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An Alternative History
of the Beautiful Game



SIMON TURNER

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Introduction

THE facts of football history are known. The winners have their names etched on to trophies for perpetuity, sometimes with nauseating regularity. But, behind all those triumphs, lie the countless disappointments of teams that were denied glory by the width of a crossbar, or by a dubious refereeing decision.

It is important that we do not fall into the trap of believing that successful sides were predestined to achieve greatness, and that those that failed to win were fated to end up as losers. The truth is that history can turn on what appear, at first glance, to be infinitesimally small events. Some great military battles have been determined by chance occurrences and freakish turns of fortune, and football matches are no different. There are countless paths that football history could have taken and, as I will attempt to show, some of them are quite remarkable.

The past wasn't always the past; it was once the future and was as unknowable as our own future is now. Football spectators of the past no more knew what the outcome of the games they were watching would be than we do with any match that we start to watch now.

Counterfactuals may appear, at first glance, to be a little frivolous, but they are becoming an increasingly important

method for studying history. By considering what would have happened had key pivotal events turned out differently, such as the British not entering the First World War, or the D-Day landings ending in retreat, both of which were perfectly plausible outcomes, we can better understand the contingent nature of our nation's history. One of the purposes of the counterfactual is that it forces us to challenge our perception that what actually happened was inevitable; that the outcome of great clashes could never have been any different to what they actually were. The aim of this book is to use counterfactual techniques to reflect on what our football history could have been, what it might have been and, in some cases, what it probably should have been.

In the course of developing this book I have considered many alternative pretend fixtures but, often with a heavy heart, have whittled them down to the six matches selected. There are innumerable matches that I could have written about, but the ones chosen are those that intrigue me the most. The matches in this book encompass a wide span of football history, stretching from the first World Cup in 1930 to the modern-day Champions League.

I have chosen six matches that were never played but, if they had been, would have left us with a quite different history of the game. Imagine, for instance, a Scotland team running out for international matches with a gold star on their shirts to commemorate their victory in the first World Cup, or a replica of the European Cup sitting proudly in the Derby County trophy room. These are not far-fetched scenarios but credible events that could have happened, had circumstances been only a little different.

In selecting matches to write about, I have resisted the temptation to indulge in wild flights of fantasy. Therefore, you won't read of non-league teams fighting their way through a succession of giant-killings before thrashing Arsenal or

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Liverpool in the FA Cup Final, or England prevailing in World Cups that they never had a hope of winning. The improbable has deliberately been discarded in favour of the plausible.

There is also another category of matches that I have not written about. The team most famous for not fulfilling its destiny were the great 'Busby Babes', many of whom perished in the snow at Munich in 1958. The Manchester United squad were on the way back from a quarter-final triumph over Red Star Belgrade in the European Cup when the accident happened. A year earlier they had narrowly succumbed to Real Madrid in the semi-finals of the same competition and, had the terrifying crash not happened, would probably have met them in that season's final. The Spanish side may have emerged victorious from that previous contest, but Busby's young side was a year older and much wiser to the ways of the European Cup. A clash between the majestic, all-conquering Real Madrid side of Di Stéfano, Kopa and Gento and Busby's home-grown talents of Taylor, Charlton and Edwards would, therefore, surely have been one of the game's greatest ever matches.

So why haven't I written about it? To my mind, the real tragedy of Munich was not that a great team failed to win the European Cup, but that so many young men lost their lives. The legacy of that terrible accident was a trail of broken lives and shattered dreams; mothers lost sons, wives lost husbands, children lost fathers. I cannot pretend that a football match matters more than that. For that reason, I have also not written about how Everton could have won the European Cup in 1986, having won both the Football League championship and the European Cup Winners' Cup Final a year earlier. The death of 39 innocent spectators in the Heysel Stadium at the 1985 European Cup Final, following rioting by Liverpool fans, resulted in all English clubs being banned from European competition, meaning that one of Everton's finest ever teams lost the opportunity to secure what would have been the

club's greatest ever triumph. But that matters less than what happened at Heysel.

The same consideration also applies to the wonderful Liverpool side of the late 1980s, in which Beardsley, Barnes and Rush were all in their pomp. They may have cantered to a succession of domestic triumphs, but the crowning glory of European trophies was denied to them by the same ban. The dominant team of that era was the great AC Milan side of Gullit, Rijkaard and Van Basten, with the Italian club winning consecutive European Cups in 1989 and 1990. A clash between those two great sides would undoubtedly have been mouth-watering, but the shameful events at Heysel rightfully meant that it never took place.

The structure of each chapter in this book follows the same format. I tell the true story of each of the teams taking part in the fantasy encounter and then, interspersed among this, I imagine what would have happened had they actually played each other.

When I was a boy I would regularly re-enact football matches in the back garden, with my mother's rotary washing line helpfully acting as the upright of the goal frame. Surely it had been designed for just that purpose? Liverpool may have been the dominant team of my youth, but they won precious few matches in my garden, with a 6-0 thrashing by Walsall as they marched towards yet another FA Cup victory being a much more likely outcome. In imagining great matches that never took place I have therefore tried to conjure up the spirit of my younger self, liberated from the constraints of how things are and free to envisage what could have been. It may seem a little indulgent, but these games do need to be brought to life if counterfactual scenarios are to be considered properly, even if only in the imagination.

I hope that the six matches I have written about interest you as much as they fascinate me. I cannot contend that my

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final list of selected fixtures is in any way definitive, especially given that it focuses largely on the fortunes of British teams. Indeed, there may well be glaring omissions that other, more diligent, observers of the game immediately spot.

No matter; this book does not pretend to be an authoritative text of the key turning points in the game's history. Rather, it is a journey down some of the paths that fate did not take us and if my choices are viewed as being a little subjective or eclectic, then so be it. Some may think that my contentions about the alternative routes that football history could have taken are a little far-fetched and unrealistic. Perhaps, but sport can always produce the unexpected, and if you don't believe that just ask a Leicester City fan...

1

Triumph in Montevideo

World Cup Final, Centenario, Montevideo, 30 July 1930

Uruguay v Scotland

Uruguay

Enrique Ballestrero

José Nasazzi (captain)

Ernesto Mascheroni

Álvaro Gestido

Lorenzo Fernández

José Leandro Andrade

Santos Iriate

Pedro Cea

Héctor Castro

Héctor Scarone

Pablo Dorado

Scotland

Jack Harkness

Tommy Law

Jimmy Nelson

Jimmy McMullan (captain)

Tom Bradshaw

Jimmy Gibson

Alan Morton

Alex James

Hughie Gallacher

Jimmy Dunn

Alex Jackson

Referee: Gilberto de Almeida Rêgo (Brazil)

Jimmy McMullan was afraid. There was a palpable menace in the air and he knew instinctively that he should be far away from this place. But there was nowhere else for him to go, for he was the captain of Scotland and a very important game of football had to be played. Every now and then McMullan could hear the unmistakable sound of a gunshot ricocheting through the air. For goodness sake, he thought, this was supposed to be a football match, not the Somme. When he had first played in the Centenario stadium he had thought that the fences separating the stands from the pitch were hardly necessary.

After all, there were only football fans standing behind them, not wild animals. Now he was glad to see the barriers there. The ground was packed full of Uruguayan supporters and he'd heard in the dressing room that there were thousands locked outside, still trying desperately to get in. There was nothing wrong with men getting passionate about a football match, he reckoned, but these Uruguayans were clearly taking it too far.

As McMullan peered beyond the fences he could see the odd Scot bravely wearing a Tam O'Shanter, but they were massively outnumbered by the home fans. A return trip to Uruguay was well beyond the means of Scotland's working-class supporters and consequently the only fellow countrymen in the stadium were those that had emigrated there. He had always thought that Hampden Park and Wembley were beyond compare but he had to admit that the Centenario was even more stunning; a huge, tiered bowl of concrete that climbed endlessly into the Montevideo sky. When McMullan had found out that he was going to spend his summer in South America he envisaged blazing sunshine and steamy tropical weather. He hadn't realised that July was in the middle of the Uruguayan winter.

Consequently, most of Scotland's matches had been played in biting winds on cold, misty days and there had even been

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some occasional wisps of snow. As McMullan felt the chill air at his back he smiled quietly to himself; this was just like being back in Scotland.

McMullan knew that his team would need nerves of steel to overcome the fine Uruguayan team, not to mention their fervent fans. But he fancied they could do it. After all, they had beaten every other team they had played so far. Belgium hadn't posed them much of a challenge; the Scots were 3-0 up at half-time and were able to spend most of the second half entertaining the small crowd rather than trying to extend their lead.

The Americans had been a bit of a surprise, even taking the lead, but when the Scots realised they had a game on their hands they'd responded firmly to the challenge, running out 4-1 winners in the end. Their last opponents in the group stage were Paraguay and they'd been repeatedly told by the locals that they mustn't underestimate them.

Apparently, they had even beaten Uruguay a year earlier. Scotland therefore took to the pitch in determined mood and made sure that the South Americans didn't get a foothold in the game. A 2-0 victory duly followed, as did a semi-final against Argentina.

The Argentineans were by far the best team that Scotland had played in the tournament until that point, their players possessed of silky skills, acute positioning and strong running. Unfortunately, they were also adept at making unsavoury tackles and the Scots were grateful for the strong refereeing of John Langenus, a Belgian whose officiating was as accomplished as any they had seen back home. McMullen's side eventually emerged victorious, but it had been a close-run thing. The two teams were level for most of the game and it was only a late strike that had won it for Scotland.

Nevertheless, McMullan felt their triumph was deserved as at least they had tried to play the game in the right spirit, which

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he couldn't truthfully say of the Argentineans. McMullan only hoped that the Uruguayans wouldn't be quite so ruthless.

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Uruguay and Scotland may lie at opposite ends of the planet, but there are several striking similarities between the two countries. They are both small, temperate lands with relatively modest populations, overshadowed by one large, football-mad port city. The football teams of Glasgow and Montevideo dominate their national leagues, with the duopoly of Celtic and Rangers being mirrored thousands of miles away by Peñarol and Nacional. Scotland and Uruguay also harbour similar football rivalries, both having a more populous and prosperous neighbour to the south which they rejoice in defeating whenever they have the opportunity. A Uruguayan will revel in a victory over Argentina just as surely as a Scot will delight in seeing his team overcome England.

Scotland, along with England, was one of the birthplaces of modern football, with the two nations competing in the first ever international match in 1872. The British were busy exporting goods all over the world in Victorian times and one of the things they took with them was football. The game was most probably taken to port cities such as Montevideo by visiting British seamen and it was their compatriots that settled there that helped to establish the game.

There was money to be made in fledgling nations such as Uruguay, especially in the construction and development of much-needed infrastructure, and the British had the necessary expertise. Expatriate British communities thus established themselves in the country, forming sporting clubs around the businesses in which they worked. Peñarol, for example, has its roots in the Central Uruguay Railway Cricket Club which, evidently, played more than just cricket. Over time the local inhabitants took these sporting clubs over from their foreign creators and, in doing so, started to make the game their own.

Uruguay played their first international match in 1901, almost three decades after Scotland had first taken on England. It was the first international fixture to take place outside of the British Isles and Uruguay's opponents, unsurprisingly, were near-neighbours Argentina. The capitals of the two nations, Montevideo and Buenos Aires, face each other across the bay of the River Plate, separated by just under 130 miles. By way of comparison, London and Edinburgh are more than twice that distance apart. The physical proximity of Uruguay and Argentina facilitated regular fixtures between them and, by the second decade of the 20th century, it wasn't unusual for them to play each other half a dozen times or more a year. Unsurprisingly, Uruguay versus Argentina soon set the record for being the most frequently played international match in the world.

Argentina initially had the upper hand in their confrontations with Uruguay, but the balance soon started to shift, with the two nations regularly trading victories. One of Uruguay's earliest triumphs came at the first South American Championships (the forerunner to the modern Copa America), which was held in Argentina in 1916 as part of the nation's centenary celebrations. Uruguay won that tournament, no doubt to the great chagrin of the Argentineans, and then showed that was no fluke by repeating the same triumph a year later back in Montevideo. Further victories then followed in 1920 and 1923, prior to Uruguay announcing themselves on the global stage at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

Uruguay had never previously played any international matches outside of South America, but were so determined to take part in the Olympics that they travelled in steerage across the Atlantic, sleeping on benches and playing friendly matches to fund their trip. Given that they had never encountered European opposition before, they arrived as unknown quantities and consequently little was expected of them.

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The Uruguayans, however, proved to be a revelation. They thrashed Yugoslavia 7-0 in the first round and then dismissed the USA to set up a quarter-final against their French hosts. Uruguay blew France away, beating them 5-1 at the same Colombes stadium that witnessed the great *Chariots of Fire* triumphs of Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell. The Netherlands were Uruguay's next victims and then the Swiss were swept aside in the final, beaten 3-0. Uruguay's efforts were rewarded not only with gold medals, but also with the respect and admiration of all those that saw them play. They scored 20 goals in their five victories and conceded only two, with many observers duly concluding that the epicentre of football excellence had shifted from Europe to South America.

Gabriel Hanot, the prime mover behind the creation of the European Cup in the 1950s, was nearing the end of his playing career when he first saw the Uruguayans perform. At the time the British creators of the game were still largely considered to be its masters but Hanot concluded otherwise, referring to the British as 'farm horses' in comparison to the 'Arab thoroughbreds' from the new world. Whether this was a fair comparison will never be known as Great Britain did not send a team to the 1924 Olympics. The British had a strong record in football at the Olympics, winning the gold medal in 1900, 1908 and 1912 (they didn't enter a team in 1904) but became increasingly frustrated at the organisers' refusal to prevent professional players from competing in the tournament. It may seem like an arcane dispute to modern eyes, but the British believed strongly that the competition should only be for unpaid amateurs. Unable to get their way, the British simply stayed away.

Britain's long head-start in the development of the game resulted in their top players becoming professional well in advance of those from other nations. That meant that countries such as Uruguay, which were still making the transition

from amateurism, were free to field their best players at the Olympics, whereas the British were not. There was, however, quite a hazy distinction between professionals and amateurs at the time. The Uruguayan captain, José Nasazzi, for example, was a marble-cutter by trade, yet it is likely that he and the other members of the Uruguayan team were still paid in some form to play football.

The Uruguayans returned to South America as heroes, duly proclaiming their status as the best side in the world. Argentina had not taken part in the Olympics and, displeased that their uppity neighbours were titling themselves as global champions, duly challenged them to a two-legged tie to determine who that honour should really belong to. Argentina were ultimately victorious, but Uruguay were undeterred, going on to win the South American Championship again later that year; a fifth triumph in comparison to Argentina's solitary title. Bragging rights clearly lay on the northern shore of the River Plate and would remain so for several years.

After trading victories in the South American Championship in 1926 and 1927, the two nations both sent teams to the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, ensuring this time there would be no loose ends, buts, ifs or maybes. Argentina cantered through their half of the draw, thrashing the USA 11-2 in the first round, Belgium 6-3 in the quarter-finals and Egypt 6-0 in the last four. Uruguay, meanwhile, overcame a more challenging set of opponents, defeating their Dutch hosts 2-0 in the first round, Germany 4-1 in the quarter-finals and then Italy 3-2 to reach the final. The semi-final between Uruguay and Italy was one of those games played on the fault-lines of international football history; the former were in their pomp, defeating all-comers, while the latter were on their way to becoming the dominant international side of the next decade.

The rest of the world may have struggled to give the teams from the River Plate a stiff challenge, but they were more than

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a match for each other. The first final, in front of a packed stadium, ended in a 1-1 draw, necessitating a second game three days later. Uruguay eventually emerged triumphant in the replay, winning 2-1, their clinching goal coming 17 minutes before the end. Uruguay's second successive Olympic triumph was undoubtedly deserved, but the British had stayed away once again. The ongoing dispute over professionalism was so dogging the game that FIFA decided that they needed an international competition free from the confines of Olympian ideals and so, within two years, the World Cup was born.

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The referee selected for the World Cup Final was a Brazilian, Gilberto de Almeida Rêgo. The Scots had been impressed with how the Belgian, John Langenus, had officiated over their semi-final encounter with Argentina and had expected him to be appointed for the final as well. It therefore came as quite a surprise when Almeida Rêgo was allocated the task instead. He had made a real howler in Argentina's clash with France, ending the match six minutes earlier than he should have, and the Scottish delegation were staggered when he kept being handed more matches to referee. The Scots soon learnt that it was the Uruguayans who had objected to the proposed appointment of Langenus. Apparently, they feared that a European referee would favour a team from his own continent and so insisted that the Brazilian take charge instead. The Scots had considered raising a complaint of their own, if only to draw attention to the double standards of the Uruguayans, but eventually thought better of it. The growing tension within Montevideo was becoming increasingly worrying and the Scots also sensed, probably rightly, that this was an argument that they just weren't going to win.

To be fair to Almeida Rêgo, his performance in the opening minutes of the match didn't give the Scots any cause for concern. The two evenly matched teams took it in turns to

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attack, the play constantly ebbing backwards and forwards. The Brazilian allowed the game to flow, only stopping the match for the heftiest and most inexcusable of challenges and, thankfully, there weren't too many of those. The Uruguayan players seemed oblivious to the fierce demands of the rancorous crowd, concentrating instead on playing the quick passing football that had so delighted those who had watched them play at the Olympics. The Scots, to their credit, were just as entertaining, making their way up the pitch with a succession of small, accurate passes that fizzed across the dusty surface. The two sides were like similarly talented fencers, jabbing and thrusting with great skill, yet still managing to parry each blow that came their way. A goal was coming, but for which team was almost impossible to say.

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A few months before Uruguay won the gold medal at the 1928 Olympics, Scotland also secured one of the most important triumphs in their long and proud history. Despite having played in international matches for almost 60 years, the Scottish FA still had very narrow horizons. The national side routinely played only three matches a year and they were always against the same three opponents. The British Home Championships was created just over a decade after Scotland's first international fixture against England in 1872 and, for the next 70 or so years, it was the only tournament that Scotland competed in. Indeed, not only were the three annual fixtures against England, Ireland and Wales the only internationals that Scotland played in but, from the 1890s onwards, they even held them in the same order nearly every year. The Welsh were normally their first opponents, followed by the Irish, and then came the end-of-season showdown with the English.

Prior to the start of the First World War it was the English that were the dominant force in British football, winning eight of the previous 11 Home Championships. That situation was

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reversed after the conflict ended, with the Scots dominating the 1920s. They won six of the eight championships held between the 1919/20 and 1926/27 seasons, enjoying a purple patch in the last three of these tournaments, with eight victories in the nine matches played. Probably the most pleasing aspect of their supremacy was their sequence of results against England, with four wins and two draws from their eight post-war encounters. It was, therefore, quite a surprise when they failed to make an effective challenge for the 1927/28 British Home Championship. A draw away to Wales wasn't too disastrous a start to the tournament, but a shock home defeat to the Irish (the first since 1903) put paid to their hopes of retaining the trophy.

England's performances in that season's championship were even more woeful than the Scots', with them losing away to the Irish and at home to the Welsh. That meant that the traditional end-of-season encounter between Scotland and England, so often the decider for the trophy, became no more than a contest for the wooden spoon. Those looking for the cause of Scotland's malaise soon settled on it being due to an over-reliance on home-based players. Ten of the side that lost to the Irish played for Scottish clubs and, three weeks before the forthcoming match against England, a representative team from the Scottish League lost the annual challenge match with the English League 6-2.

The reaction of the Scottish selectors, therefore, was to pick a team to play England which contained eight players that plied their trade there. A famous cartoon of the time pictured the three home-based Scots in a train carriage on their way south for the match bemoaning the fact there weren't even enough of them for a game of bridge. If nothing else, the selectors had certainly been brave. They had discarded popular players from Rangers and Celtic in favour of those who had moved to play their football in England, including two who had never even

been capped for Scotland before. Back then these 'Anglo-Scots' were nowhere near as well-liked north of the border as those that stayed at home and, consequently, their compatriots would be unforgiving if they failed to win at Wembley.

The captain selected for the game was Manchester City's pint-sized left-half, Jimmy McMullan. He first played for his country in 1920 and was 33 by the time that Scotland played England in 1928, which was positively geriatric by the standards of the time. The principal reason why he was still playing when many of his peers had long since retired was his great understanding of the game. With his knowledge making up for the deficiencies of his limbs, McMullan was the team's conductor. He used his fine passing ability to give action to his carefully crafted plans, determining the speed and nature of attacks on the opposition's goal. Domestic honours passed McMullan by, as he missed Partick Thistle's 1921 Scottish Cup triumph through injury and then finished on the losing side for Manchester City in the 1926 and 1933 FA Cup finals. His record for Scotland, however, was almost immaculate as he won 12 of the 16 games he played in and lost only once.

The other long-standing Scottish stalwart selected to play against England was the outside-left, Alan Morton. He was the proverbial 'first name on the team sheet' during the 1920s, amassing a total of 31 appearances for Scotland between 1920 and 1932. That may appear quite paltry by modern-day standards, but it was a phenomenal achievement in the inter-war period when so few international matches were played. Any current-day player with an international career of the length of Morton's would easily amass over 100 appearances, and it is in that echelon that he truly belongs.

Morton's wing-play was legendary as he was capable of dribbling past opponents at ease, yet he never allowed the beating of a full-back to become an end in itself. After leaving bewildered defenders in his wake, Morton would send crosses

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into the penalty area with unerring accuracy. His speciality was a floating lob which often seemed to hang in mid-air, causing chaos among those trying to defend the goal and offering a tantalising opportunity to those trying to attack it. Morton spent much of his career with Glasgow Rangers, with his haul of nine championship titles being particularly impressive given that he didn't join them until he was 27 years of age. His record for Scotland was just as distinguished, with only six of the 31 international matches that he played in ending in defeat.

The player selected to play on the opposite wing was Huddersfield Town luminary Alex Jackson. He had an erratic start in professional football, playing first for Dumbarton and then spending a season in the USA, before returning to Scotland to play for Aberdeen. He spent only a season at Pittodrie before Herbert Chapman tempted him to move south and sign for Huddersfield. Chapman had transformed the fortunes of the Yorkshire side after the war, leading them to consecutive league titles in the two seasons preceding Jackson's arrival in 1925. Chapman left Huddersfield to manage Arsenal not long after signing Jackson, but the side he left behind was strong enough to win the championship again in 1926 without him.

It hardly seemed possible at the time, but that was the only medal that Jackson was to win in his entire career. Huddersfield continued to be one of England's strongest teams for the remainder of the 1920s, but all they had to show for their efforts was a series of near-misses. They finished as runners-up in the First Division in 1926/27 and then did the same in 1927/28, magnifying their pains that season by suffering a defeat in the FA Cup Final as well. If that wasn't bad enough, Huddersfield lost another FA Cup Final in 1930, to Chapman's Arsenal of all teams. Jackson's exploits meant that he was regularly picked for Scotland, making his debut at 19 years of age and missing only two British Home Championship

matches over the next six seasons. His record over that period was certainly impressive, with 15 of the 17 matches in which he appeared ending in a Scottish victory and only one in defeat.

Jackson may have been a fine player, but he was also the type of man who made sure everyone else knew as well. He told team-mates early in his career that he would go on to play for Scotland and his subsequent feats did nothing to shrink his opinion of himself. Thankfully for Jackson, he had the talent to back up his boasts. His lightning pace and excellent ball control not only made him an impressive right-winger, but also gave him the confidence to cut inside full-backs and shoot at goal. When Dixie Dean selected the best team from his playing days he chose Jackson at outside-right, reckoning him to be a better footballer than even the great Stanley Matthews.

Playing in the forward line alongside Jackson was Hibernian inside-right Jimmy Dunn. He was probably the least naturally talented of the forwards that were picked to face England, but it would be a mistake to discount him simply on those grounds. Dunn was an energetic runner who passed the ball crisply and scored his fair share of goals in all the teams that he played for. His performance against England at Wembley was so impressive that, less than a month later, Everton bought him to partner their greatest asset, Dixie Dean. The plan backfired initially, with Dunn struggling to settle in his new environment. The Merseyside club finished bottom of the First Division in 1930, though their stay in the second tier of English football was mercifully brief. They won promotion in the subsequent year and followed that by winning the championship and FA Cup in consecutive seasons, with Dunn being a key part of both triumphs.

The leader of Scotland's five-man forward line was the diminutive, volatile Hughie Gallacher. At 5ft 5in tall, he was hardly a traditional, battering-ram centre-forward, having to rely instead on his prodigious natural talent for the game. He

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could run with the ball, turn and twist defenders, shoot with power and, despite his height, was good in the air, even when competing against much taller defenders. Perhaps Gallacher's greatest quality, however, was his tenacity. He was regularly subjected to brutal punishment by vengeful defenders but would never allow himself to be intimidated, striving endlessly instead for the goal that would confirm his superiority over the beasts that tried to maim him.

Unfortunately, Gallacher's commendable character traits also had their negative side, with his passion for winning often boiling over and leading him into all manner of troubles. He didn't only argue and fight with the opposition, but also with referees, club officials and even with his own team-mates. Gallacher was just as capable of getting into trouble off the pitch as he was on it, once receiving a two-month ban for pushing a referee into a bath after a heated match. He also ended up in court after fighting on the streets of Newcastle. Modern-day footballers may be prone to bouts of bad behaviour, but the template was laid down for them many years earlier by men such as Gallacher.

Thankfully, Gallacher's suspect temperament did not do irreparable damage to his career. His performances for his first club, Queen of the South, were so impressive that he only played nine times for them before being snapped up by Airdrie. With Gallacher in their line-up Airdrie's fortunes were transformed, finishing as runners-up in the league to Glasgow Rangers for three consecutive seasons between 1922/23 and 1924/25 and winning the Scottish Cup, for the first and only time in their history, in 1924. Newcastle United persuaded Gallacher to move south of the border in 1925 and the move worked out well, with his goals propelling them to a league title in 1926/27. Gallacher's total of 463 goals in 624 matches in Scottish and English football easily places him among the greats of the domestic game, but it's his goal scoring feats at

international level which most clearly differentiate his talents from the rest.

The inimitable Gallacher scored a total of 23 goals for Scotland, making him the nation's third highest ever scorer. Denis Law and Kenny Dalglish may have found the net more times, but the difference in scoring rates between them and Gallacher is stark. Gallacher scored over a goal a game, whereas Law scored just over once every two games while Dalglish scored once in every three games (and that's being kind with the maths). Hughie Gallacher, meanwhile, rarely disappointed his expectant countrymen, finishing on the winning side 17 times in the 20 matches he played for them.

Scotland's inside-left against England in 1928 was Alex James, an old school friend of Hughie Gallacher. They had grown up together in the small town of Bellshill in Lanarkshire, playing football whenever they could and watching their beloved Celtic whenever it was possible. That they should both end up playing in the same forward line for their country is certainly a romantic story, though neither of them were particularly poetic figures. Gallacher could be irascible and tempestuous, while James could be indolent and not a little selfish. Despite being the younger of the two men, Gallacher was the first to be offered a professional contract. A relieved James was later taken on by Raith Rovers and, after a few seasons with them, moved south to play for Preston North End. The fact that the club played in the second tier of English football didn't stymie James's international career, with the striker making his Scotland debut shortly after joining them.

James's next move was the one that came to define his career. Herbert Chapman offered him a contract at Arsenal in 1929 and he never looked back, going on to become probably the most important player in a side that dominated English football in the 1930s. James didn't have much pace and was knocked off the ball fairly easily, but his natural talent for the

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game didn't reside in his physique; it lay between his ears. His speed of thought and imagination made up for the frailties of his limbs, enabling him to fashion creative moves that often flummoxed opposing defences. James was well rewarded for his efforts at Arsenal, winning four league championships between 1930/31 and 1934/35, as well as two FA Cups in 1930 and 1936.

Alex James's appearances for his native Scotland were inexcusably rare, with Preston and Arsenal often taking advantage of the rules that allowed them to refuse him permission to play for his country. James only played eight times for Scotland, but he couldn't blame that entirely on the selfishness of his English employers. He cried off a few days before Scotland's game against England in 1933, citing injury, but then proceeded to play for Arsenal on the very same day that his countrymen were battling the English. Unsurprisingly, James was never asked to represent Scotland again.

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As the first half progressed, the five-man Scottish forward line started to impose themselves on the game. Fed by a succession of accurate passes from McMullan, the left-winger Morton began to give his opposing number a torrid time. He dribbled past him with increasing ease, before sending looping crosses into the penalty area for Gallacher and Jackson to chase. The Uruguayan defence dealt manfully with the challenge, but their increasingly nervous supporters sensed that they wouldn't be able to keep the Scots out forever. Gallacher, in particular, was an ever-present threat; his movement and energy clearly troubling the Uruguayan back-line.

There was much to admire about how Gallacher was playing the game, but sadly the little Scotsman was also indulging in some rather ignoble tactics. The more eagle-eyed of the Uruguayan supporters spotted him aiming the odd kick at an opponent's ankles when the referee's attentions

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were elsewhere and his fierce temper was often in evidence. Gallacher's behaviour was no doubt a reaction to the increasingly harsh challenges that came his way, but there was a constant danger that one of his skirmishes with opposing defenders would escalate into an all-out brawl. Before the match he had stuffed cotton wool beneath his shin-pads, as was his usual custom, and no doubt felt the benefit as the Uruguayan defenders aimed retaliatory hacks at his battered legs.

There was little in common between Gallacher and Morton; the former a tempestuous firebrand who drank as hard as he played, the latter a clean-living mining engineer who spent more time sporting a bowler hat and briefcase than he did football boots. On the pitch, however, Gallacher and Morton formed an admirable alliance. They had combined well on many occasions before and it was now Uruguay's turn to feel the power of their partnership. The move started with the captain McMullan, who sprayed a well-aimed pass to the feet of Morton. He quickly flicked the ball past the lunge of the opposing defender and looked up to see where Gallacher was. Most of Morton's previous crosses had been played high into the air, but the diminutive Gallacher had been unable to make the most of them. This time Morton dispatched the ball from the left wing at chest height. Gallacher read the flight of the ball perfectly, getting a step ahead of his marker before flinging himself headlong at the ball. His forehead connected with the ball as he intended and the Uruguayan goalkeeper could only glance in despair as the net rustled behind him. The Scots had metaphorically drawn first blood, but if Gallacher continued to play the way he was playing there was a risk of real blood being spilt.

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The man selected to keep goal for Scotland against England in 1928 was Jack Harkness. He was still an amateur when the

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game took place, though he turned professional just over a month later. He grew up in Glasgow, began his career with local side Queen's Park and was only 19 years old when selected for his first international match; a 2-0 victory over Northern Ireland in 1927. Success came quickly to Harkness, but it was clearly deserved. He was a brave, agile goalkeeper who was more than capable of holding his own against strikers who routinely challenged keepers much more robustly than would be allowed today.

One of Harkness's principal rivals for a place in the international team was the Celtic goalkeeper, John Thomson. Like Harkness, Thomson had risen to prominence early in his career and great things were expected of him. He made his debut for Scotland in May 1930 and could well have been the first-choice goalkeeper if a squad had been sent to Uruguay that summer. Sadly, Thomson was to die in tragic circumstances just over a year later, following a collision with a Rangers striker during a match at Ibrox. He was rushed to hospital with a head injury but, despite undergoing emergency surgery, died a few hours later, aged just 22.

Playing in front of Harkness against England was right-back Jimmy Nelson. Of all those selected, Nelson had the loosest associations with Scotland. He was eligible for the national side by virtue of having been born in Greenock, but he spent little time there before his family relocated to Belfast. The struggle for independence made the island a troubled, violent place and Nelson escaped it as soon as he was able to, gladly accepting the offer of a professional contract with Cardiff City in 1921.

The Welsh team had most successful spell in their history in the 1920s and Nelson was a key part of it. The disappointment of near-misses in 1924 and 1925 (runners-up in the league and then the FA Cup) was banished by a cathartic victory over Arsenal at Wembley in 1927; Cardiff

thus becoming the only club from outside England to win the FA Cup.

Cardiff's fortunes faded after that triumph and they were relegated from the First Division two years later, though Nelson and his fellow defenders were not the chief culprits for their demise. The Welsh club conceded fewer goals than any other team in the division that season, with even the title winners, Sheffield Wednesday, letting in more. Nelson only played in the Second Division for a season before moving back into the top flight with Newcastle United. He repaid their faith in him by captaining the side to another FA Cup triumph; a 2-1 victory over Arsenal in 1932. Nelson was only capped four times by his country of birth, though that could hardly be attributed to the quality of his performances for the national side. Scotland won all four of those matches, conceding only two goals in the process. The principal reason for the paucity of his international appearances was simply that he didn't play his club football in Scotland. In truth, for a man who grew up in Ireland and spent his career playing in the English league (with most of that being at a Welsh club), being awarded four Scottish caps was actually quite an impressive achievement.

Nelson's defensive partner, Tommy Law, was the youngest of the players selected to face England, with the teenager making his international debut. Law was raised in Glasgow but his talent for the game was missed by the local clubs. A Chelsea scout spotted his potential, however, and Law made his debut for the west London side in 1926, with his first cap for Scotland being awarded only a year and a half later. It was a rapid rise to the top and his selection for the national side was particularly remarkable given that Chelsea were only playing in the second tier of English football at the time. Law had little pace, but made up for it by reading the game well and making sure that he was in the right place at the right time. He was particularly adept at the sliding tackle; a skill that he was to

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demonstrate successfully on the sodden Wembley pitch against the English forwards.

The centre-half who played in front of Nelson and Law was Tom 'Tiny' Bradshaw. The nickname was a deliberately ironic misnomer as Bradshaw was a 6ft 2in, 14st stopper. Despite his size, Bradshaw was an adept ball player, though his predilection for trying to dribble his way out of difficult positions, rather than kicking the ball up the pitch, was often seen as the weakness in his game. The fledgling Bradshaw was given a trial by Hamilton Academicals but they passed up the opportunity to take him on and it was Bury that gave him his chance in the game. The Greater Manchester club may be a football outpost in modern times but they had a strong team in the 1920s, winning promotion to the First Division two years after Bradshaw joined them and then securing three top-five finishes in the following four seasons. That gave Bradshaw a stage from which he was able to attract the attention of the Scottish selectors and he was given his first, and only, cap against England in 1928.

Bradshaw had a marvellous game at Wembley, with his omission from future national sides having to be put down to a combination of misfortune and the selectors' preference for home-based players. Early in the 1928/29 season Bradshaw picked up a bad injury and Bury were duly relegated. Despite resuming his First Division career with Liverpool, Bradshaw never became Scotland's first-choice centre-half again. The selectors' preferred option in that position was the Glasgow Rangers player, Davie Meiklejohn, and it's not too hard to understand why. Rangers dominated Scottish football in the 1920s and 1930s and Meiklejohn was an integral part of that success. In the 16 seasons between his debut in 1920 and his retirement in 1936 Meiklejohn played 635 times for the club, winning 12 Scottish championships and five Scottish Cups. Not only was Meiklejohn a strong defender and decent ball

player but, perhaps most importantly of all, he was also a great leader. Meiklejohn captained Rangers to many of those triumphs and regularly led the national side as well.

The final member of the Scotland line-up against England was Aston Villa right-half Jimmy Gibson. He was talented enough to excel in several positions, playing in all the half-back positions for Villa, as well as at inside-right, centre-forward and once, when the keeper was injured during a match, even in goal. He began his career with Partick Thistle but was tempted south by the greater financial opportunities on offer, being transferred to Aston Villa in 1927 for what was then a British record fee of £7,500. Villa were a strong team for most of his time there, achieving two second-, one fourth- and one fifth-place finish in the First Division between 1929/30 and 1932/33. Gibson's record for his country was just as impressive, with Scotland winning six of the eight matches he played in and only losing once.

Scotland went into the game against England as heavy underdogs. Not only were they playing away from home, but they also had to contend with an in-form Dixie Dean. He was at the peak of his career that season, scoring an unequalled record of 60 goals in the league and was clearly in confident mood for the game against the Scots. The night before the match he sent a bottle of aspirins to Scotland goalkeeper Jack Harkness with a note wrapped around it, advising him to get a good night's sleep before he faced the prolific Everton striker. Dean was to be the focal point of England's attacks, with balls played up to him as quickly as possible. The Scots, meanwhile, aimed to keep the ball on the floor, passing it swiftly between themselves, out of reach of the bigger and heavier English players. The Scots and the English may only have been playing for pride but, given the long, and sometimes bitter, history between the two nations, that was more than enough for the match to be a competitive one.

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The weather conditions on the day of the game suited the Scots perfectly. Heavy rain resulted in a slippery pitch which favoured the Scottish forwards, enabling them to run at the English defenders secure in the knowledge that their opponents would be reluctant to dive in and tackle for fear of losing their footing. The Scottish forward line was one of the smallest to ever to take to the field; two of them were only 5ft 5in in height and another two were just an inch taller. Yet, on a muddy pitch, their lower centre of gravity became a positive advantage, helping them to torment an English defence which longed for a more physical, aerial battle.

England started the match well, nearly taking the lead after a minute of play when a well-hit shot struck a post. The home fans no doubt thought that augured well, but that was pretty much as good as it got for them that afternoon. After surviving the initial English onslaught, the Scots began to come forward. A swift interchange of passes took the ball to Alan Morton, who beat the opposing full-back and then sent a cross into the penalty area, where it was met by intruding right-winger, Alex Jackson. He buried his header into the net and, with just three minutes on the clock, the Scots were in front. The two Scottish wingers were probably the most influential players on the pitch that afternoon, causing such trouble to the English full-backs that the right- and left-halves playing in front of them had no choice but to leave their usual positions in midfield to help them out. That left large gaps in the middle of the pitch, resulting in the Scottish half-back line seeing plenty of the ball and having more than enough time and space to use it wisely.

The English were thus pinned down in their own half of the pitch, with Bradshaw subduing Dixie Dean so effectively that the great English hope was reduced to a peripheral figure. Scotland's second goal was perfectly timed, coming just before the half-time break, serving to further demoralise the hosts

while reassuring the visitors. The goal was scored by Alex James with a half-volley from the edge of the penalty area; a strike so good that he later considered it to be the finest of his career.

England came out fighting at the start of the second half, but the Scots were in no mood to relinquish their hard-won lead. Their third and fourth goals came in quick succession, in the 65th and 66th minutes, thus effectively ending the match as a contest. Jackson scored the first of these two goals with a header after another fine cross from Morton. It was not just the left-winger that Jackson had to thank though, as Gallacher's contribution was just as important. He might not have scored any of the team's goals that afternoon, but his unselfish running frequently took his English centre-half marker out of position and so left space for Jackson to come in from the wing and take advantage.

Gallacher was also influential in Scotland's fourth goal, going on a weaving run soon after the kick-off which was halted only when he was upended on the edge of the penalty area. The loose ball then ran into the path of James who smashed it gleefully into the back of the net. After that the Scots really started to enjoy themselves, stringing long sequences of passes together to demonstrate their superiority over the English. Their fifth goal came five minutes from the end of the match and they could probably have scored more, had they concentrated on finding the net rather than on humiliating their opponents. The creator of the goal, once again, was Morton who crossed the ball for Jackson to volley into the goal from only a few yards out. It was a historical hat-trick for Jackson; the first player to score three goals at Wembley and the first to do so for Scotland against England since Robert McColl in 1900.

The English did manage to get a goal back one minute from time but, given the galling afternoon they had endured, it was

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hardly much of a consolation. Each man in the Scottish team played his part in the victory, but the glory inevitably shone on the five-man forward line. They had been dismissed before the match as midgets but left the pitch as giants, mobbed by the Scottish fans that ran on to the Wembley turf to congratulate their heroes. Gallacher, generous in victory, happily deflected the glory on to his captain, Jimmy McMullan, who he reckoned to have been the best player on the pitch.

The victorious Scottish players were christened for posterity as the 'Wembley Wizards', but the selection committee never picked the same XI again. In retrospect, it appears to be a bizarre decision. The selectors stumbled, almost by accident, upon a team that was good enough to humiliate the English on their own turf and yet they never gave them a second game.

Perhaps the best explanation is that priorities were just different back then. International caps were often given as a reward to players who had done well for their clubs and, as a result, were shared around much more equitably than they would be now. In addition, the pressure to select home-based players was simply too great for the selection committee to bear. Despite the result secured by the Anglo-Scots at Wembley, the sides picked for the 1929 British Home Championship were once again dominated by players from Scottish clubs.

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Uruguay tried to come back at the Scots, but their search for an equaliser floundered on the rocks of the well-drilled Scottish back-line. Law had looked uncomfortable from the start, clearly intimidated by the bloodcurdling cries from the terraces, but McMullan shielded him from most of the Uruguayan attacks. The home side tried to make progress down their left flank instead, but Nelson made full use of his experience to deny them that possibility. Scotland's most effective defender, however, was the centre-back, Bradshaw. It didn't matter whether the Uruguayans played the ball on the ground or in

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the air as he rose to the challenge of both, either dismissing aerial attacks with thumping headers or crashing into tackles with colossal force.

As the match edged towards half-time the Scots sensed that there was another goal there for the taking. Uruguay were playing higher and higher up the pitch, trying desperately to level the scores before the referee blew his whistle for the break. That resulted in the Uruguayan back-line becoming increasingly isolated and it was much more vulnerable as a consequence. Scotland's chance to take advantage of the situation came when Gibson won the ball and played it forward to Jackson, who was standing just inside the halfway line. The four other Scottish forwards immediately galloped towards the opposition goal, outnumbering the abandoned Uruguayan defenders.

Jackson quickly passed the ball to Dunn, who then flicked it into the path of Gallacher, the ball being moved sideways across the pitch as if they were playing rugby. When the ball found its way to James he was completely unmarked; the slanting passing movement having stretched the Uruguayan defence beyond its breaking point. With time on his side, he was able to stop, look up and spot Jackson's run to the right-hand edge of the penalty area. James took aim and fired a 20-yard pass straight into Jackson's path. The ball bounced a foot into the air after landing and Jackson caught it full on the volley, sending it crashing into the back of the net. The Uruguayan goalkeeper didn't even have a chance to move.

Scotland's goal was greeted with a crescendo of jeers from the home supporters, which only increased in volume when the referee brought the first half to a close a few moments later. Many of the Uruguayan fans had been in the ground for hours before kick-off, desperate not to miss what promised to be the national side's greatest ever triumph. Having made such an effort, they were angry to see the Uruguayan players not

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responding in kind, and so duly let them know how they felt. If the daunting atmosphere was alarming for the Uruguayan players, then it was several times worse for the Scots. As soon as they heard the first note from the referee's whistle they ran quickly to the sanctuary of the dressing room; not wanting to be out on the pitch a minute longer than they had to.

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The year 1929 witnessed not just the Wall Street crash, the St Valentine's Day Massacre and the first Academy Award ceremony, but also the decision over which nation would host the first World Cup. FIFA gathered in Barcelona to make its choice, with five European countries putting themselves forward as well as one from South America. As the tournament was the brainchild of a Frenchman, Jules Rimet, it may be reasonable to assume that his nation would want to host it. Yet, when applications for holding the tournament were invited, the French happily let the opportunity pass them by. They clearly wanted to have a party, but not in their house. The European nations that did offer to be hosts (Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, Spain and Sweden) eventually all withdrew their bids in favour of one from Uruguay. It may seem to be a curious choice of location now, but there were strong moral and practical arguments at the time for holding the competition there.

Uruguay's consecutive victories at the 1924 and 1928 Olympics had put them firmly on the map as far as football was concerned and 1930 would also be special for their country as they would be commemorating 100 years of nationhood. What better way to celebrate that milestone than with an international football tournament? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the Uruguayans were prepared to back up their proposal with cold, hard cash. They promised to build a vast new stadium for the competition, capable of accommodating 100,000 spectators, and offered to meet the expenses of all

competing nations. In light of such an attractive proposal the European nations agreed to withdraw their applications and Uruguay's bid was duly accepted.

The prize that the Uruguayans won, however, soon started to look more like a poisoned chalice. As the months to the beginning of the tournament ticked away it became doubtful whether any European nation would actually take part, with all of those that had volunteered to host it declining to attend. That may appear, at first glance, to be a case of sour grapes, but there were sound practical reasons for their reluctance to take part. There was no commercial air travel in 1930, meaning that teams would have no alternative other than to make the two-week journey to South America by boat. It would take a further month for the competition to be completed and then another fortnight would have to be spent at sea before they arrived back home again. Any European side that wanted to be part of the Uruguayan jamboree, therefore, had to commit to being away from home for over two months. It was little surprise, then, that most of them decided not to participate.

There were some brave pioneers, though. The French had little option but to take part, given that it was their idea in the first place, and they were joined, somewhat reluctantly, by Belgium, Romania and Yugoslavia. Over half of the teams in the tournament came from South America, with teams being sent from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Peru. North America was represented by Mexico and the USA, while there were no entrants at all from Africa, Asia or Australasia. In total 13 teams took part, though it really should have been 14. The Egyptians were due to attend, but just missed the boat from Marseilles and so had to wait another four years before making their World Cup debut.

The Uruguayans had managed to get just about enough teams to take part to make the tournament worthwhile, though there were fewer than had taken part in the 1924 and

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1928 Olympics. Most damaging for the fledgling competition, however, was the absence of so many of Europe's major football powers. Perhaps the strongest of the sides not to travel to Uruguay was the Austrian 'Wunderteam', which bewitched football watchers in the early 1930s with their fluid attacking play. Also missing were the Italians, who would win the next World Cup in 1934, and Spain, who, in 1929, became the first team from outside Britain to beat England. The Czechs, Hungarians and Germans were also absent.

Uruguay were so desperate for the World Cup to be a success that they invited British nations to take part, even though they were not members of FIFA at the time. The British had refused to participate in the football tournament at the previous two Olympics because of their concerns over the blurred definitions of amateur and professional players. The World Cup was to be free of Olympian ideals and so any player, be they amateur, professional, or something in between, could take part. The creation of a level playing field should have encouraged British nations to participate, but it didn't. The English received a polite invitation from the Uruguayans, but all they provided in response was a curt, two-sentence letter confirming that they wouldn't be coming. Given the insularity of the Football Association at that time, perhaps the South Americans should have been grateful that they got even that. The Scottish FA, sadly, also declined.

The FA may not have been a beacon of forward thinking at the time, but they were far in advance of the Scots in such matters. While both nations turned up their noses at the prospect of participating in a World Cup, the English were far less averse to taking on continental opposition in friendly matches than the Scots were. The first match played by the English outside Britain was in 1908, when they travelled to Vienna to challenge Austria. It took over 20 years for the Scots to follow their lead, not journeying abroad until 1929 when

they crossed the North Sea to play against Norway. By that time England had played 25 international matches against eight different continental nations, only two of which had been played at home. The Scottish FA, by contrast, was an inward-looking body that clearly lacked the more progressive outlook of its southern neighbour, let alone the vision of the Uruguayans who were so determined to make a success of the first World Cup.

The Scots really should have ventured abroad much earlier than 1929, as they soon found that there was little to fear. They played three matches on that end-of-season tour and none of them ended in defeat. Norway were crushed by 7-3, the Netherlands beaten 2-0 and Germany held to a 1-1 draw in Berlin. This sequence of results was particularly impressive given that the Scottish squad couldn't be described as being anything better than a second- or third-string outfit. None of the 'Wembley Wizards' were included, with all of the great luminaries of the day such as Gallacher, Jackson and James being absent.

To be fair to the Scottish FA, sending a side to the 1930 World Cup would have been a mighty challenge. They would have required an enormous amount of co-operation from others if they were to have sent such a team, but it's doubtful they would have received it. The Scottish League, and the clubs who played in it, would have taken a vast amount of persuading that the tournament was worth bothering with, not least because it would have entailed reorganising the following season's fixture list.

The 1930/31 Scottish League season started on 9 August, just ten days after the World Cup ended, meaning that any home-based players in the Scottish squad would have been somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean when it kicked off. Their clubs would either have been forced to commence the new season without them, or else have appealed to the Scottish

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League to delay its start until their top players returned. Either way, it's hardly likely that Scottish clubs would have looked favourably on their players travelling to and from Uruguay, missing pre-season training and a host of league matches, before arriving back out-of-shape after lounging about on a boat for a fortnight. After all, it was the clubs that employed and paid the players, and it was hardly in their interests to make a sacrifice for the greater good of the nation.

An indication of the most likely outcome of a tussle between the Scottish FA and their leading clubs can be found by looking at the international side that was put out against France in May 1930. At first glance it may appear curious that there were no players from Glasgow Rangers in the team, given that they had just completed a league and cup double. Yet there was a perfectly sound reason for their absence: they were thousands of miles away in the USA on an end-of-season tour, organised by their club as a reward for their achievements that season. If that tour took priority over the match in Paris, then there seems little likelihood that the World Cup would have been looked on any more favourably.

It's even more doubtful that English clubs would have allowed their Scottish players to be involved in an expedition to South America. The 1930/31 league season didn't begin in England until the end of August, which meant that Scottish players could have made it back from Uruguay in time for the start. However, given the antipathy of English clubs at the time towards releasing 'foreign' players for international duty, even for British Home Championship fixtures, it seems unlikely that they would have sanctioned their involvement in the World Cup.

Even if the Scottish FA had obtained the co-operation it required from Scottish and English clubs, the players would still have needed persuading that the trip was worth making. No doubt some of them would have relished the challenge,

but others would have taken a lot of convincing. The Scottish full-back Tommy Law went on a tour of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay with Chelsea in 1929, but did not return with happy memories of the experience. The west London side were greeted with unruly crowds that thought nothing of trying to intimidate players and officials by firing gunshots into the air during matches. One Chelsea player was punched by a spectator and a match in Buenos Aires had to be abandoned because of crowd disturbances. The English couldn't even rely on the native referees who, quite understandably in the circumstances, blatantly favoured the home teams and rarely interpreted the rules of the game in the same way that the British players did.

It's unlikely that Law would have relished a return trip in 1930, and his experiences would hardly have encouraged other Scottish players to participate in the tournament. Interestingly, one of the 'friendlies' played by Chelsea on that tour was against Peñarol, who supplied several players for Uruguay's World Cup challenge. The hosts may have won the game 2-1 but that is scant evidence of the superiority of Uruguayan football, given that Chelsea had just finished ninth in the second tier of the English league.

Another player that would not have been keen on the trip was Alex James. He was a reluctant traveller at the best of times, which was hardly surprising given what he had experienced earlier in his career. James was taken on Raith Rovers' end-of-season tour to the Canary Islands in 1923, but the journey nearly ended in disaster when his ship was wrecked just off the coast of northern Spain. The captain had to ground the ship in order to avoid hitting rocks but, in doing so, caused so much damage to his vessel that all the crew and passengers had to be evacuated.

Understandably, James was never keen on travelling by sea after that and avoided even relatively short sea trips whenever

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possible. He pulled out of Arsenal's summer tour to Denmark and Sweden in 1931 and then refused to play for the Gunners in a friendly match in Ireland in 1933. James also regularly missed the annual match played by Arsenal in aid of First World War veterans against Racing Club of Paris. The thought of a two-week sea voyage to Uruguay would no doubt have filled him with horror, and he would probably have sought any excuse not to go.

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The Scots' dressing room was a riot of noise at the interval, with almost every occupant trying to make himself heard above the din. Some of the players were talking excitedly about the first half and the goals the team had scored, while others spoke about what they needed to do after the break. Alex James happily stepped aside from the fray, deciding to let the younger men have their say for a few minutes. As he sat down on one of the benches his eyes settled on Jimmy McMullan, who was seated at the opposite end of the room. James was immediately concerned by what he saw, for the team's ageing captain was clearly exhausted.

Even though McMullan had been resting for a few minutes, he was still breathing heavily; his body struggling to restore its equilibrium. James started to lift out of his seat, so as to walk toward his captain, but then thought better of it. The last thing McMullan needed was someone fretting over him, especially given that there was little that James could realistically do to help.

James left his captain in peace and diverted his gaze to some of the Scottish FA officials that were moving among the players, congratulating them on their first half performance. James lifted his head back, closed his eyes and muttered something unrepeatable beneath his breath; this game was far from over and the last thing they needed was administrators patting them on the back as if the job was already done. When

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he opened his eyes again he noticed one of the officials talking eagerly to Alan Morton. From what he had heard, this was the young man who had moved heaven and earth to get Scotland to the World Cup.

The last thing James had wanted to do that summer was travel all the way to Uruguay; he hated boats at the best of times and he had better things to do with his break than sail halfway across the world. He didn't quite know how the young administrator had done it, but he had somehow convinced James's bosses at Arsenal that he had to be on that boat and they, in turn, had made sure he was. Wheels within wheels, no doubt, thought James to himself. God; how he hated the upper classes. They just organised the world around themselves and made sure that the little people did as they were told, regardless of what the little people may have wanted for themselves. Still, he had to admire what the young man had achieved. Apparently, the Scottish league season was even going to start a few weeks later than planned, just to give the players time to get back from Uruguay. How he had managed to do that he would never know.

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The World Cup of 1930 has become a much more important event than it ever was at the time. We see it as the first episode in the history of the biggest sporting competition in the world but, back then, most viewed it as no more than a curious experiment that was unlikely to succeed. To the British it was simply a fledgling tournament in a faraway land, contested by teams of which they knew little that had nothing to teach those who had pioneered the game. Now, once every four years, the World Cup Final is the most watched television programme on the planet; mankind's activities grinding to a halt simply to see two teams of young men chase a ball around a grassy field. The 1930 final didn't just take place in a different era; it took place in a different world.

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The squad that the Uruguayans assembled for the World Cup, unsurprisingly, was based around the players that had won two Olympic titles. The side was captained by the reliable left-back, José Nasazzi, who had been a key part of both of those triumphs. He was joined by five other double gold medal winners, four of whom were forwards. There was Héctor Scarone, who practised his shooting by knocking down bottles at a distance of 30 metres; Santos Urdinarán, a diminutive right-winger; Pedro Cea, who sold ice when he wasn't playing football; and Pedro Petrone, who was Uruguay's top goalscorer at both Olympics, even though he declined to head the ball lest it spoil his carefully greased hair. The other veteran from Paris and Amsterdam was wing-half José Leandro Andrade, the only black player in the side. Andrade came from a humble background, scraped a living by shining shoes and subsequently died in poverty from tuberculosis. There was, however, no paucity in his ability to play football. He was an extravagantly gifted player who, it was said, once crossed half the pitch during a game with the ball balanced on his head.

Uruguay's first-choice goalkeeper for the World Cup was due to be Andrés Mazali, but he was dropped after being caught breaking a curfew. The double Olympic winner had made a quick visit back home to spend some 'quality time' with his wife. One only hopes she was worth it. He was replaced by Enrique Ballestrero who, while not as good a goalkeeper as Mazali, did at least possess the merit of being able to resist his urges when it was asked of him. Other additions to the squad for the World Cup included the lanky right-back Ernesto Mascheroni, who would go on to be the longest-living member of the World Cup winning side, the side's centre-half Lorenzo Fernández, and Álvaro Gestido, a wing-half whose brother later became president of Uruguay. The squad was also strengthened by the inclusion of three forwards; the one-handed Héctor Castro (he lost his right hand in a chainsaw

accident), Pablo Dorado, the youngest member of the team at 22, and Santos Iriarte, nicknamed the canary, apparently.

The playing formation adopted by Uruguay was that employed all over the world at the time. Two defenders (a right-back and left-back) played behind three midfielders (a right-half, centre-half and left-half) who supported a five-man forward line (an outside-right, inside-right, centre-forward, inside-left and outside-left). The Uruguayans played their own variation of 2-3-5, but it was still recognisably the same system that had been used since the game was developed in Britain in the 1880s. Tactical revolutions would come in the future but, in 1930, the victors were generally those that played the system best, rather than those which had the best system.

The structure of the first World Cup was not radically different to that used for modern tournaments, with the 13 teams being split into four first-round groups. Ideally there would have been enough sides to make up four groups of four teams, but the weakened field meant that the Uruguayan hosts had to make do with one complete group of four teams and three groups of three teams. Only the winners of each group progressed to the semi-finals, with there being no second chances for those who finished as runners-up in their first-round group.

There were five seeded nations in the draw: the hosts, neighbouring Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil and, rather curiously, the USA. Uruguay's great rivals, Argentina, drew the short straw by being placed in the only group that contained four teams. The hosts, meanwhile, were drawn in a not particularly tough looking three-team group with Peru and Romania. The hosts of modern World Cups invariably distribute the tournament's games across a number of different cities. The first World Cup, however, was held solely in the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo, with only three different stadia being used.

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Uruguay may have invited the world to come and play football in their country but their citizens initially showed little enthusiasm for the competition. The tournament's opening match between France and Mexico attracted a crowd of just over 4,000 spectators, while only 300 souls turned up to watch Romania play Peru, the lowest attendance in World Cup history. Teething troubles no doubt, but it was hardly an advertisement for the fledgling tournament.

What the Uruguayans did want to see, of course, was their own team play. An impressive crowd of over 57,000 people gathered to watch their opening match against Peru in the still unfinished Centenario stadium. The Uruguayans got off to a successful start, winning 1-0, but it was a stuttering, uncertain performance and their expectant supporters were less than impressed.

Decisive action was needed and it was duly taken. Four changes were made to Uruguay's team for their second match against Romania and, except for one player, remained unchanged for the rest of the tournament. Right-back Domingo Tejera was replaced by Mascheroni, even though Uruguay hadn't conceded any goals against Peru, and the forward line was also rebuilt. If Petrone had thought that being the side's top scorer at the last two Olympics had made his position in the side safe, then he was wrong. He was dropped, as was Castro, even though he had scored the winner against Peru, and Urdinarán also had to give way. Their replacements were Dorado, Scarone and Peregrino Anselmo, an asthmatic whose illness was to get the better of him before the tournament was over.

The Romanians, whose team was selected by King Carol, the nation's German-speaking monarch, were not expected to present the hosts with many problems, and so it proved. Uruguay's remodelled team fulfilled expectations by dispatching the Romanians 4-0, all scored within the first

35 minutes of the game. Half-time rescued the Romanians from further punishment and, without needing to stretch themselves in the second half, the Uruguayans breezed into the semi-finals.

Uruguay's opponents in the last four were Yugoslavia, who had topped their group ahead of Brazil and Bolivia. Not too much should be read into that, though. The Brazilian side was not remotely close to the standard of the great teams that would compete in future tournaments, while the Bolivians were probably the weakest team in the entire competition. They had only played seven international matches in the years preceding the World Cup and had lost them all, conceding an average of six goals a game in the process. The fact that their two World Cup matches against Brazil and Yugoslavia both ended in 4-0 defeats, therefore, actually represented an improvement in form.

Uruguay fielded the same side that had crushed Romania but, against all expectations, it was Yugoslavia that drew first blood, scoring after only four minutes of play. In front of a crowd of nearly 80,000 eager spectators the hosts soon drew level, courtesy of a goal by Pedro Cea. By half-time they were 3-1 up, with the irrepressible Anselmo scoring twice. The build-up to the third goal apparently included a touch by a policeman, who kicked the ball back into play after it had rolled off the pitch. It was a curious incident but, in the end, not one that mattered terribly. Uruguay scored another three goals in the second half, with Cea completing his hat-trick and Iriarte scoring his first goal of the tournament. The semi-final, ultimately, was a desperately one-sided affair, with Uruguay scoring more goals in it than they had in their previous two games combined.

Uruguay's opponents in the final were their nearest neighbours and oldest foes: Argentina. They had a tougher route to the final as they were in the only first-round group

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with a full complement of four teams and also had to overcome France, the strongest of the four European teams in the competition. The French eased to a 4-1 victory over Mexico in their first match of the tournament and then met Argentina in the group's second game. The peculiar schedule of matches hardly helped the French as they had to face a fresh Argentina only two days after beating Mexico. Their cause was also not helped by early injuries to two of their players, which meant that they had to play most of the match with only nine fit men (no substitutes were allowed back then).

The French managed to hold out until nine minutes from the end when they conceded a goal from a poorly defended free kick. They almost got back into the match when their left-winger bore down on the Argentinean goal but he was halted by the referee blowing his whistle for full time. That would be irritating enough at the best of times, but the official had inadvertently ended the match six minutes earlier than he should have. Lengthy complaints from the French ensued and, after the referee finally accepted his error, the game was restarted. However, whatever drive the French had was gone for good and no further goals were scored. The spectators thought so much of the Frenchmen's efforts, however, that they carried some of them off the pitch on their shoulders. The watching Uruguayan players also commented afterwards that France should have won the game, though they may have said that just to antagonise their rivals from across the River Plate.

After that initial flurry of excitement events proceeded more smoothly for the Argentineans. They won their next two group matches at a canter; a 6-3 win against Mexico followed by a 3-1 victory over Chile. Then, in the semi-finals they encountered the surprise team of the tournament: the USA. Little was initially expected of the Americans but their unorthodox tactics caught both their Belgian and Paraguayan opponents unawares. Their approach of defending in large

numbers and then counter-attacking was novel for the time and neither of their challengers in the first-round group could fathom out how to respond to it. The USA defeated Belgium 3-0 in their opening match and then repeated the scoreline against Paraguay to book their place in the last four. The latter victory was particularly impressive as Paraguay had finished as runners-up at the previous year's South American Championship, beating Uruguay 3-0 in the process.

The Argentineans were a much classier outfit than the Americans, however, and it soon showed. They overwhelmed their opponents, taking the lead after 20 minutes and then scoring a further five goals in the second half. It was an impressive performance by the men from Buenos Aires, though a serious injury to one of the American players just before the break also had some bearing on the outcome. Even the American trainer had a bad day. He ran on to the pitch to remonstrate with the referee over a foul, dropped a bottle of chloroform from his medical kit and had to be helped back to the stands by his considerably more alert colleagues.

It was fortunate for FIFA that Uruguay and Argentina were in opposite sections of the draw as only a clash between these two teams could produce a World Cup Final worthy of the name. None of the other sides in the tournament, with the possible exception of France, had been able to trouble either of the two South American neighbours and the competition desperately needed a well-contested final. Argentinean fans sailed across the River Plate in their thousands for the game, eager to see their team avenge the defeat suffered at the 1928 Olympics.

The new Centenario stadium was full and many disappointed fans, some with valid tickets, were locked outside when the gates were closed half an hour before kick-off. Those that got in were searched by the police for handguns and revolvers and the tension rose even higher when it emerged that

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one of the key Argentinean players, Luis Monti, had received death threats in his hotel on the morning of the game.

If anyone was to receive such a word of warning, then it was bound to be Monti; the pantomime villain of 1930s international football. If you wanted to be charitable about his style of play, you would call it robust. Those on the receiving end of his challenges probably had some rather more choice words to describe it, however, and Monti courted trouble throughout the tournament.

The match against France was only two minutes old when he caught an opposing striker's ankle and left him limping for the rest of the game. Then, in the clash with Chile, he started a brawl on the pitch in which over 30 players and officials eventually became involved before it was broken up by the police. One suspects that the match between Argentina and Mexico only passed off without incident because Monti didn't play.

It would be unfair, however, to simply dismiss Monti as a bruiser. He was the pivot of the Argentinean team, acting as their playmaker when they had the ball and marker of the opposing centre-forward when they didn't. It's probably fair to say that Argentina's fate at the World Cup rested more heavily on his shoulders than on any other single player in their team. After 1930 he moved to Italy and, because of the more relaxed rules in place at the time, was able to play for their national team at the 1934 World Cup.

He ended up on the winning side that time, so becoming the only player in the history of the World Cup to have appeared in two finals for different nations. The nature of the man can perhaps best be summed up by an incident that took place in a match when Chelsea toured Argentina in 1929. In what was supposed to be a friendly game Monti offered to shake the hand of one of the Englishmen and, as the gesture was about to be reciprocated, promptly kicked him. Nice. Monti may

not have been the captain of the Argentinean side but he was, without doubt, their most dominant, and brutal, character.

The 1930 World Cup Final was played in a febrile atmosphere. The referee selected to keep control of the incendiary fixture was a Belgian, John Langenus. He was familiar with the combatants, having been a linesman for their clash at the 1928 Olympics, and had already officiated over three World Cup matches involving either Uruguay or Argentina. However, he was so concerned by the fervour of the fans that he only agreed to take charge of the World Cup Final on condition that he was given a police escort to the port once the game was over, where a boat was waiting to take him and his family back to Europe. Clearly he didn't want to stay in a restless Montevideo a minute longer than he had to. Before the match started the two teams even had a row over which ball they were going to use, both wanting to use one made in their own country. The referee wisely resolved the dispute by suggesting that they play with the away team's favoured ball in the first half, and then the home team's in the second period.

Uruguay would have preferred to play the same XI that had thrashed Romania and Yugoslavia but, unfortunately, Anselmo had to miss the final after falling ill. His place was taken by the one-handed Castro, with the remainder of the team staying the same. The match started at a furious pace, with Uruguay making all the running. They scored the first goal through Dorado after 12 minutes of play, but were only able to hold on to their lead for eight minutes before the Argentineans breached their defence and scored an equaliser. Luis Monti may have been disconcerted by the threats he received but there was no evidence that it was affecting his football. He competed with his usual verve and vigour, playing a key role in the second goal which gave Argentina the advantage at half-time. The goal was scored by Guillermo Stábile, whose international career had all the brilliance and longevity of a firework. He

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made his debut at the 1930 World Cup, scored eight goals in four matches, finished as the tournament's leading scorer, left to play football in Italy and then never played for his country again. Curious days.

Uruguay played much better in the second half, following Nasazzi's half-time exhortations for them to raise their game. What was just as crucial, however, was Argentina's failure of nerve. Luis Monti was anonymous after the break, the death threats perhaps finally having the desired effect, while an injury to one of his team-mates only served to tilt the balance further in the hosts' direction. With their midfield warrior neutralised, Argentina were effectively doomed. Cea scored an equaliser after 57 minutes, Iriarte put Uruguay into the lead after 68 minutes and Castro made sure of the victory when he headed the ball into the net one minute from the end of the game.

It was, in retrospect, a truly grand final and Uruguay's victory meant they were able to claim, with some justification, that they still had the best football team in the world. Montevideo celebrated long into the night and the following day was declared a national holiday. Meanwhile, in the Argentinean capital, their bitter rivals hurled stones at the Uruguayan embassy. One can only wonder what would have happened if the final had been played on the other side of the River Plate. Perhaps with home advantage and an unthreatened Luis Monti, Argentina would have prevailed. Perhaps if they had volunteered to host the World Cup finals rather than let their neighbours take the strain, Argentina would have been the first holders of the Jules Rimet trophy. Perhaps.

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When the Scots arrived back on to the pitch for the second half the Uruguayan players were already standing there, patiently waiting for them. The pale-blue-shirted players made a point of fixing their glares on the Scots, making it abundantly clear

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that they were up for the challenge of clawing back the two-goal deficit. Some of the Scottish players returned the stares with fierce grimaces of their own, though others were clearly cowed; either averting their gaze or dropping their heads to the floor. Jimmy McMullan saw it all and was particularly concerned to notice that the left-back, Tommy Law, was one of those who had anxiously looked away. He had spent most of the first half protecting the youngster from the Uruguayan attackers but he knew he no longer had the energy to keep doing so. Law was about to embark on the longest 45 minutes of his life and there was little that McMullan would be able to do to help him through it.

If any of the Scottish players harboured any doubts about whether the Uruguayans really had the stomach for the fight, then they were soon disabused of them. The hosts came storming out at the start of the second half, not only taking the game to the Scots but also hurling themselves into some of the most committed tackles that the visitors had ever felt. Both sides had made a few full-bodied challenges in the first half, but they paled in comparison with the ferocious approach that the home team were now taking to the game. At the heart of the Uruguayan onslaught was the side's captain, José Nasazzi, who led by example; his tackling full of venom and attacking full of purpose. The Scots were rocked back on their heels by the sheer force of the Uruguayan attack and their five famed forwards could only watch helplessly as their defensive colleagues struggled to hold back the tide.

McMullan and Law, in particular, were having real trouble containing the hosts. The Scottish captain's ageing limbs had little left to give, leaving the unprotected Law at the mercy of Dorado's pace and Scarone's intelligent runs. The Uruguayan causing most damage, however, was their right-half, José Andrade. His first-half battle with McMullan had been an evenly balanced struggle, but the shattered Scotsman was no longer

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able to match the younger man's energy. Andrade duly made the right flank his own, running with the ball into the Scottish half of the pitch almost at will and spraying passes around with ease. Bradshaw did his best to protect the penalty area but was unable to prevent every attack from getting through and Harkness was soon called on to make a couple of fine saves.

It had been clear from early in the second half that a goal was coming for Uruguay and the only surprise was that the Scottish defence lasted out as long as it did; the second period of the game being almost 15 minutes old when the hosts finally got the goal that their determined fightback deserved. The move started, rather inevitably, with Andrade who effortlessly skipped past another tired challenge from McMullan. He had time to look up and see Castro peeling away from Bradshaw, whose attention was distracted by Scarone's darting run. Andrade lofted the ball up to Castro, who had made his way to the edge of the penalty area, and now stood unmarked. The centre-forward turned his back to the Scottish goal, so that he could better judge the flight of the pass, and then jumped to intercept it. Castro flicked his head to the right, sending the ball straight into the path of the onrushing Cea. Nelson threw himself down towards the Uruguayan's feet but was too late to prevent Cea from striking the ball with all his might; the ball shooting off the forward's foot and crashing past Harkness's outstretched arm. Scotland may still have held the lead but even the few neutrals in the ground couldn't see them holding on to it for long. Uruguay were on the rise again.

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Two months before the start of the World Cup Scotland played their fourth-ever international match outside of Britain. Their opponents were France, who departed shortly afterwards for South America. The Scottish team was a fairly strong one, with John Thomson in goal, Jimmy Nelson in defence and Alex Jackson and Hughie Gallacher in the forward line, though

the absence of any players from the double-winning Glasgow Rangers side effectively prevented it from being a genuine first XI. The Scots won the match 2-0, both goals scored by Gallacher who could undoubtedly have had more had the French goalkeeper not been in such fine form. History may have forgotten this fixture but it is an important game in the context of this book as it is the only real tangible clue we have of how Scotland may have fared at the World Cup, had they taken part.

The French side that Scotland beat without too much difficulty performed pretty well at the 1930 World Cup, winning their opening game against Mexico before losing to a late goal against Argentina. The French played most of that game with only nine fit men, had had just one day's rest after beating Mexico and were playing a side that were as fresh as daisies. The slender margin of Argentina's victory over a tired French side thus speaks volumes for the prospects of a Scotland entry in the tournament. After all, if a below-strength Scottish side could beat the French in Paris then surely their best XI could have severely tested the Argentineans on neutral ground.

As it was, Scotland's focus was still fixed on the annual clashes with their British neighbours. After the aberration of the 1927/28 British Home Championships, when they finished a lowly third, normal service was resumed in 1928/29. Scotland won all three of their fixtures, putting four goals past the Welsh in Glasgow and seven past the Irish in Belfast. All 11 of these goals were scored by 'Wembley Wizards', with Gallacher notching seven, Jackson two and Dunn and James getting a goal apiece. The concluding game with the English at Hampden Park was a much more sedate affair, with the hosts winning by virtue of a goal scored in the game's dying minutes. The goal was notable for the fact that it was scored direct from a corner, the stiff wind helping to blow it in the right direction for the Scots. What also hindered the English was that their

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goalkeeper was rooted to the floor as the ball was crossed, his feet pinned down by a mischievous Gallacher.

The 1929/30 Home Championships got off to a familiar start for the Scots, with the Welsh being beaten 4-2 in Cardiff. Once again the 'Wizards' scored all of the goals; Gallacher getting a brace and James and Gibson a goal each. Gallacher was on the scoresheet again when the Irish were put to the sword in Glasgow, scoring twice in a 3-1 victory. England also recorded victories over the Welsh and Irish (scoring an impressive nine goals in the process) to set up another end-of-season showdown with the Scots for the trophy. It was the Scots' first visit to Wembley since the 'Wizards' had run amok two years earlier and English hearts were burning for revenge.

What Scotland should have done, of course, was field the same XI that had humiliated England in 1928. However, the selectors, in their wisdom, picked a side that omitted too many of the nation's finest talents. Six of the side were Glasgow Rangers players, including four of the team's five defenders. It was an understandable decision, given that Rangers had just won the Scottish league title for the fourth year in a row, but it turned out to be the wrong one. English-based players were also largely ignored, with only three being selected. In total, only five of the 'Wizards' from 1928 were picked again; Harkness, Law, Jackson, James and Morton. The most damaging omission from the side was undoubtedly the prolific Gallacher, though that couldn't be blamed on the selectors. He was due to play but decided that he should appear instead for his club side, Newcastle United, who were fighting against relegation and had a crucial fixture against Arsenal on the same day.

England duly took advantage of the poorly constructed Scottish side, taking the lead after only 11 minutes of play and then embarking on a five-minute goal frenzy which gave them a four-goal advantage at the half-hour mark. The Scots

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managed to get a goal back early in the second half, but England soon restored their four-goal lead and a further Scottish goal did nothing to change the game's inevitable outcome. Much of the damage was done by Derby County's flying winger, Sammy Crooks, who gave Tommy Law a torrid time and played a key role in four of England's five goals. The poor Law was never selected for Scotland again, though that may not have been entirely due to his woeful display at Wembley. In the 1930s the English Football League made it extremely difficult for the Scots, Welsh and Irish to select their best sides for international matches, decreeing that clubs were not obliged to release their non-English players when international fixtures clashed with league games, which, of course, they invariably did.

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In an attempt to halt the Uruguayan offensive, Scotland started to venture out of their half of the pitch and attack the opposition goal. That ploy was met with vicious resistance by the home side who hacked down the Scots at every opportunity. Fernández was one of the worst culprits, but it was Mascheroni that committed the game's most infamous foul. His failure to contain Morton in the first half had resulted in him receiving some harsh and unrelenting feedback at the interval and, determined not to be outdone by Morton again, the right-back decided he would do whatever was needed to neutralise the Scotman's impact on the game. His opportunity came when Morton received the ball wide on the left flank and, as the Scotsman pushed the ball forward slightly, Mascheroni hurled himself, two-footed, at both man and ball. The force of the challenge knocked Morton clean off the pitch, to the evident delight of the cheering home fans and the Uruguayan players.

The Scotsman tried to get back on his feet straight away, but as soon as he put pressure on his right leg intense pain wracked his limb. Morton managed to stifle his instinctive reaction, only

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allowing himself to reveal a desperate grimace; stiff upper lip and all that. While bearing his wounds with stoicism may have been achievable, walking was another matter altogether. The brutal tackle reduced Morton to a forlorn figure, limping along the touchline and unable to have any real impact on the game. In the future, more humane rules would be introduced to allow an injured footballer to leave the pitch and be replaced by a substitute. Back in 1930, however, that change was many years away; Scotland having no alternative other than to soldier on with only ten fit men.

Uruguay duly took full advantage of the situation and, with Scotland's left flank in ruins, they inevitably pushed all their attacking moves down that side of the pitch. McMullan did his best to keep Andrade in check, but the Uruguayan was not to be contained. He drove his side forward, even mocking the Scottish captain by slipping the ball between his legs and performing his party trick of balancing the ball on his head while skipping past another weary tackle. If facing a resurgent Uruguay with only ten players wasn't hard enough, the Scots also had to contend with a referee who didn't appear to have their interests at heart. Not only had the Brazilian official failed to restrain the Uruguayan's harsh tackling, he also opted not to punish Mascheroni for his ferocious tackle on Morton. The Scots were used to tough games back home, but at least the officials there knew when to intervene to prevent things from getting out of hand. If all of that wasn't bad enough, the referee then handed Uruguay the perfect opportunity to equalise.

The incident began when Dorado received a fine pass from Andrade and bore down on Law, who backtracked into the penalty area in an attempt to defend Harkness's goal. As the Uruguayan outside-left lifted his foot to strike the ball Law slid in with a tackle that took it cleanly away from him. The force of the challenge brought Dorado to the floor and, as he picked himself up, he was surprised to see the referee pointing to the

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penalty spot. It was a fair tackle but the bellowing crowd had clearly convinced the Brazilian official otherwise. The Scots protested vigorously but their complaints were to no avail, with the referee making it clear that he was not going to change his decision. Harkness made a decent effort of trying to save Castro's spot-kick, diving the right way and getting a hand to the ball, but the power of the shot took it over the line. There were still 20 minutes left to play and, to all those watching, that appeared to be ample time for Uruguay to find the winner.

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In the aftermath of the 1930 World Cup Final the football associations of Uruguay and Argentina severed relations. The match had evoked emotions so strong that even the administrators no longer felt able to talk to each other. It was a sad outcome, especially considering that it was the Argentineans who had helped to put forward Uruguay's case for hosting the tournament at the FIFA congress in Barcelona a year earlier. Even sadder was the fact that this began a period of 20 years during which Uruguay voluntarily cast themselves into the football wilderness; the spirit of adventure that drove them across the Atlantic to compete in the 1924 and 1928 Olympics disappearing into a haze of recriminations. Uruguay didn't take part in either the 1934 World Cup in Italy or the 1938 World Cup in France, their absence commonly being attributed to them still being angry about being rebuffed by the Europeans in 1930. When Uruguay finally took part in another World Cup (in Brazil in 1950) they won it again, breaking the hosts' hearts with a surprise victory over them in the final game of the tournament.

The crest on the modern Uruguayan shirt displays four stars: two to celebrate their Olympic triumphs of 1924 and 1928 and two to commemorate their World Cup victories in 1930 and 1950. One can only imagine how differently Scotland would view its own football history if its team wore

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a shirt sporting a star. For better or worse, the history of the English national team revolves around the World Cup-winning team of 1966; the tests and trials that came before it, and the disappointments and frustrations that followed, often being referenced to that pivotal moment. Consequently, the England shirt has a star on it, reminding their long-suffering fans that at least their side reigned supreme once. The Scots were a similarly dominant force back in the inter-war period but, unfortunately, have little to show for it now.

The principal blame for Scotland's failure to make its mark on the global stage in the 1920s and 1930s must lie with the administrators that ran their game back then. They rarely sent the national side abroad to test themselves against unfamiliar opposition, with the height of their ambition being limited to beating England at Wembley. The Uruguayans, by contrast, had the vision to see what the game could be, rather than being obsessed with respecting its traditions. That foresight gave them the opportunity to become the best in the world while the Scots, sadly, didn't realise that it was already getting quite late in the day for them to have their hour in the sun.

Scotland still had a decent team when the next World Cup was held in Italy but, again, chose not to compete. However, even if they had, it's unlikely that they would have returned home with the trophy. Not only did the Italians have an impressive side that year, but they were also ably supported by Mussolini's fascist regime which was desperate for a morale-boosting victory on home soil. No British teams took part in the 1938 World Cup in France either, though by that time the English had supplanted the Scots as the strongest of the home nations.

The World Cup was suspended during the Second World War, but when it was revived again in 1950 the British nations finally deigned to take part. The Scots secured a place at the finals in Brazil but, bizarrely, turned it down. FIFA had agreed

to the British Home Championship being used as a qualifying group, with the two top-placed teams going through. In what was probably the greatest act of hubris in the history of the competition, Scotland declared that they would only go to South America if they won the championship. They proceeded to thrash the Irish 8-2 and then beat the Welsh, but a narrow defeat at home to England resulted in a second-place finish. So they stayed at home.

Scotland belatedly made their World Cup finals debut in 1954 but they were heavily, and perhaps deservedly, punished for the arrogant stance that they had taken to the competition over the previous 24 years. They only played two games, losing them both: the first to Austria and the second, ironically, to Uruguay, 7-0. Scotland's history in the World Cup after that is well known; failure to progress beyond the first round of the finals being followed by the disappointment of not even qualifying for the finals at all. If Scotland were to have won a World Cup, then 1930 was not just their best chance; it was their only chance. Not only did they have one of the most talented groups of players that the country is ever likely to produce, but they could also have competed in a tournament which many of the best teams in the world had declined to attend.

The Scots had the players to win a World Cup in 1930 but lacked a visionary leader to show them the way. The French had Jules Rimet, who not only helped to make the dream of a World Cup a reality, but also ensured that the national team sailed halfway around the world in order to take part. What the Scots most desperately needed in 1930 was such a figure; a man who could bully and cajole clubs into releasing their best players; a man who could persuade recalcitrant players that the long journey was worth making; a man who could see where football was headed and what it would eventually become. If the Scottish FA had such a man in their ranks in

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1930 then perhaps the national side would be playing today in shirts sporting a star proudly above the thistles and lion rampant. There was a brief moment in time when Scotland had the world at its feet, but it came and went before they even realised what they had missed. It's hard to see that they'll get another chance.

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With a man down and Uruguay in the ascendancy the Scots should have been dead and buried. To their credit, however, they refused to lie down and die. Their left flank may have been of little use but their right-sided players were full of vigour and attacking intent. Gibson was clearly getting the better of Gestido, while Jackson's pace and movement were testing even the great Nasazzi. Dunn may have had a poor season with Everton but he was like a man reborn in Uruguay, playing the precise and delicate passes that had so attracted the attentions of the great Merseyside club in the first place. The last third of the half should have belonged to the home side but the Scots' refusal to give up the match as lost resulted in a frenetic final few minutes, with the game being as evenly balanced at its end as it was at its start.

Morton was still limping out on the left wing and the pitiful figure he struck greatly irked Gallacher. He dearly longed for a chance to mete out some retribution on Mascheroni but the opportunity just wouldn't present itself so, with time running out, he opted instead to settle the score with the first Uruguayan to cross his path. Gallacher's short fuse had already been exposed in the semi-final against Argentina, when he had clashed with their chief bruiser: Luis Monti. The Argentinean seemed to take exception to the diminutive Gallacher's refusal to be cowed by him, and, after a series of unsavoury tackles, the two of them began trading blows. It hardly looked to be a fair contest, with Monti towering over the undersized Scot, but Gallacher refused to be intimidated, aiming a volley of

IF ONLY

punches at his opponent's midriff. The Scottish striker had boxed as a youngster, with his fierce temper amplifying his natural pugilistic talents, and he was more than a match for the much larger Monti. As the saying goes, sometimes it's about the size of the fight in the dog rather than the size of the dog in the fight. The two combatants were soon separated, but the incident was not lost on the watching Uruguayans who noted just how fearsome the little Scot could be.

Gallacher had managed to contain his temper throughout most of the match against Uruguay, but when Fernández jabbed a sharp elbow in his ribs he finally exploded. Before the offending Uruguayan had the chance to move away, Gallacher launched his fist at his chin. The punch connected and Fernández collapsed to the floor, clutching his jaw in agony. The Brazilian referee may not have spotted Gallacher's strike, but many of the crowd did and they erupted in a din of indignation. It certainly wasn't a wise move to have provoked the volatile home fans and Gallacher's team-mates openly cursed him, fearing that his actions would affect the safety of them all. There were nearly 70,000 men screaming in rage at Gallacher and all that separated them from him were a few flimsy fences. The confrontation between Fernández and Gallacher threatened to boil over into an all-out brawl but the referee soon restored order, calming the bruised Uruguayan and taming the fiery Scotsman.

When the game finally restarted, there were less than five minutes left to play. Uruguay's forwards thundered towards the Scottish goal, desperate to get the goal that would give them the victory that their fans expected of them. Nelson was resolute in defence and, after taking the ball from Iriarte's feet, lofted it 20 yards upfield to Dunn's feet. The little Scotsman turned so quickly that his movement caught out the dazed Fernández, the Uruguayan accidentally clipping his heels as he tried to get to the ball. The referee immediately blew for a foul

TRIUMPH IN MONTEVIDEO

and Alex James sauntered over to take the free kick, midway between the halfway line and the edge of the Uruguayan penalty area.

Dunn noticed that James was starting to look a little weary, so he reminded him that extra time would be needed if the game was still level after 90 minutes. James puffed out his cheeks, shook his head, muttered something unrepeatable and then lofted the ball into the penalty area. The pass, played just in front of Jackson, was inch-perfect; the outside-right smashing his header past the helpless Ballestrero. The Brazilian referee came under great pressure to rule the goal out for some minor infringement that Gallacher was alleged to have incurred, but he stood firm and instructed the game to be restarted in the centre circle. The raucous Uruguayan crowd screamed at their players as they frantically retook their positions, urging them to find an equaliser in the last few breathless moments that remained of the match.

The closing minutes of the game passed in a blur for the Scottish players. They chased and harried the home side for all they were worth, dashing all over the pitch in one last fraught attempt to keep them away from their goal. Then, after what seemed like an eternity, the Scots finally heard a shrill whistle above the ceaseless clamour of the crowd. Against all odds, they had beaten the best team in the world in their own back yard and there were few neutrals there that day that begrudged them their brave victory. Would they hear about it in England? Well, maybe not that day, or even the day after but, for the next 36 years, barely an hour would pass without some Englishman being reminded of what happened on that great day in Montevideo when Scotland became the champions of the world.