, p.7 [Online]. Available at

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19190523/146/0007> (Accessed 13 May 2021);

Anon, (1919b), 'The Day's Results' in *Western Mail*, 8 Sep 1919, p.9 [Online]. Available at

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19190908/194/0009> (Accessed 13 May 2021);

Anon, (1919c), 'Results' in *Merthyr Express*, 13 Sep 1919, p.6 [Online]. Available at

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002970/19190913/027/0006> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>92</sup> Anon, (1930g), '1930 AGM Papers, West Wales Football Association' [Online]. Available at

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/572986> (Accessed 14 May 2021); Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.55

<sup>93</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.55

<sup>94</sup> 'Citizen' (1921b), 'The Welsh League's Annual Meeting' in *Western Mail*, 3 Jun 1921, p.3 [Online]. Available at

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19210603/072/0003> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

operating underneath it.<sup>95</sup> In a rare victory, the Southern Section did lure the reserve sides of the Welsh teams that had joined the Football League that year. The clubs in the Welsh Section of the Southern League generally remained there and the majority sent their reserves to the Welsh set up but both competitions were devalued as a result, which led to smaller gates and less revenue for all involved.<sup>96</sup> The efforts of the FAW to merge the sections in 1923 were rejected by the southern clubs and the league reverted back to its previous title. This shows that the clubs in the Welsh League saw their fixtures with the reserve teams of Welsh based, English league sides as of a higher quality and more lucrative than what would be provided by any competition involving the northern clubs.<sup>97</sup>

The defection of the top Southern League clubs confirmed the superiority of the Football League and some Welsh clubs, in both the Southern and Welsh League competitions, had ambitions of join it. In their efforts to show they were worthy of election, they splashed out on excessively high wages to lure players into their teams. Yet, most of these were sub-standard journeymen who had failed in the Football League. Such was the low quality of these players, the Welsh League was viewed as 'a dumping ground for superfluous professionals' by 1922.<sup>98</sup> These wages, as well as the cost of ground improvements to meet the league standards were vast, and this, combined with the decline in turnover due to the collapse of coal industry and the mass out migration from the area from 1925 led to many clubs going bankrupt or returning to the Welsh system as amateurs.<sup>99</sup> Not even the clubs that had made it to the promised land of the Football League were safe from the economics of the period, and both Aberdare Athletic and Merthyr Town lost their place in the Football League as attendances tumbled due to inability for their supporters to meet the *1s* minimum price demanded by the Football League.<sup>100</sup> With clubs falling away throughout the decade, the Welsh League reached crisis point in 1929 with only eleven clubs in the top division, seven of which played in other leagues, and the second division

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<sup>95</sup> Anon, (1921c), 'Cilfynydd News' in *Pontypridd Observer*, 27 Aug 1921, p.1 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002889/19210827/008/0001> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>96</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.66; Anon, (1921d), 'Football – Welsh National League' in *Western Mail*, 17 Jun 1921, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19210617/177/0006> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

<sup>97</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.196

<sup>98</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.57-8

<sup>99</sup> Davies, J. (1993), *A History of Wales*, Penguin Books, London, p.549; Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.66-7

<sup>100</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.68-9

containing many amateur teams.<sup>101</sup> The reputation of the League was so low at this point, Cardiff City and Swansea Town looked for more competitive football for their reserves in leagues including the London Combination and the Birmingham and District League. These clubs moved many of their Welsh League games to mid-week and fielded third choice teams for those they could not move to facilitate their reserves to play in these minor English leagues. These actions by the biggest names in South Walian football not only pushed the reputation of the Welsh league lower but impacted even further on the smaller teams' revenue as these games against feeble line-ups would not draw a crowd.<sup>102</sup>

There were clubs that did buck the downward financial trend. Llanelly AFC, reformed in 1928, had a solid financial base thanks to the success of the tinsplating and anthracite coal industries and maintained gates of four thousand for the 1930/31 season while also applying to join the Football League three times between 1929 and 1933.<sup>103</sup> Clubs that had developed out of other organisations, such as working men's club, welfare halls and places of work were less reliant on match day income to survive and the more ambitious were able to move up from their district leagues as the Welsh League attempted to rebuild itself.<sup>104</sup> This influx of junior clubs was facilitated by the second division of the league being split into western and eastern sections in 1932 to cut their travel costs and this system continued once football resumed in 1945.<sup>105</sup> The most successful of these organisation teams were Lovell's Athletic, a club that was formed in 1918 as the sporting and leisure club for the Lovell sweet factory in Newport. The club were asked to resign from the South Wales Amateur League in 1923 due to employing professionals and joined the Western League, winning it at their first attempt. They successfully applied to the Welsh League in 1924 and Newport County to threaten to resign from the league as they feared it would result a drop in their attendances. At times, Lovell's were running teams in multiple

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<sup>101</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.195 and p.94

<sup>102</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.195-6

<sup>103</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.73

<sup>104</sup> Anon, (1932a), 'Loss of £191 on the year' in *Western Mail*, 1 Jul 1932, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000104/19320701/149/0005> (Accessed 14 May 2021); Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.104

<sup>105</sup> Anon, (1932b), 'Trelewis A.F.C.' in *Merthyr Express*, 20 Aug 1932, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002970/19320820/038/0005> (Accessed 14 May 2021);

Anon, (1932c), 'New Clubs' in *Port Talbot Guardian*, 29 Jul 1932, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003137/19320729/090/0006> (Accessed 14 May 2021);

Jenkins, C. (1946), 'Llanharan' in *Glamorgan Gazette*, 20 Sep 1946, p.4 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002846/19460920/074/0004> (Accessed 14 May 2021)

leagues, as widely spread as the Monmouthshire Senior League and the London Combination.<sup>106</sup> After the Second World War, the club was competitive in both the Welsh and Southern League and applied to join the Football League in 1947.<sup>107</sup> That season proved to be their high-water mark, with a Welsh Cup win at the end of that season before the club contracted, withdrawing from the Southern League in 1959 before they were wound up in May 1969, three years after their last Welsh League title. This occurred due to the running costs being transferred to the club by the business.<sup>108</sup> The demise of Lovell's came after the top division of the league was rebranded as a Premier Division and the regional split in the second tier was removed in 1964 but by this time, the reputation of the league was so low, its results barely got into the sporting pages of any major papers.<sup>109</sup> The league, which was by far the strongest in Wales, then renamed itself the National League in the 1980s and attempted to live up to this by recruiting Aberystwyth in 1987 before it provided ten teams for the LoW.<sup>110</sup> As for the South Walian teams in the English system, only Barry Town and Newport County were targeted by the FAW due to the status of Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham and a deal agreed with Merthyr Tydfil, granting them a five-year grace period. Barry changed their mind after one season and entered the second tier in 1993 but Newport held their ground and won a 1995 court case to remain in the English system.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Rutherford, A. (2019), 'Lovell's Athletic - the story of Newport's lost football club' in South Wales Argus, 27 May 2019 [Online]. Available at <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/17666626.lovells-athletic---story-newports-lost-football-club/> (Accessed 14 May 2021); Anon, (1930h), 'Football - Association' in *Western Gazette*, 3 Jan 1930, p.7 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000407/19300103/035/0007> (Accessed 14 May 2021)

<sup>107</sup> Rutherford, A. (2019), 'Lovell's Athletic - the story of Newport's lost football club'; Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.104

<sup>108</sup> 'R.H.' (1959), 'Talking Sport' in *East Kent Times and Mail*, 13 May 1959, p.5 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003350/19590513/088/0005> (Accessed 14 May 2021);

Rutherford, A. (2019), 'Lovell's Athletic - the story of Newport's lost football club'

<sup>109</sup> Anon, (1964) 'Welsh League' in *Sunday Mirror*, 15 Nov 1964, p.38 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002137/19641115/268/0038> (Accessed 14 May 2021)

<sup>110</sup> Aberystwyth Town FC, (n.d.), 'Club history'; The Welsh Football League, (1991), 'The Abacus League Season 1991-92 - Composition of Divisions' in *The Abacus League - Official Handbook 1991-92*, Maesteg, Gibbs Printers, p.4; Y Clwb Pel-Droed, (n.d.) '1992/93 - League of Wales - Results and Table'

<sup>111</sup> Barry Town United, (n.d.), 'History' [Online]. Available at <http://www.barrytown.co.uk/history/> (Accessed 15 May 2021); Tulley, P. (1995) 'Sitting in the dock are the Bay' in *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 15 Apr 1995, p.32 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000726/19950415/278/0032> (Accessed 19 May 2021)

## Chapter Three: Comparison with England and Scotland

The codification of football began with the development of the games at Eton and Rugby Schools in the 1840s. This process began to formalise the game outside the public school system in 1863, when eleven teams from the suburbs of London came together to agree a rule set for games between themselves. This result of this meeting was the formation of the FA but it was the propagation of cup competitions around the country that finalised the split between the handling and dribbling codes. While the FA was founded by the southerners, the game had already a solid foundation in the North, with Sheffield FC promoting their own rules, which may have been influenced by both local game play and contact with the public-school network.<sup>112</sup> During this period, a schism developed over professionalism, with the northern clubs threatening to break away from the FA in 1884. Generally, the FA was still dominated by the elite, which still championed the 'Corinthian spirit', while the more working-class Lancashire clubs believed that payments were neither 'wrong nor unusual'. The FA finally allowed professionalism in 1885 and it may be that football's administrators were inspired by cricket, hoping to replicate its successful balance between professionals and amateurs within the sport.<sup>113</sup> It is no surprise that the FAW, with its committee sharing a similar, public school background to those at the FA, took the same line against professionalism.

With professionalism firstly confined to Lancashire, it was only natural that the first football league was created here to provide a regular fixture list that would provide stable income, as opposed to the intermittent schedule that cup competitions provided. The catalyst behind this was Scottish born, Aston Villa director, William McGregor. His letters of March 1888 applied to the professional clubs of northern England and twelve teams were selected to partake in the first season. This selection seems to have been driven more by location, facilities and the potential for large attendances rather than on field success, with only three of the teams having won the FA Cup previously. The league was an immediate financial success with some clubs reporting a four hundred percent increase in gate revenue within six seasons. This success resulted in other leagues forming but even the most success of these, the Football Alliance could not overcome the prestige of the original, and it became the Football League's second division in

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<sup>112</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.47-52 of 669

<sup>113</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.77-80 of 669

1892.<sup>114</sup> The success of the leagues in this area can be attributed to both population and wages rises at the time. Lancashire's population grew by almost fifty percent between 1871 and 1891 and industrial workers' real wages also increased, providing a solid financial platform for the clubs. In contrast, during the same period, North East Wales saw only minor population growth and the wages within the coalfield there were the worst in the country, making the average *3d* ticket price too much for the majority of the working class to attend regularly.<sup>115</sup>

In the south of England, the formation of a league was hampered by the London FA's attitude to professionalism, which matched the FA. When the Southern League was formed in 1894, four of its nine members were amateur, but as feared professionalism in the capital only grew after its formation. The league did reach equivalence with the Football League for a short period in the 1900s, but the defection of teams to the Football League slowly saw the reputation of the league fall. The Southern League actively recruited South Walian clubs to replace those clubs that left, and fourteen Welsh teams were completing in the league by 1914.<sup>116</sup> The loss of the league's top teams, including Cardiff City into the Second Division in 1920 and Swansea Town, Merthyr Tydfil and Newport County, to the Football League as part of the new Third Division the same year was the final proof of the secondary status of the competition.<sup>117</sup> This consolidation of clubs into one national system was facilitated in England by the rail connections between the major cities. Without the speed and relative low costs of travel provided by the railways, league fixtures could not have been fulfilled by the clubs.<sup>118</sup> Yet the railway network in Wales was created by private companies rather than under central governmental oversight. Thus, the system was created with profit in mind, with links to the nearby English regions deemed more important than any internal connectivity and this made travelling to partake in Welsh

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<sup>114</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.96-9 of 669

<sup>115</sup> Johnes and Garland, 'The New Craze', pp.292-5

<sup>116</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.99-100 of 669

<sup>117</sup> Anon, (1920b), 'The Third Division' in *Hull Daily Mail*, 1 Jun 1920, p.2 [online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000324/19200601/004/0002> (Accessed 21 May 2021); Anon, (1920c), 'Third Division to be Formed' in *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 1 Jun 1920, p.6 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000669/19200601/144/0006> (Accessed 21 May 2021); Anon, (1920d), 'League Table Third Division' in *North Wilts Herald*, 10 Sep 1920, p.3 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002942/19200910/057/0003> (Accessed 21 May 2021)

<sup>118</sup> Huggins, M and Tolson, J, (2001) 'The Railways and Sport in Victorian Britain: A Critical Reassessment' in *The Journal of Transport History*, 22(2), p.110 Available at <https://journals-sagepub-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.7227/TJTH.22.2.2> (Accessed 17 May 2021)

fixtures arduous, as shown by the difficulties of Aberystwyth during their 1896 Welsh League season.<sup>119</sup>

The effect of the proximity to England on Welsh football can be gauged when the Scottish system is observed. Scottish football was confined to the Central Belt during its initial years and taking part in any English competition was costly and difficult, as discovered by Queen's Park in their FA Cup exploits of 1872, which forcing Scots to create their own competitions.<sup>120</sup> The Scottish League was founded in 1890 with eleven clubs in the Forth and Clyde areas, yet, with the clubs selected purely on merit rather than revenue generating potential, six of the founding members withdrew within ten years.<sup>121</sup> Professionalism was embraced in 1893, which also saw the league form a second tier by merging with the Scottish Alliance.<sup>122</sup> By 1913, the footprint of the league had moved north and east, with 34 teams, including Fife, Dundee and Aberdeen, spread across two division<sup>123</sup> A Third Division was created for in 1923 but the small-scale nature and the distance between the clubs alongside the economic downturn put an end to this division three years later while many Second Division clubs folded.<sup>124</sup> It was only the acceptance of payments from the Pool's Promoter's Association in 1960 that provided financial stability to clubs at this level and this stability saw a rebranded three tier system introduced in 1975.<sup>125</sup> 1994 saw the league reformed again, with four divisions of ten teams, before the Premier League teams broke away in 1997, just like the English teams six years earlier and citing the same reason, a bigger share of revenue.<sup>126</sup> Thus the isolation of Scotland enabled it to keep its top clubs and this kept the reputation of the Scottish league high enough to attach greater revenues, enabling the clubs to meet the costs required to operating within a national league.

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<sup>119</sup> Davies, J. (1993), *A History of Wales*, p.409; Stead, 'The rise and fall of Aberystwyth Town', *The Red Dragons*, location 874 of 5840.

<sup>120</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.143-4 of 669; Crampsey, *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, p.3

<sup>121</sup>Crampsey, *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, p.3, p.7 and p.13

<sup>122</sup>Crampsey, *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, p.26

<sup>123</sup>Crampsey, *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, p.49 and p.56; Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.100-102 of 669

<sup>124</sup>Crampsey, *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, pp.76-9, p.82 and pp.85-6

<sup>125</sup>Crampsey, *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, pp.159-60 and pp.192-4

<sup>126</sup>McKenzie, B. (1994), '£1m Men' in *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 13 Jan 1994, p.20 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000445/19940113/369/0020> (Accessed 18 May 2021)  
MacNab, S. (1997), 'Name of the top 10 game' in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 10 Sep 1997, p.28 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000578/19970910/644/0028> (Accessed 18 May 2021)



Another important factor is how national identities were involved in the sport. Both the FA and the Football League lacked English in their titles as both viewed themselves as British organisations. Entry into the FA Cup only required affiliated to the FA and teams from Scotland, Ireland and Wales had all competed by 1888 but many of these were forced to concede their places in the competition due to travel issues. The British scope of the competition ended in 1886 when the Scottish FA banned its clubs from affiliating with other national associations due to a conflict over professionalism, in what has been described as Scottish football's declaration of independence.<sup>127</sup> William McGregor also envisioned his league to be a British one, rather than just English.<sup>128</sup> This British approach to the game was also seen in the formation of the IFAB in 1886. This organisation was created to provide a common rule set for the sport, to facilitate international matches. FIFA joined in 1913 and the structure was amended in 1958, providing one vote for each Home Nation and four for FIFA, with a three quarters majority needed to enforce any rule change.<sup>129</sup> This imbalance of power within the IFAB has always been an issue and calls for a Great Britain Football Association and international team, to remove their control of the IFAB, have arisen periodically.<sup>130</sup> Wales was always seen as the weakest Home Nation association and the lack of national league was used as a reason to disband the organisation by FIFA.<sup>131</sup> It was this threat, more than any desire to see the Welsh teams return, that drove the formation of the LoW.<sup>132</sup>

While the creation of the LoW was, without doubt, a top down process, some clubs were in favour. A survey, conducted in 1988, suggested that the majority of the Welsh, English non-league teams were 'favourably disposed' of joining a Welsh league consisting of ten teams.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.143-4 of 669

<sup>128</sup>Crampsey, *The First 100 Years: The Scottish Football League*, p.5

<sup>129</sup> International Football Association Board, (n.d.) 'History of the IFAB' [Online]. Available at <https://www.theifab.com/history/ifab> (Accessed 18 May 2021); International Football Association Board, (1958) 'Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 1958', p.5 [Online]. Available at [https://static-3eb8.kxcdn.com/documents/511/113120\\_141217\\_1958\\_Minutes.pdf](https://static-3eb8.kxcdn.com/documents/511/113120_141217_1958_Minutes.pdf) (Accessed 18 May 2021)

<sup>130</sup> Anon, (1972), 'Uruguay axe British team proposal' in *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 23 Aug 1972, p.34 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000769/19720823/372/0034> (Accessed 20 May 2021); Hickman, L. (1986) 'Britain United' in *Sandwell Evening Mail*, 26 Nov 1986, p.34 [Online]. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002487/19861126/432/0034> (Accessed 20 May 2021)

<sup>131</sup> Stead, '1958 World Cup', 'The Lost Decade – 1960-1969' and '1992 European Championship' in *The Red Dragons*, location 2520, 2983 and 4139 of 5840.

<sup>132</sup> Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.517-20 of 669

<sup>133</sup> Harvard, R. and Thomas, D. (1989), 'Lost Tribe or European Nation?: The Feasibility of a Welsh National League' in *Planet: The Welsh International*, Issue 74, April/May 1989, p.13 BerwCyf., Aberystwyth.

Yet, the FAW believed it benefited from the presence of Welsh clubs within the English system as it provided a reliable pool of quality players from which to select from, regardless of how it would affect these teams on the field.<sup>134</sup> Less than a fifth of Welsh international debutants between 1876 and 1991 were selected while playing in Welsh competitions and no player operating in a Welsh league selected after 1910, which shows the FAW disregarded their own competitions when searching for international talent.<sup>135</sup> Having Welsh clubs in England also allowed the press, especially in the south, to portray matches as national contests, especially during periods when the national team were performing badly. This notion of national representation was also picked up by the fans, with many attending the matches of their rivals. The Cardiff City's 1927 FA Cup final is a fine example of this, as seventeen hundred Swansea fans attended and the price of leeks tripled due to demand. Big league ties would also attract fans, with special trains running in North Wales when Cardiff City played against Liverpool or Manchester.<sup>136</sup> This Welshness was also paraded at home games, with teams being led onto the field by girls in national dress and the fans singing Cwm Rhondda.<sup>137</sup> The 'otherness' that Welsh clubs felt within the English system forged a sense of community between them. The mass resignation from the Western League in 1910 was down to the perceived anti-Welsh feeling within the organisation and the clubs would assist each other off the field. Swansea Town led the campaign to get Merthyr Town re-elected in 1930, Llanelli AFC withdrew their application to the Football League to strengthen Newport County's chance of re-election the following year while Cardiff City played struggling Caerphilly Town to boost both their finances and local interest in the team.<sup>138</sup> Yet Welshness is a fluid notion and despite continuing players from other nations, a club based in Wales could be viewed as Welsh, even when playing against an English team containing Welsh players.<sup>139</sup> Football also generated a British identity within the Welsh and success in the English system allowed Wales to gain recognition within a British context. Both the FAW and clubs were more interested in integrating into the English system than developing

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<sup>134</sup> Stead, 'The Unknowns' and 'Cardiff's sacrifice earns a Triple Crown' in *The Red Dragons*, location 1719-1726, 1393-1401 and 1426-1441 of 5840

<sup>135</sup> Davies, G.M. and Garland, I. (1991), *Who's Who of Welsh International Soccer Players*, Bridge Books, Wrexham, p.108. This accurate figure is 16.2% and the calculated from the full book. A full breakdown of international debutant by club and national league can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>136</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.173-4

<sup>137</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.176

<sup>138</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.197

<sup>139</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, pp.200-1

its own independent system due to the prestige it gave them. The request of the South Walian Welsh League for promoted into the Football League in 1920 alongside the volume of clubs that left the Welsh system confirm the notion that Welsh football saw itself as part of a wider British game.<sup>140</sup> The FAW's commitment to the Britain can be seen with acceptance of only two non Home Nations internationals in the early twentieth century, as loses against these would impact on Britain's prestige, alongside its stance with the other Home Nations as part of IFAB.<sup>141</sup>

## Conclusion:

To conclude, the creation of a truly national association football league in Wales faced many difficulties. Firstly, by the time that the first leagues in Wales were formed in 1890, the sport had already taken on a British identity, with clubs from all the nations competing in the FA Cup regularly, making the clubs familiar with matches against English sides. In the North, the Welsh League faced the problem of proximity to the high quality football in Lancashire and the Midlands. This, combined with the effects of low population and low wages in North East Wales made competing within English leagues more rewarding financially than solely Welsh fixtures. Wrexham identified both these issues at the initial league meeting and in opting to play in the Combination, they confirmed the secondary nature of any Welsh league competition before it started. In the south, the clubs had to combat rugby and a poor start but it slowly gained ground in the Valleys. Yet both suffered low revenues and high travel costs and this forced the clubs to concentrate on more regional leagues. When professionalism arrived, clubs needed more high profile fixtures to generate enough money to covers wages and the regional leagues could not provide this. This forced clubs to enter leagues in England and with each team that left, the reputation of the Welsh leagues declined. Yet, this exodus of clubs did not cause the FAW concern, due to the British outlook of the organisation and the increase in player quality it provided for the national team. Indeed, the FAW were so relaxed about Welsh clubs operating in the English system, that when it attempted to create a national league system, they accepted the reserve teams of those clubs into it. Yet the timing for the creation of the Welsh National League

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<sup>140</sup> Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939*, p.194 and p.201

<sup>141</sup> Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp.518-20 of 669; Stead, 'Back on their feet' in *The Red Dragons*, location 1377-1383 of 5840

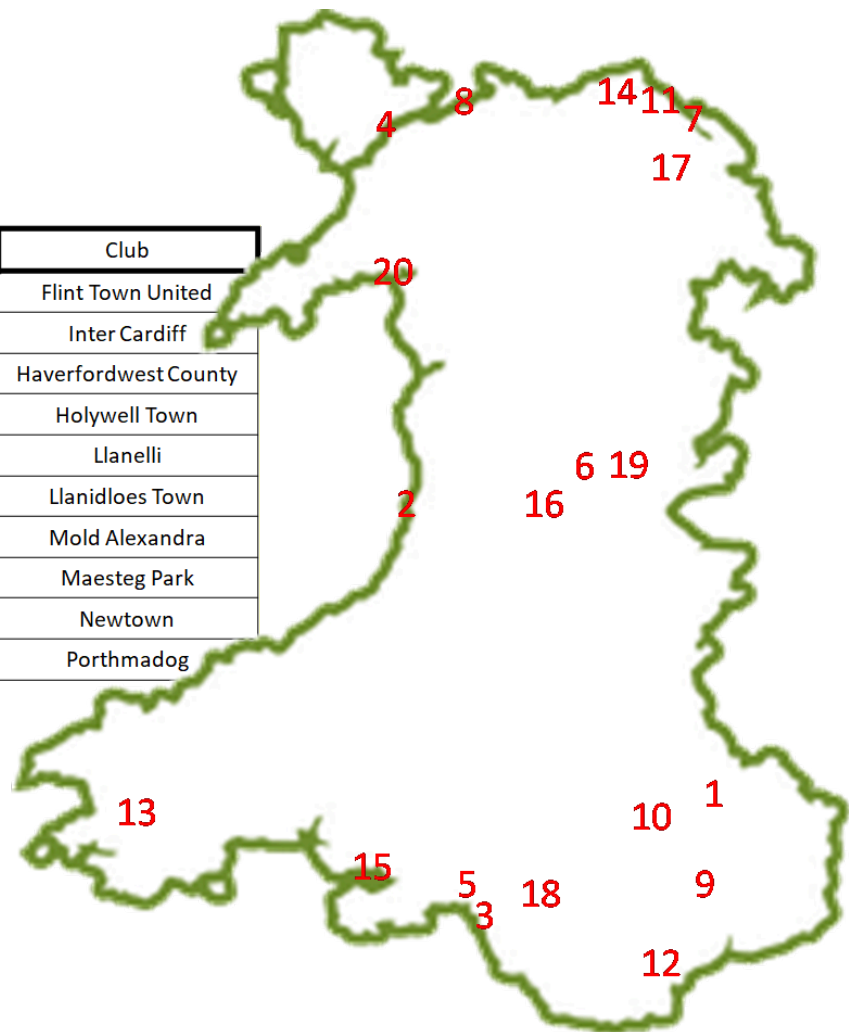
could not have been worse, and the post war economic downturn and the collapse of the coal industry in the south saw the smaller professional clubs within Wales, which the national league project was built upon, disappear due to being overstretched financially. Yet this collapse in the clubs was due more to their efforts towards gaining acceptance into the English system, rather than chasing Welsh league success.

Regionally identity, geography and transport connectivity also played its part. North and South Wales viewed each other as outside their notion of Welshness and this, along with the fact that these games would not provide the revenue that games against English opposition could, made the major clubs shun their fellow Welsh teams for those in England. The geography and transport connectivity issues are interlinked, with the Welsh population centres separated by a thinly inhabited hinterland. This created a rail network that focused on East-West links and thus, it was logistically easier for North Walian clubs to reach Sheffield than Swansea and South Walian clubs to reach London than Llandudno. This issue was always the first factor raised whenever a national league was mooted, such as 1958 and 1978. As Scotland lacked this proximity and ease of travel to the English football heartlands, they were able to retain their top clubs and thus, had to develop their own league. The FAW never pressed the issue as they were happy with the current situation, even if it meant that Welsh teams missed out on the top continental competition. The English system also provided players for the national side, even if they were difficult to get released for internationals, and the FAW continued to allowed clubs to join the English system, even as late at 1988, in an effort to increase the Welsh players playing at this higher level. This situation would have remained unchanged to this day without the conflict between FIFA and the Home Nations over control of the IFAB. The lack of a national league made the FAW the weakest association within the Home Nations and FIFA attacked them in their efforts to break the British domination of the rule making body. Faced with this threat to its existence, the FAW were forced to act but the reputation of Welsh domestic football was so low, many of the Welsh clubs playing in the lower English leagues fought their own association to remain where they were. Not even with the lure of UEFA's top club competition could overcome their belief that playing English non-league opposition was better for them financially than a Welsh national competition. While angered by the attitude of the clubs, by fulfilling FIFA's definition of a national league and therefore preventing further attacks on organisation, the LoW was a success for the FAW, irrespective of its composition. Thus, the creation of a national

association football league should be viewed as an act of self preservation by the ruling body rather than fuelled by any desire to improve the quality or reputation of the game in Wales.

## Appendix A: Location of teams in the 1992-3 League of Wales

No.	Club	No.	Club
1	Abergavenny Thursdays	11	Flint Town United
2	Aberystwyth Town	12	Inter Cardiff
3	Afan Lido	13	Haverfordwest County
4	Bangor City	14	Holywell Town
5	Briton Ferry Athletic	15	Llanelli
6	Caersws	16	Llanidloes Town
7	Connah's Quay Nomads	17	Mold Alexandra
8	Conwy United	18	Maesteg Park
9	Cwmbran Town	19	Newtown
10	Ebbw Vale	20	Porthmadog



This map was compiled by the author from the LoW table on the Y Clwb Pêl-droed website. Available at <https://clwbpeldroed.org/1992-93-league-of-wales-results-and-table/> (Accessed 20 May 2021)

## Appendix B: Breakdown of Welsh international debutants by clubs between 1876 and 1991

<b>Clubs in English competitions</b>			
<b>Club</b>	<b>No. Of Debutants</b>	<b>Club</b>	<b>No. Of Debutants</b>
Aberdare Athletic (Football League)	2	Millwall	1
Arsenal	9	Millwall Athletic	1
Aston Villa	4	Nelson (Lancashire)	1
Bangor City (Combination)	5	Newcastle United	5
Barnsley	1	Newport County (Football League)	9
Blackburn Rovers	4	Newton Heath/Manchester United	11
Blackpool	2	Newtown AFC (Shropshire League)	4
Bolton Wanderers	6	Northampton Town	1
Bootle	3	Northwich Victoria	1
Bradford City	1	Norwich City	6
Bradford Park Avenue	1	Nottingham Forest	2
Brentford	2	Oldham Athletic	1
Brighton & Hove Albion	3	Oswestry United	3
Bristol City	3	Oswestry White Stars	10
Bristol Rovers	4	Oswestry/Oswestry Town	14
Burnley	4	Oxford University	4
Cambridge University	3	Peterborough United	1
Cardiff City (Football League)	32	Plymouth Argyle	3
Charlton Athletic	7	Port Vale	1
Chelsea	4	Portsmouth	3
Chester	5	Preston North End	2
Chirk (Combination)	10	Queen's Park Rangers	2
Clapton	1	Reading	1
Clapton/Leyton Orient	5	Rhyl (Combination)	1
Colwyn Bay (Football Combination)	1	Rotherham County	1
Corinthians	2	Rotherham United	2
Coventry City	5	Sheffield United	4
Crewe Alexander	2	Sheffield Wednesday	1
Crystal Place	8	Shrewsbury Engineers	2
Derby County	2	Shrewsbury Town	4
Doncaster Rovers	1	Small Heath/Birmingham City	10
Druids (Birmingham & District)	3	Southampton	1

Druids (Combination)	5	Southend United	1
Everton	11	St Helens Recreation	1
Fulham	4	St. Thomas Hospital	1
Glossop North End	7	Stoke City	6
Grimsby Town	2	Swansea Town/City (Football League)	43
Holy Trinity School, Blackpool	1	Swindon Town	2
Hull City	2	Tottenham Hotspur	7
Ipswich Town	3	Tranmere Rovers	2
Leeds United	6	Treharris (Southern League)	1
Leicester Fosse/City	6	Walsall	1
Lincoln City	1	Wanderers	1
Liverpool	9	Watford	5
Llanelly (Southern League)	2	West Bromwich Albion	7
London Welsh	1	West Ham United	1
Lovell's Athletic (Western League)	1	Wimbledon	2
Luton Town	3	Wolverhampton Wanderers	5
Manchester City	4	Wrexham (Birmingham & District)	10
Merthyr Town (Football League)	1	Wrexham (Combination)	27
Merthyr Town (Southern League)	1	Wrexham (Football League)	18
Middlesbrough	2	Wrexham Olympic	4

Clubs in Welsh competitions			
Club	No. Of Debutants	Club	No. Of Debutants
Aberaman	1	Druids (Welsh League)	2
Aberdare (South Wales League)	2	FAW Secretary <sup>142</sup>	1
Aberystwyth Town	7	Gloddaeth Rovers (Llandudno)	1
Bangor (Pre-League)	7	Llandrindod Wells	1
Bangor (Welsh League)	1	Llandudno Swifts (North Wales Coast)	1
Barmouth	1	Llangollen	1
Berwyn Rangers	2	Newtown AFC (Welsh League)	3
Brecon	1	Newtown Excelsior	1
Brymbo Institute	1	Newtown White Stars	1
Builth	1	Presteigne	1

<sup>142</sup> FAW Secretary Alexander Hunter was required to step in against Ireland in 1887 due to many of the players suffering 'the after effects of the crossing'. Davies and Garland, *Who's Who of Welsh International Soccer Players*, p.93



Caernarvon Athletic	1	Rhosllanerchrugog	2
Cardiff Corinthians	3	Rhostyllen	1
Chirk (Pre-League)	5	Rhyl (Pre-League)	3
Chirk (Welsh League)	3	Ruabon	1
Civil Service, Wrexham	2	Ruthin	6
Corwen	1	Ruthin Grammar School	1
Druids (Pre-League)	18	Wrexham (Pre-League)	9

<b>Clubs in other competitions</b>	
<b>Club</b>	<b>No. Of Debutants</b>
Crusaders (Northern Ireland)	1
Hibernian (Scotland)	1
Linfield (Northern Ireland)	1
Motherwell (Scotland)	1
PSV Eindhoven (Holland)	1

Total number of debutants	573
Percentage from English competitions	82.9
Percentage from Welsh competitions	16.2
Percentage from other competitions	0.9

This statistical analysis of the clubs of Welsh international debutants was compiled by the author from the records published in *Who's Who of Welsh International Soccer Players* by Gareth M. Davies and Ian Garland.

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*Daily Herald* (London)  
*Daily Mirror* (London)  
*Derby Daily Telegraph*  
*Dundee Courier*  
*East Kent Times and Mail* (Ramsgate)  
*Evening Express* (Cardiff)  
*Field* (London)  
*Flintshire County Herald* (Holywell)  
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