



Theme 8



World War I: To Play or Not to Play?

Pupil Activity Sheet 1: Opinions in the *Examiner*

Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, shortly before the start of the football season. The war was expected to be 'over by Christmas', but with thousands of volunteers needed for the armed forces, arguments raged about whether professional Northern Union rugby and professional association football should continue.

The following arguments all appeared in the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*. After each decide whether the writer is **for** or **against** the continuation of professional rugby and football.

When you have finished, decide whether you believe professional rugby and football should have continued to be played during World War I, and prepare your arguments.

1. Letter from EA Beaumont (24 August 1914)

'Stern facts should impress themselves upon the mind. Germany has levied a tax on Liege for two million pounds, Brussels eight million pounds. Bring it home to yourselves.

Suppose they got to Huddersfield, demanded five millions in cash within twenty-four hours ... or more soldiers and if the [German] lodger took a fancy to anything you had in the house he could take it without asking permission. Every man who is physically fit should volunteer at once to help in defeating Germany, the ruler of which has let hell loose upon Europe.'

for

against

2. Letter from Francis H Knaggs (31 August 1914)

'It is in appalling thought, when this country's very existence is at stake, that our young men should be spending their time training for sports, when they should be training for the defence of the motherland and their own homes ... there is a time for everything, and ... the present is not one for playing games before thousands of spectators, who should be more usefully employed in their country's cause.'

for

against

3. FOOTBALL CHAT by 'SPECTATOR' (31 August 1914)

'There is a very widespread feeling that men fit and strong enough to engage in the mimic warfare of the football field are just the men of whom our country is in need at the present crisis. Footballers are always of necessity the most physically fit of our population. The Blackheath club have ... cancelled all their fixtures, and other Rugby Union clubs have followed suit. Will the ... English [Football] League follow this patriotic example? Lord Kitchener is asking every able-bodied man in the country to come forward and uphold the nation in its struggle ... how will the footballers respond?'

for

against

4. Letter from Thomas P Crosland (31 August 1914)

'At a national crisis like the present I venture to express an opinion that our Huddersfield C & A [Northern Union Rugby Football] Club should cancel all their football engagements during the continuance of the war.

I think you and your readers will agree with me that a football match held at Fartown, and witnessed by some thousands of young fellows, who ought to be at the front, would be a disgrace to the fair name of Huddersfield.'

for

against

5. Letter from Arthur H Hardisty (2 Sept 1914)

'... loyalty to his King and his country ... is to be hoped is shared by all lovers of football, whether organisers, players or spectators.

But there are two sides to every question ... Is it to be understood that in keeping with ... cancellation of all football ... the same ... should be applied to cricket, lawn tennis, golf, bowling, theatres, music halls, picture houses, motoring; to, in fact, any and every form of amusement or pleasure? I put this question because if ... applied to one it should be applied to all. Perhaps ... we should draw on all the blinds, and sit in sackcloth and ashes while our gallant soldiers are fighting for their King and country.

Personally I think that this is not a desirable spirit.

Then supposing football matches were cancelled, what reason is there to suppose that this would lead to those "thousands of young followers who ought to be at the front" actually going to the front? I must also point out that the average football match – whether it be at Fartown or Leeds Road*, is attended by thousands of men who, for many and various reasons, cannot serve their country at the front. (* see bottom of page)

Rightly or wrongly, many football players – as also cricketers, golfers etc. – play as professionals. i.e. it is their means of livelihood. The cancellation of matches would therefore cost them their way of making a living, not to mention the loss [of work] to ground staff, caterers, tradesmen etc.

... I certainly do not think it "would be dangerous to the fair name of Huddersfield" if the matches are played ... as usual, as far as circumstances will permit.'

for

against

6. Match Report, Huddersfield Town v Bury (9 September 1914)

At the end of the match Mr AP Crosland 'appealed to those who were physically fit to come to the aid of their country. The duties of citizenship ... did not end in enjoying its privileges, but also included the obligation of defending those privileges.'

for

against

* Fartown was the home ground of Huddersfield Northern Union Rugby Football Club (now Huddersfield Giants Rugby League FC).

Leeds Road was the home ground of Huddersfield Town FC.

7. THE WAR AND FOOTBALL by 'SPECTATOR' (10 September 1914)

'... why single out this one body of men? There are thousands of men in comfortable circumstances who are physically fit who have not come forward ... how many men have given up salaries of £4 per week to join the colours? I think it would be ... few, and yet this is what is expected of our professional footballers. Another important aspect to the question is their ... fate at the end of the war. In industry, the promise of re-instatement has been made to [army] recruits, but this is not altogether practicable in the case of men whose living depends on their physical fitness and soundness of limb. Even a slight wound might debar them from attaining their former skill with the ball. Hence, the obvious unfairness of comparing footballers with other professions or employments.

Every able-bodied man should make a sacrifice for his country in time of need, but I fail to see why undue criticism should be levelled against this particular profession.

for

against

8. Letter from Private J Roebuck, from the trenches in northern France (16 October 1914)

'I saw in one of the papers that [Huddersfield] Town had beaten Barnsley ... pleased to see the Town are doing so well; let's hope they keep the form up.'

for

against

9. Opinion of Chief Constable of Bradford, where, as in Huddersfield, many workers were earning large wages in the woollen/khaki trade (3 Dec 1914)

'Unless they have attractive football matches on Saturday afternoons to attend there is certain to be a deplorable increase in drunkenness'.

for

against

10. Lord Derby, Government 'Director of Recruiting', (9 March 1915) (*see bottom of page)

'...the troops in the field ... like to hear the results of football and cricket.'

'Sport of all kinds is absolutely engrained in every single Englishman. All our similes are taken from sport, and the ideal of a soldier is taken, surely, from sport. The best you can say of a soldier is that he has played the game right well.'

for

against

11. FOOTBALLERS TO THE FORE (Editorial) (22 April 1915)

'Those who have taken such a strong line against recreation during the period of the war have overlooked two important facts – the need of the workers for relaxation and the interest of the soldiers themselves in the various [sports] competitions.'

for

against

* Lord Derby (the 17th Earl of Derby), was one of horse racing's leading owner/breeders. 'The Derby' was named after his ancestor the 12th Earl of Derby. The 17th Earl of Derby was later honorary President of the Rugby Football League.