Team GB: united or untied? 
Contemporary nationalism, national identity and British Olympic football teams at London 2012

This item was submitted to Loughborough University’s Institutional Repository by the/an author.

Additional Information:

• A Doctoral Thesis. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University.

Metadata Record: [https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/8370](https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/8370)

Publisher: © Darren Marks

Please cite the published version.
This item was submitted to Loughborough’s Institutional Repository (https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.

For the full text of this licence, please go to:
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/
Team GB: United or Untied? Contemporary Nationalism, National Identity and British Olympic Football Teams at London 2012

By

Darren Marks

A Doctoral Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Loughborough University

December 2010

© Darren Marks (2010)
For my wife, Rowena
Abstract

At the London 2012 Olympic Games, a football team representing Great Britain & Northern Ireland will take to the field for the first time since 1972. This research uses the often fractious and acrimonious debate surrounding this issue to gain insights and understandings about contemporary national identity and nationalisms in the United Kingdom. In particular, the objective is to show how these concepts may be influenced, affected or altered by the existence or absence thereof of a Great Britain Olympic football team at London 2012. A virtual ethnographic approach is adopted and a number of websites are identified where discussion and debate has already been undertaken between fans of the home nations teams: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The expectation was that the debate would reflect parallel political arguments regarding the constitutional make up of the United Kingdom. However, it transpired that this was not the case and the association between sporting and political arguments was less fervent and profound than was anticipated. This suggests that there is a degree of satisfaction among fans concerning the footballing and political status quo, particularly now that the way football is organised in the UK reflects the political make-up of the UK more than ever. A number of themes emerge, most notably those relating to anti-Englishness and the common conflation of England and Great Britain. The issue of social class is identified as being significant to these processes and the working class following and ethos that football has is central to this. Comparisons are made with cricket and rugby union to illustrate these points, and the significance of the England team’s continued use of symbols that are usually associated with the UK, such as the anthem ‘God Save the Queen’, is identified as contributing to instances of conflation. In these regards, the work of several theorists is deemed to be helpful in detailing the contemporary significance of nationalism. But it is the ‘banal nationalism’ of Michael Billig that is seen to be most important and appropriate in describing the significance of the home nations teams to continuing constructions of the nation.
Acknowledgements

I would first like to offer my sincere thanks to my research supervisor, Alan Bairner, for his continued intellectual support and guidance throughout the course of this research. I feel particularly fortunate and honoured to have been supervised by one of the leading experts on sport, nationalism and national identity in the UK and his advice and encouragement has always been very gratefully received. Doing a PhD is a very solitary undertaking, and it often felt like I was riding an emotional rollercoaster. So, whenever I was feeling low, a visit to see Alan was always a tonic, and he never failed to make me feel better, much happier and more confident about my work. He also never failed to make me laugh and his friendship whilst I have been at Loughborough has been something that I have really enjoyed. He was even very gracious and hardly ribbed me at all as we sat down for a pint after his Derby County team had just walloped my beloved Crystal Palace five-nil.

There are several other people at Loughborough University that I would like to thank. First of all, I would like to thank my Director of Research, John Evans, for his quiet support and guidance. I would also like to thank Dominic Malcolm for his encouragement and patience in helping me to begin to teach the Sociology of Sport. Some friends at Loughborough have also been important to me, particularly Nakyoung Kim for frequently making me roar with laughter, and also Andrea Scott for her friendship and for sharing with me the highs and lows of being a PhD student. I also wish to show my gratitude to the School of Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences at Loughborough for their generous bursary, without which this research would not have been possible.

Friends and family have always been important to me, but this has never been more so than during the last three years. Many friends have taken the time to visit us whilst we have been living in Leicester, some on more than one occasion, and I would like to thank them for doing so. So thanks must go to John, Ian, Andy, Joe, Ben, Stuart and Pete. My parents, Carol and John, have also been to visit us on a number of occasions and have been incredibly supportive throughout the course of my PhD. I do not think it has always been easy for them to adjust to seeing their only child move so
far away from Sussex, but they have handled it remarkably well. Much love and my enormous thanks go to them too.

But by far the greatest thanks though must go to my wife, Rowena. She has supported me ceaselessly throughout the last three years and, indeed, has done so since we got together almost six years ago to the day. It was a big decision to give up our lives in Brighton to move to Leicester but we knew that it was the right thing to do. I also knew that the right thing to do would be to marry her, and I am very proud to say that I did so in June of last year. The ultimate success of this research then is hers. She was my inspiration and she believed in me when at times I did not believe in myself. I cannot thank her enough for that and I cannot express in words how much I love her.

Darren Marks
Leicester
December 2010
The point about football in Britain is that it is not just a sport people take to, like cricket or tennis or running long distances. It is inherent in the people. It is built into the urban psyche, as much a common experience to our children as are uncles and school. It is not a phenomenon; it is an everyday matter. There is more eccentricity in deliberately disregarding it than in devoting a life to it. It has more significance in the national character than theatre has. Its sudden withdrawal from the people would bring deeper disconsolation than to deprive them of television. The way we play the game, the way we organize it and reward it reflects the kind of community we are.

From Arthur Hopcraft’s *The Football Man*
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................. 2  
Acknowledgements ..................................................... 3  
Table of Contents .................................................... 6  

**Introduction** .................................................... 10  

**Chapter One: Theories of Nationalism** ....................... 17  
1.1 Nationalism: Some Introductory Thoughts ................. 17  
1.2 Modernist Theories of Nationalism ......................... 21  
1.2.1 Industrialisation ........................................... 22  
1.2.2 Invented Traditions ....................................... 25  
1.2.3 Imagined Communities .................................... 28  
1.3 Ethnosymbolism .................................................. 31  
1.4 Social Constructions of Nationalism ....................... 34  
1.5 Summary: Theories of Nationalism ......................... 39  

**Chapter Two: Nationalism and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** .......... 41  
2.1 Contextualising the UK State ................................. 41  
2.1.1 The UK and Nationalism .................................. 43  
2.2 Wales and Nationalism ........................................ 48  
2.3 Northern Ireland and Unionism ............................. 53  
2.4 Scotland and Nationalism ..................................... 58  
2.5 England and Nationalism ..................................... 64  
2.6 Summary: Nationalism and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ............ 70  

**Chapter Three: Sport and Nationalism** ....................... 71  
3.1 Understanding Sport and Nationalism ....................... 71  
3.2 Sport, Nationalism and the Consolidation of National Identity ........................................ 78  
3.3 Sport and Submerged Nations ................................ 84  
3.4 Summary: Sport and Nationalism ............................ 88
Introduction

On Wednesday 6th July 2005, thousands of people gathered around huge TV screens that had been especially erected in London’s Trafalgar Square in the hope of seeing British sporting history being made. They were there to watch the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Jacques Rogge, announce via satellite link from the IOC meeting in Singapore, which of five competing bids had won the right to host the 2012 Olympic Games. As Moscow, then New York City and then Madrid were eliminated from the ballot in turn, it left just Paris and London to compete for the honour of hosting the Games. With the Trafalgar Square crowd on tenterhooks and millions of others in the United Kingdom and around the world following events on television, radio and the Internet, just before ten minutes to one, Rogge announced that the 2012 Olympic Games would indeed be held in London. The euphoria that followed the announcement was genuine and found expression across the UK but was ultimately cut short less than 24 hours later as suicide bombers detonated a series of devastating devices on London’s transport system.

Whilst planning and preparations for the Games began in earnest almost immediately, very few foresaw one major debate that was to emerge from London’s victory in the bidding process, namely, what was to be done about the Olympic football tournament. Great Britain\(^1\) has won two gold medals in men’s Olympic football tournaments (1908 & 1912) but not since the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome has a team competed in the final stages of an Olympic Games, and after 1972 Great Britain did not enter at all. The reasons for this are varied and relate in part, at least initially, to the

\(^1\) The official name of the UK’s Olympic Team as recognised by the IOC is ‘Great Britain and Northern Ireland’. This is often shortened in relation to the Olympics to ‘Great Britain’, or as in more recent times, ‘Team GB’.
requirement of Olympic tournaments to feature only amateur rather than professional players, a distinction that the Football Association removed in 1974. Secondly, there were concerns that the independent status that the British home nations teams enjoy, might be compromised if they played as Great Britain in the Olympic Games. Thirdly, the rivalry between the home nations is particularly intense and fractious whenever football is involved. However, it was seen to be important that a team representing Great Britain should compete in the Olympic Games in London. This was not only because it was the British who had done so much to give the game to the world, but also because of the added stipulation that host nations are obliged to compete in all Olympic events.

In terms of official attitudes, however, only the British Olympic Association (BOA) (Goodbody, 2004), the Football Association (FA) (“GB team cleared for 2012”, 2005) and the British government (“Brown wants British Football team”, 2008) have been in favour of both male and female teams representing the UK in the 2012 Olympic football tournaments in London². Significant opposition to the proposal has come from the Scottish National Party (SNP) (ibid.), the Irish Football Association (IFA), the Scottish Football Association (SFA) and the Football Association of Wales (FAW) (Winter, 2005; Luney, 2007; Macaskill, 2008), as well as from a coalition of football fan groups represented by an organisation named No Team GB³. However, at the end of May 2009, the SFA, IFA and FAW reached an agreement with both the

² The preferences of the FA are of particular importance because it is they rather than the SFA, IFA or FAW that are affiliated to the BOA, and by association to the IOC. Also, as the Olympic football tournament is a FIFA affiliated event, FIFA have insisted that the British associations reach an agreement as to how this team will be constituted.

³ No Team GB is a coalition of national football supporters associations in the United Kingdom, all of whom are opposed to a united GB football team: The Association of Tartan Army clubs (ATAC - Scotland), Football Supporters Federation (FSF - England), Football Supporters Federation Cymru (FSF - Wales) and the Amalgamation of Official NI Supporters Clubs (AONISC - Northern Ireland).
BOA and FA that an all-English team should represent Team GB at football in 2012, with players from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland playing no part at all (Lydall, 2009).

What is also significant is that whilst the debate was sometimes entered into between these official interests, much more intensive and interesting debate was being engaged in elsewhere among fans of the home nations teams. Most significantly, this part of the debate was not only to be found in the places that it might have been in the past, such as in newspapers and radio phone-in shows, though in truth in some cases it certainly was. But debate was also increasingly evident in prominent websites across the Internet. Importantly, the Internet allows contributors to actively take part in the debate and discuss the issues at first hand with each other, which is something new and relatively innovative. It is also profoundly interesting sociologically. As the debate progressed, it became increasingly apparent that to an extent it had begun to reflect some interesting and relevant trends or attitudes within UK society more generally.

Clearly, the debate about a Team GB football team, if sensitively handled, can provide interesting insights into the contemporary state of nations and nationalism within the UK. The main objective of the research is then to gain a thorough understanding of the ways that these concepts are felt and experienced by people from all four ‘nations’ of the UK. Of particular interest will be the ways that ideas about nationalism and national identity may be influenced, maintained or transformed by the existence, or absence thereof, of a combined Great Britain Olympic football team competing at London 2012. Additionally, it is hoped that the debate surrounding this
eventuality will provide understandings about the complex relationships between football, sport and national identity in the UK, whilst also shedding light on the tensions and contradictions that are apparent within the context of the various national representative sporting teams in these islands. The notion of Britishness, and how compatible this concept might be with other existing expressions of sporting nationalisms and national identities within the UK, will be central. Using such a new social environment for the purposes of research, whilst providing a number of positive features, nevertheless raises a number of methodological challenges, particularly those relating to the ethics of using publicly available Internet materials for the purposes of research, as well as to the methods themselves that are clearly pre-paradigmatic and very much emerging as an area of speciality. As well as this, there is also an on-going debate about the changing nature of contemporary ethnography, which this research addresses head-on.

The thesis is structured thus. Chapter 1 begins by considering and critically assessing the ways in which theories of nationalism have been explained. The chapter focuses on some of the classic approaches to nationalism provided by the Modernists such as Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1992a, 1992b) and Anderson (1991), and Ethnosymbolists (Smith, 1989, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2007) as well as considering more diverse approaches such as those of Billig (1995) and Özkirimli (2000, 2005). Chapter 2 moves on to consider the ways in which the experiences of nationalism in the UK has been interpreted more generally, before looking more closely at the relationship between nationalism and the component ‘nations’ of the UK, starting with Wales, and then in turn Northern Ireland, Scotland and finally England. Chapter 3 seeks to understand the relationship between sport and nationalism, before looking
specifically at some of the ways that sport has been used in national contexts, and for nationalist ends. This discussion focuses mainly on areas where sport has been implicated in processes that seek the consolidation of national identity and also on sport within submerged nations. Chapter 4 follows on from this by concentrating on the experiences of sport and nationalism in the UK. After considering this, the focus shifts to the component ‘nations’ of the UK and of their individual relationships with sporting nationalisms.

Chapter 5 has the objective of contextualising the paradoxical relationship between the UK and the Olympic Games, given that whilst Great Britain has ordinarily been a good Olympian, its record of competing in and commitment to Olympic football tournaments has been patchy to say the least. Chapter 6 considers the methods that the research utilises. In so doing, positivist and interpretivist approaches to social research are evaluated, and the ontological and epistemological basis of the work is considered. Additionally, the methodology is scrutinized and the appeal of employing a virtual ethnography approach is determined. A number of ethical concerns regarding the use of the methodology are additionally clarified and resolved. The themes that emerge from the data are the focus of Chapter 7, and are presented in turn. This starts by considering two questions: should an all-English team represent Team GB? And why should football be different from any other sport? Then the focus moves on to suggest that a tournament should be held to decide who competes as Team GB. The debate then centres on two contrasting themes, both of which are crucial to the deliberations around a Team GB football team: whether the threat posed to the home nations independent status is an idle one, or in contrast, whether Team GB is a real threat to the independent status of the home nations. The final two themes relate to the
conflation of England and Great Britain (or vice versa), and the status of Olympic football tournaments. In Chapter 8, the data is discussed, and the two most significant and prominent themes from the data, anti-Englishness and the conflation of England and Great Britain, are considered in greater detail and in relation to previous research.

What has been revealed is that the balance between competing British and home nation footballing identities is never static, and is subject to change and transformation over time, with the British dimension to football demonstrably in serious decline. Social class is also significant and the issues of conflation and anti-Englishness that are common in the data are considered in relation to the England cricket team and the British and Irish Lions rugby union team. The predominantly working class appeal and tribalism of football is highlighted to explain the evident hostility towards a Team GB football team and the less antagonistic approach of cricket and rugby fans to the British and Irish Lions and the England cricket team. Additionally, the continued use of the symbols of the UK in relation to the England football team, such as the playing of ‘God Save the Queen’ before England international football matches, is deemed to be significant in signalling the potential conflation of England and Great Britain.

What the study offers most may be split into two parts. Firstly, the study promotes a significantly different and innovative methodological approach that challenges traditional ethnographic techniques and orthodoxies. It also adds knowledge to the emerging field of virtual ethnographies, and in particular those that are beginning to acknowledge the increasing importance of the Internet to football cultures. Secondly, the study suggests that football remains an important indicator of the separate and
distinctive cultures of the UK’s component nations. The ways in which modern football was invented, developed and organised in the UK contributed to the emergence of a historic British dimension to footballing identity, as well providing ample opportunities and scope for the expression and evocation of separate national football teams, cultures and identities. However, it is far harder to determine from the debate the extent to which particular fans’ views reflect cognate political sentiments, or whether they are instead restricted solely to the sphere of sporting nationalisms. In the contemporary era, when Scotland has its own devolved parliament, and the Welsh and Northern Irish their own assemblies, it is the administrative composition of British football that now resembles contemporary political structures more closely than other British sporting bodies such as the BOA. In this respect, the opposition to Team GB that has been apparent is understandable for the simple reason that fans are not used to their players playing together in the same representative team with those who are usually regarded as their rivals.
Chapter One: Theories of Nationalism

This aim of this chapter is to consider and critically appraise some of the significant theoretical perspectives that populate studies of nationalism. This section is significant because it will attempt to identify the appeal and influence of such theories upon political nationalisms and upon nationalists as political groups. Though there may be some merit in considering these arguments in terms of chronology, or more explicitly, by considering the points in history at which particular theories and theorists cite the first existence of nations, the direction that has been chosen takes a more developmental orientation.

Whilst not irrelevant to what follows with regard to the debate about a Team GB football team, many of these theoretical perspectives do not prove to be particularly helpful in understanding what transpires. But in seeking to understand the field of nationalism in a more complete way, it is important to acknowledge and recognise the role that these theories have played in the development of studies of nationalism. So whilst this chapter will look at a number of theoretical perspectives, there will be a particular focus on those that have proved most useful in understanding the debate about a Team GB football team.

1.1 Nationalism: Some Introductory Thoughts

To describe the theoretical landscape of nationalism as sometimes confused and a little messy would be regarded by many as a significant understatement. Though there are numerous perspectives that have been clearly conceived and elucidated in the history of national studies, there remain significant and fundamental theoretical
differences that have in many ways hindered the advancement of the field. In stark contrast, it will become apparent that where theoretical difference is sometimes cited as being critical, close examination reveals that this may not always be as unequivocal as one might expect. These initial concerns are compounded if one considers also the fluid and often blurred conceptual boundaries of the perennial, primordial and ethnosymbolic approaches and also of competing perspectives not only between but also firmly within these paradigms. With these issues in mind, it will be apparent why one may find it at times hard to clearly see the landscape of nationalist theory through the rain.

That being said, for the purposes of this research there is still much to be gained from identifying the major perspectives relating to nations and nationalism. The principle areas that require attention in this regard will be the main perspectives of what has been coined modernist theories of nationalism, focusing on the significance of Eric Gellner’s ‘industrialisation’ theory (1983), Eric Hobsbawm’s individual work (1992a, 1992b) and also his jointly edited work with Terence Ranger (1992) on the ‘invention of traditions’ and Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (1991). Further scrutiny will also be given to ethnosymbolism and finally, some attention will be paid to social constructionist theories of nationalism, which in recent years have tried to move nationalism forward and beyond what have become the entrenched, theoretical positions that perpetually dominate the field. To commence though, it would be pertinent to consider some general thoughts about nations and nationalism before moving on to consider specific theories in more detail.

That there can be no nationalism without theory is an assertion made by Michael
Billig in his groundbreaking 1995 text, *Banal Nationalism*. He argues that the theory of nationalism involves making assumptions about the very notion of the nation: ‘it is a theory of community, as well as a theory about the world being “naturally” divided into such communities’ (Billig, 1995: 63). Billig is important because his conception of nationalism is profoundly different to the other types that we shall go on to look at. His version is concerned broadly with nationalisms that are continually being reminded to us in ways that are routine or ‘banal’:

the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag that is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building’ (1995: 8).

The significance of this form of nationalism is that through varying cultural forms this ‘continual “flagging”, or reminding, of nationhood … is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding’ (*ibid.*). Rather, Billig argues that ‘national identity embraces all these forgotten reminders. Consequently, an identity is to be found in the embodied habits of social life’ (*ibid.*). Billig’s then is a nationalism that finds expression at all times and not just during those occasions where the nation is ordinarily brought to the fore such as during wars or other national crises.

Anthony D Smith has suggested that there are several essential propositions that belong to nationalism that presuppose any effective theorisation or indeed practical implementation of the concept. Smith is a seminal figure in nationalism studies and as we shall go on to see below, his work on the role of ethnicity and ethnic histories in the development of nations and nationalism is of vital importance. For now though we need only reflect on how Smith (1998) identifies five essential propositions of nationalism:

the world is divided into nations, each of which has its peculiar character and destiny; the nation is the source of all political power, and loyalty to it overrides all other loyalties; if they wish to be free and realise themselves, men must identify with and
belong to a nation; global freedom and peace are functions of the liberty and security of all nations; and nations can only be liberated and fulfilled in their own sovereign state (187).

Smith argues that these essential propositions merely offer nationalisms a broad and abstract framework; it has to be filled by all kinds of secondary concepts and particular notions, specific to each national community (ibid.: 24).

It should also be made apparent that when different theories of nationalism are being considered or discussed they are often categorised, rather crudely as we shall see below, as being either ‘ethnic’ or ‘civic’ in character. This distinction emerged initially from the seminal work of Kohn (1944) and was drawn upon the perceived differences between Western and Eastern forms of nationalism. Simply put, Kohn’s dichotomous vision of nationalism saw its Western forms being predicated on political processes and nation-states. In contrast, Kohn saw the experience of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia as less sophisticated and developed, being instead based on community, kinship and status. From these distinctions, the two categories developed into what is now commonly regarded as ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ forms of nationalism.

Generally speaking, civic nationalism, most often associated with the work of Renan (1990), is when ‘the nation is defined in terms of a shared commitment to the public institutions of the state and civil society’ (Özkirimli, 2005: 23). Ethnic nationalism on the other hand is more exclusive in its composition, and instead ‘emphasizes common descent and cultural sameness’ (ibid.: 23). However, one should be cautious about placing too much emphasis or reliance upon these categorisations when attempting to comprehend or conceptualise particular incidences of nationalism. The civic/ethnic dichotomy has been criticised by many theorists including Özkirimli (2005), and most
notably by Kuzio (2002): ‘pure civic or ethnic states only exist in theory. All civic states, whether in the West or the East, are based on ethno-cultural core(s)’ (20). The use of such categories then would be misleading in any study that sought to provide nuanced, yet comprehensive understandings, of particular incidences of nationalisms.

1.2 Modernist Theories of Nationalism

From the catchall term ‘modernist’, one might expect these three perspectives to be theoretically tight and analogous. In some limited ways this proves to be the case, but in others they often reveal themselves to be quite distinct and disparate. According to Smith (2001), ‘there is a widely accepted “history of nationalism”, and it is one that is decidedly modernist’ (87). If, for the moment at least, we consider modernist theories of nationalism as an all-encompassing and bounded theoretical whole we can start to understand how and why they are so important. McCrone (1998) for example has identified what he considers to be some of their key strengths:

modernists are able to show how the ideologies of nationalism connect with processes of social and economic change, and especially with the political and material interests generated by ‘modernisation’ (16).

This is of great significance for two reasons. Firstly, the theorisations provided by the modernists provide a marked break from other theories of nationalism. Secondly, their assertion that nationalism is a modern phenomenon is a notion that has found broad agreement among many theorists such as Kohn (1944), Renan (1990), Armstrong (1982), Connor (1990), Guibernau (2004), Breuilly (1993) and Smith (1989), though significantly, not all favour seeing nations as equally modern. In contrast though, the modernist stance has been criticised at length. Hearn (2006) for example is

---

* Author’s italics.
sympathetic to the modernist approach but thinks that

the very idea of modernity is burdened, if often implicitly, by theoretical paradigms which imagine history in the form of distinct sequential stages, each with its own relatively stable and defining characteristics (115).

Smith (2001) too has argued that modernists have tendencies that look much like ‘blocking presentism’ or ‘an exclusive focus on the views and interests of the present generation in shaping the past’ (83). Also, the term modernism itself is often invoked to describe a broad range of theoretical perspectives, though it should be noted that this invocation is neither welcome nor helpful as

the only apparent point of intersection among these diverse interpretations is their belief in the modernity (in the sense of recent) of nations and nationalism (Özkirimli, 2000: 213).

Özkirimli is correct in this assertion, though he does neglect to acknowledge the Marxist origins of many of the main protagonists of modernist approaches.

1.2.1 Industrialisation

Ernest Gellner is one such modernist theorist who owed a small debt to Marxism. His work centred upon the significance of industrialisation to the development of nations and nationalism, and contrasted sharply with perennialist views of nationalism. He argued that nationalism

*is not* the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself. It is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organisation, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each one protected by its own state (1983: 48)\(^5\).

Central to Gellner’s theorisations were the new labour requirements and practices demanded by industrialisation that he argued would require the men taking part in it to ‘be ready to move from one occupational position to another, even within a single

\(^5\) Author’s italics.
lifespan, and certainly between generations’ (*ibid.*: 140-141). Integral to this was a desire for cultural homogeneity though Gellner was insistent that this was not imposed, rather that ‘it was the objective need for homogeneity that is reflected in nationalism’ (*ibid.*: 46). Hutchinson (2000) has criticised the modernist emphasis on homogeneity by arguing that this fails to adequately acknowledge that most nations are marked by tensions surrounding ethnic diversity and diffuseness (654). Verdery (1996) has two main observations with regard to homogenization. Firstly, in relation to the role of power, which Gellner rarely acknowledges, she suggests that states vary in the intensity of their homogenizing effects, partly as a function of the power held by political elites and the resistances they encounter (231).

Secondly, she argues that the modern state is produced through a totalizing process that entails a relentless press towards homogeneity, *which is simultaneously a process of exclusion* (*ibid.*)

Another requirement that again contributed to the needs of industrialisation’s increasing labour demands was the existence of a literate, high-culture which required an effective and efficient system of state education to sustain it. Gellner (1983) strongly suggested that this would require significant political support and guidance (51). This political facet is reflected in Gellner’s definition of nationalism, which he concludes is ‘primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent’ (*ibid.*: 1), a definition broadly supported by Hobsbawm (1992b).

There is little doubt that Gellner’s theories of nationalism are of enormous significance, not least because he refused the conventionalist wisdom that it derived from atavistic, ethnic instincts, and saw it as a fundamental and modern phenomenon (McCrone, 1998: 64).

---

*Emphasis added.*
That being said, Gellner has been criticised consistently and at length for a variety of reasons. Another of the modernists, Eric Hobsbawm (1992b), whose ideas about the constructed nature of nations and nationalism have some parallels with those of Gellner, argues that

his [Gellner’s] preferred perspective of modernisation from above, makes it difficult to pay adequate attention to the view from below (10-11).

Benedict Anderson (1991) too has cause to comment critically on Gellner’s theorising. His main contention being with Gellner’s assertion that ‘nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist’ (1964: 169). Anderson (1991) concludes that

Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates ‘invention’ to ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’, rather than to ‘imagining’ and ‘creation’ (6).

Anthony D. Smith has been perhaps Gellner’s most prominent critic, and he has drawn attention to some evident weaknesses on a variety of levels. Initially, he argues that

Gellner’s ‘nationalism’ … has little or no connection with what most people mean by the term: the ideologies and movements under whose banner people have sought unity, identity and autonomy for their nation (2001: 67).

A further critique, which has echoes of Hobsbawm’s concerns regarding the top-down approach to explaining nationalism, is offered by Smith when he states that Gellner’s theory ‘has no place for the role of individuals and their ideals’ (ibid.: 68). Additionally, Smith (1998) has argued in relation to causation, that

one might concede that nationalism, is in some sense functional for modern, industrial society on a variety of grounds, but this in no way explains the origins and spread of nationalism (36).

Smith also points out several examples (Serbia, Ireland and Japan to name but a few) whereby he claims that nationalism and nations arrived before industrialisation (ibid.:
36). This is a significant criticism, and one that would influence Smith’s own work on the pre-modern, ethnic origins of nations. In terms of nationalism pre-dating industrialisation, McCrone (1998) is one theorist who agrees with Smith on this point, and in developing his critique further argues that it is hard to find a link between industrialisation and the mass public education programmes upon which Gellner depends so heavily (82).

Tom Nairn (1977) has a similar outlook to Gellner, in that he is concerned with nationalism arising from the new social conditions and organisation required by industrialism. Importantly though, he takes a more explicit Marxist line by regularly substituting ‘industrialisation’ with ‘capitalism’ and further, by advocating that it is actually the uneven development of capitalism that encourages or stimulates further nationalisms. Nairn’s work is important to this research, as is that of Hechter (1975), in that both have more to say about the UK in particular. Nairn (1977) is perhaps most relevant to this research given that he has prophesised the break-up of the UK. This is an assertion that the data and analyses in this research challenge, by suggesting that the UK has broken up as much as it is going to already. Nairn’s approach and use of the UK as a case study has been criticised by Anderson (1991), who points out ‘Nairn’s good nationalist tendency to treat his “Scotland” as an unproblematic, primordial given’ (89).

1.2.2 Invented Traditions

Eric Hobsbawm is another key theorist who takes his cue from Marxism and is more often than not referred to as a modernist. As already mentioned above, Hobsbawm’s work has some parallels with that of Gellner in that he too ‘would stress the element
of artefact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations’ (1992b: 10). Hobsbawm also agrees with Gellner that ‘nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round’ (ibid.). The key differences between their outlooks though are summarised by Hearn (2006) thus:

while the same general historical process lies behind the rise of nationalism for both of them, where Gellner sees the formation of a social identity that is functional for life under modern conditions, Hobsbawm sees an identity that is an ideological illusion, generated by the interests of those benefiting from the capitalist state, and the fears and uncertainties of those confronting the dissolution of more traditional ways of life in the face of capitalist ‘progress’ (70).

Hobsbawm’s main thinking is centred around notions of the ‘invention of traditions’, an idea which sees elites and dominant groups using traditions to infuse particular national sentiments, sympathies and loyalties amongst their populations. Hobsbawm (1992a) defines this as being

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (1).

Hobsbawm identifies two types of ‘invented tradition’. The first are those traditions that are ‘actually invented, constructed and formally instituted’ (ibid.) of which, as an example, he cites the Queen’s annual Christmas address to the nation. The second are those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period … and establishing themselves with great rapidity (ibid.: 46),

which in a further example, he relates to the emergence of traditions and practices associated with the Football Association (FA) Cup Final. Hill (1999) has also considered the FA Cup Final in terms of its significance to nations and national identity. He concluded that it could be most closely associated with the work on ‘banal nationalism’ of Billig (1995).
Significantly too, Hobsbawm (1992b) cites the existence of ‘proto-national bonds’, which he claims are certain variants of feelings of collective belonging which already existed and which could operate … potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit-in with modern states and nations (46).

It is worth pointing out though that Hobsbawm considers the existence of these ‘proto-national bonds’ alone is not sufficient enough to form nationalities, nations or indeed states, nor does he feel them strong enough even to contribute to national patriotism (ibid.).

Calhoun (1997) agrees in part with Hobsbawm and regards the invented character of much tradition as accurate, though he is more critical in two ways. Firstly, he regards all ‘traditions’ to be invented. Secondly, he draws attention to the contested nature and continual reshaping of all such ‘traditions’. Smith (1998) too is highly critical of ‘invented traditions’. His initial criticism, which he suggests is also applicable to the political nationalist theorist, Breuilly (1993), is that Hobsbawm places too much emphasis on state-making:

an unduly restrictive criterion; it omits all other functions and dimensions of nationalism – social, cultural and psychological – that make it so central to the modern world (Smith, 1998: 125).

Smith continues by arguing that Hobsbawm’s theorisations unnecessarily regard the ‘masses’ as simply passive recipients of elite manipulation (for political gain); and whose ‘cultures and social networks have no political relevance’ (ibid.: 127). Moreover, and most significantly for Smith, he considers that Hobsbawm’s identification of ‘proto-national bonds’ is an opportunity scorned, when he states that he ‘has overlooked the fact that his popular proto-national bonds are, in fact, the very ethnic ties that he dismissed as a basis for nations’ (ibid.). Adrian Hastings (1997) has
also criticised Hobsbawm’s approach and specifically his neglect of historical depth:

Hobsbawm wrote a history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism, but not a
history of nationalism, and denial of the first half of the story has inevitably skewed the
whole (11).

The fact remains though that Hobsbawm’s theoretical approach remains a significant
contribution to the study of nations and nationalism, not least because he considered
that

the genetic approach to ethnicity is plainly irrelevant, since the crucial base of an ethnic
group as a form of social organisation is cultural rather than biological (Hobsbawm,

In addition to this, other commentators have argued that Hobsbawm, and indeed
Benedict Anderson whom we shall consider in turn, are progressive because they
‘moved the discussion beyond material and structural determinations into the realm of
discourse and the generation of meaning’ (Eley and Suny, 1996: 6).

1.2.3 Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1991) is a key text within the study of
nations and nationalism and again, this thinking emerges from Marxist origins. His
definition of the nation as ‘an imagined political community – and imagined as both
inherently limited and sovereign’ (*ibid.*: 6), reflects his view that both nations and
nationalism can be seen as ‘cultural artefacts’ (*ibid.*). The central tenet of his thinking,
‘imagination’, is developed from the recognition that

the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-
members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of
their communion (*ibid.*).

Anderson though sees that the conditions for this form of conceptualisation of the
nation are propagated not organically from changes in the forms of social organisation
concomitant to modernisation, but rather from ‘a fundamental change … in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to “think” the nation’ (ibid.: 22). Anderson goes on to argue that what made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print) and the fatality of linguistic diversity (ibid.: 42).

Several factors predominate in these conditions. Language, or more specifically, print language is central to Anderson’s hypothesis, though it is important to note that it is not literature per se that defines a nation. Moreover, he sees in language a ‘capacity for generating “imagined communities”, building in effect particular solidarities’ (ibid.: 133). Print capitalism, in particular the growth of the novel and newspaper, has a large part to play in this sequence and these also contribute to and engender a feeling of ‘simultaneity’:

the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving up or down history (ibid.: 24).

 McCrone (1998) has argued that Anderson’s approach has parallels with that of Renan (1990). Renan, whose own approach sought to emphasise a subjective and inclusive approach to nations stated that a nation is a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future (ibid.: 19).

In common with Anderson, Renan emphasises the role of consent in conceptualising the nation, and requires a continual imaging of the nation through his concept of a ‘daily plebiscite’ (ibid.: 19). This contrasts with Billig’s concept of ‘banal nationalism’ (1995), which posits a nationalism that does not require a continual affirmation of consent and belonging, rather an unconscious, unknowing one. However, whilst Billig (1995) himself is willing to admit that there are some elements
of truth in Anderson’s theorisations, he concludes that it does not offer a full or comprehensive account of the rise of nations and nationalisms:

it is an oversimplification. Psychological identity, on its own, is not the driving force of history, pushing nation-states into their present shapes. National identities are forms of social life, rather than internal psychological states; as such, they are ideological creations, caught up in the historical processes of nationhood (24).

McCrone (1998) adds his own critique by asserting that Anderson ‘does not develop the ways in which this process of “imagining” is carried out and sustained’ (6).

Hobsbawm (1992b) agrees that ‘imagined communities’ could be utilised to replace the space left by the disappearance of real human communities and networks, but in doing so asks why would people seek to replace them specifically with such a national imagining? Hastings (1997) has criticised Anderson’s historical location of the birth of the modern English nation in the late nineteenth century as both flying in the face of the evidence, and ‘totally implausible’ (1997: 6). Hastings also contends that any discussion of the influence of print capitalism on nationalism should, arguably with some justification, make mention of the role and influence played in this by the Bible (ibid.). Chatterjee (1996) has criticised Anderson and his ‘imagined communities’ from a postcolonial perspective. He argues that

the theoretical tendency represented by Anderson certainly attempts to treat the phenomenon as part of the universal history of the modern world (1996: 216).

This has grave consequences for the possibilities for effective and independent imaginings for many nations and potential nations from the postcolonial world:

autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the postcolonial state (ibid.: 222).

Smith (1998) too has been characteristically critical of Anderson’s approach to nations and nationalism. Firstly, he regards his angle as being too ‘individualistic and
voluntaristic’ (138), which when combined with the concept being too open, and, the role of language too central, consequently means that any community can declare itself a nation (*ibid.*). Secondly, he argues that Anderson’s conception of ‘imagined communities’ make it difficult to differentiate nations from other kinds of collectivities (2001). Thirdly, Smith highlights another issue he feels that many modernist theories of nationalism fail to deal with adequately, namely the sheer power and depth of feeling associated with them: ‘a nation is not only known and imagined: it is also deeply felt and acted out’ (1998: 137). Essentially, this begs the question as to what it is that makes people imagine and conceptualise the nation in the ways that they undoubtedly do.

### 1.3 Ethnosymbolism

It is the concern with the enormous passion and emotions garnered by nationalist thought, as well as the ethnic origins of nations, that are the key focuses of the ethnosymbolists. The most prominent and prolific proponent of this approach to the study of nations and nationalism is Anthony D Smith (1989, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2007), though he receives conceptual support from Hutchinson (1987, 2000) and Armstrong (1982, 2004).

To begin with, Smith (1989) accepts that nationalism is a modern phenomenon and that nations have reached full maturity within the modern era ‘with its specific modes of domination, production and communication’ (361). He adds however that modern nations have their roots in pre-modern eras and pre-modern cultures. The origins of such nations must therefore be traced far back, since their ethnic features, though subject to considerable reconstructions, stem from often distant eras and ancient traditions (*ibid.*).
Smith (1998) has developed several key concepts with which to elucidate his theories. He uses the term *ethnies*, to describe the ethnic, cultural collectives that provide modern nations with pre-modern roots:

*ethnies*: named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity (190).

Though Smith goes on to explain that *ethnies* provide two possible and distinguishable routes to nationhood via lateral and vertical forms, our main concern at this point is with the way that a perceptible and tangible ethno-national consciousness is developed, illuminated and communicated periodically. Smith argues that

the rediscovery of the ethnic past furnishes vital memories, values, symbols and myths, without which nationalism would be powerless (*ibid.*: 45).

These symbols and myths are central to the ethnosymbolic approach and Smith defines each term thus: ‘symbols represent to particular human groups distinctive shared experiences and values’ (*ibid.*: 186-87) and ‘myths explain to them the meanings of those experiences and exemplify and illuminate those values’ (*ibid.*).

Hutchinson (1987) adds that symbols ‘may have the capacity to elicit powerful historical memories that impel groups towards certain cultural, political and territorial goals’ (21). Armstrong (1982) too argues that myth, symbol and communication ‘are critical to a slow emergence of nations in the premodern period’ (7).

There is no doubt that the ethnosymbolic approach to nations and nationalism is of great consequence as it identifies the ‘continuity between pre-modern and modern forms of social cohesion, without overlooking the changes brought about by modernity’ (Conversi, 2007: 21). However, though Smith has been a critic of virtually all contrary approaches to his own, he more than reaps what he sows. Conversi (2007)
for example, commenting on Smith’s extensive reliance upon the importance of 
myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols, states

this is a complex set of elements that Smith tends to use interchangeably, often without 
specification to allow critical analysis or easy application (*ibid.*).

Hearn (2006) too adds that ethnosymbolism ignores the influence of socially 
organised power and that consequently, ‘attempts to define culture, nations and 
nationalism primarily in terms of symbols and meanings are inadequate’ (232). 
Additionally, Hearn argues with Smith’s insistence on the persistence of myths and 
symbols: ‘they are polysemic, changing their meanings over time, and thus obscuring 
as much as illuminating the processes in question’ (*ibid.*: 206). Conversi (2007) adds 
further that the ethnosymbolic approach has difficulty in explaining the variations 
between nationalist movements and also in accounting for how nationalist, ethnic 
conflicts arise. As a result of which he argues that ethnosymbolism ‘risks remaining a 
descriptive endeavour’ (24-25).

Ethnosymbolists have also made much of the perceived lack of attention paid by 
modernists to the links between modern nations and pre-modern cultures, 
collectivities and ethnicities. However, as Özkirimli (2003) has indicated, Hobsbawm 
identified his proto-national bonds as evidence of a form of pre-modern collectivity, 
whilst Anderson (1991) devotes a huge portion of his text to exploring the historical 
pre-conditions of nations (Özkirimli, 2003: 342). The significance of this is 
compounded and the differences between the competing approaches somewhat 
reduced if one adds to this the recognition by Gellner (1983) that nationalism is 

the crystallization of new units, suitable for the conditions now prevailing, though 
admittedly using as their raw material the cultural, historical and other inheritances 
from the pre-nationalist world (49).
Several critiques have also been offered relating further to Smith’s insistence that nations have pre-modern origins. Walker Connor (1990, 2004) has criticised Smith on the basis that he relies too much upon a concept of nation that is based upon elite rather than mass consciousness. Guibernau (2004) has argued vehemently that as a result of Connor’s interjection, Smith amended his definition of ‘nation’ (and removed the word ‘mass’) to allow him to still be able to ‘claim that a nation exists even if its particular culture is not shared by the mass of the population’ (Guibernau, 2004: 128). Guibernau has additionally criticised Smith’s approach for: focusing too narrowly on culture at the expense of some political analysis; too often conflating ‘nation’ with ‘state’; and for suggesting that Smith’s approach is not apolitical, rather that it has powerful political implications (ibid.).

Clearly, the ethnosymbolist approach is significant in that it does provide some key ideas on why nations and nationalism evoke such powerful emotions and why they have such resonance with people. It is also an approach that finds favour with, and complements the views of, nationalists and nationalist political parties. This particular area of thought though is one that has been criticised broadly and is also fraught with problems of categorisation and nomenclature, which is indicative of the blurred boundaries between these concepts.\footnote{For example, Anthony D Smith, calls himself an ethnosymbolist, but has been referred to by Gellner as a ‘primordialist’, much to Smith’s disdain. Another key figure within this area, John Hutchinson, who attributes to himself the title of a ‘cultural nationalist’, has been additionally categorised as an ‘ethnosymbolist’ by Özkirimli (2003: 340). The categorisation of another key figure within the ethnosymbolist approach, that of John Armstrong, is also debatable (ibid.).}

### 1.4 Social Constructions of Nationalism

This points to a thorny conceptual issue that dogs the field, namely that of whether a
general theory of nationalism can ever be adequately developed or applied. Despite his acknowledgement of the importance of the individual specificities of nations and ideological differences, Smith (1998) remains insistent that it is still possible to offer general, causal explanations that transcend the failure within the study of nations and nationalism to agree on common definitions of terms and explanatory paradigms. This is because he claims ‘the basic tenets, ideals and core concepts of nationalism have remained fairly constant through time and across cultures’ (ibid.: 42).

Others such as Özkirimli (2003) have argued against the possibility of producing effective grand-narratives regarding nations and nationalism. Along the same lines, Calhoun (1997) has strongly suggested that all the major theoretical paradigms have contributed at some point or time to causal explanations of particular instances of nationalism and that resultantly, ‘to treat any one of them as a “master-variable” explaining nationalism makes an account reductionistic’ (21). Hearn (2006) is concerned that the concept of power is largely ignored by many of the dominant theoretical understandings of nationalism. He conceptualises power as being developed and realised through forms of social organisation and that nationalism ‘is the form that the pursuit of power takes under certain conditions’ (ibid.: 169).

Özkirimli’s main concern is with the suppression of alternative readings and realities of the nation that are a consequence of the homogenizing effects that grand-narratives promote: ‘there is no single narrative of the nation, and no nation is ever free of ambiguity and contestation’ (2005: 169). Calhoun (1997) too has indicated his view that

ideas of nation, nationality and the like are ‘essentially contested’ because any particular definition of them will privilege some collectivities, interests and identities
and damage the claims of others (98).

Consequently, Özkirimli proposes a social constructionist approach to understanding nationalisms: ‘constructionism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting’ (2005: 162). He cites the following reasoning behind his proposition:

we thus need an alternative conceptualization of nationalism, one that carries us beyond the objective/subjective and culture/politics dichotomies while at the same time enabling us to capture what is common to all nationalisms (ibid.).

Hechter (2001) too does not deny that nationalism is a social construction, but he suggests that it would be fruitful to consider also the conditions under which such social construction takes place. Özkirimli (2005) showing a Foucauldian influence, is insistent though that social constructions of nationalism can be successfully undertaken if we understand nationalism as a form of discourse or ‘as a particular way of seeing the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us’ (163). Calhoun (1997), also taking his cue from Foucault, sees the discourse of nationalism as

like those of class, race and gender – [it] not only encourages seeing identity as inscribed in and coterminous with the individual body; it also encourages seeing individuals as linked through their membership of a set of abstract equivalents rather than their participation in webs of concrete interpersonal relationships (46).

Özkirimli (2000) identifies that the discourse of nationalism has three main characteristics: it claims that the interests and values of the nation override all others; it regards the nation as the only form of legitimacy; and it operates through binary divisions such as ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘friends’ and ‘foes’. Clearly there are parallels here between these main characteristics of the ‘discourse of nationalism’ and Smith’s earlier cited essential propositions of nationalism. Özkirimli (2005) also though argues how such a discourse might operate. Firstly, he argues that the discourse of
nationalism *hegemonizes*, that is to say it is predominantly about power and domination, and that it ‘legitimises and produces hierarchies among actors’ (33). Secondly, the discourse of nationalism *naturalises*, that is to say ‘national values are no longer seen as social values and appear as facts of nature – they become taken for granted, common sense and hegemonic’ (*ibid.*). Finally, the discourse of nationalism works through institutions and ‘does not arise out of nothing, and does not exist in a social vacuum. It is produced and imposed by a whole set of institutions’ (*ibid.*).

The tendency for the discourse of nationalism to be seen as wholly natural is considered to be both significant and problematic by Billig (1995). In his ‘banal nationalism’ thesis, one of Billig’s main concerns is that nationalism is a very restricted concept, which ‘confines “nationalism” to particular social movements rather than to nation-states’ (1995: 38). For Billig, the effect of this is twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the common perception that nationalism is at once exotic and peripheral. It is exotic in the sense that the common perception is that nationalisms are only ever be seen during political or military struggles for independence, unity or self-determination and where there are none, nationalism is not seen to be an issue at all (Billig, 1995). Nationalism is also regarded as being peripheral in that these particular instances of nationalism are more often than not witnessed on the margins of the developed western world, for example after the collapse of Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia), and following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union (Moldova and Ukraine etc). Secondly, the implications of these perceptions of the discourse of nationalism are clear for Billig: ‘those in established nations – at the centre of things – are led to see nationalism as the property of others, not of “us”’ (1995: 5). And it is here that Billig (1995) stands out from many other theorists and theories of
nationalism:

nationalism is not merely the ideology which is impelling Flemish speakers to resist the Belgian state. It is also the ideology which permits the states, including the Belgian state, to exist (15).

And so, Billig’s primary concern is with the ways that nations are reproduced, or of the ways in which nations remain as nations after they have been initially established, and Özkirimli (2000) offers support in respect of this view. Central to these processes are what Billig has termed ‘banal nationalism’, or the ‘continual “flagging”, or reminding of nationhood’ (Billig, 1995: 6). The temptation here might be to equate this approach to some extent to the concept of the ‘daily plebiscite’ of Renan (1990), or to the ‘imagined communities’ of Anderson (1991). But the most pronounced difference between these approaches and that of ‘banal nationalism’ is that of consciousness and choice, and Billig is emphatic here: ‘there is no daily choice. The citizens of an established nation do not, day by day, consciously decide that their nation should continue’ (1995: 95). And so, ‘banal nationalism’ focuses on the ways that nations and nationalisms are so systematically entwined and enmeshed within the everyday lives that people lead, and of how these ideas are continually reminded to us.

Billig’s fundamental claim is the ‘banal’ manner in which the nation is continually reminded to people, in that ‘the reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding’ (ibid.: 8). The extent of this national reminding it is argued is vast, and can be found within all aspects of people’s lives from political discourses, cultural artefacts and products, in newspapers and on television news broadcasts, and to the intricacies and peculiarities of the languages that people speak
on a day-to-day basis. It is also to be found in the coins and banknotes that we habitually use, and the flags hanging quietly and unnoticed not just from public buildings as Billig contends, but on the packaging of the food we eat, the products we buy, and the clothes that we wear. To this we might add, particularly for the purposes of this research, the sports that are played at national representative levels and the ways in which these sports occupy the lives and minds of many people within these nations. For Billig then, ‘national identity is a routine way of talking and listening; it is a form of life, which habitually closes the front door, and seals the borders’ (1995: 109). The significance of Billig’s approach is undoubted, in that it identifies both the all-encompassing nature of nationalism, and the propensity of nationalism to go largely unnoticed outside of periods of national crises, when the nation ordinarily comes to the fore. And it is the ability for the nation to be called upon so easily and readily at these times that is perhaps the defining contribution and significance of the ‘banal nationalism’ thesis to national studies.

1.5 Summary: Theories of Nationalism

Clearly, the above theoretical understandings of nationalism all have their undoubted merits, but equally so, they all also have their failings. Evidence of all can be seen to differing degrees in examples of particular instances of nationalism, though to favour a particular viewpoint over any other obscures the individual context and particularities of any one case. For example, few theorists would disagree that the modern period has seen nations and nationalisms in full bloom, and there is clearly enough space for industrial capitalism, ‘invented traditions’ and ‘imagined communities’ to all stand in the same room together. Ethnosymbolism is also important, not simply because of its insistence upon the premodern antecedents of
nations, but also because it seeks to explain how and why nationalism and nations are so meaningful and emotionally powerful for many people. Therefore in some respects, it complements certain modernist paradigms, particularly that of ‘imagined communities’. Social constructionist views reflect the inadequacies of the grand narrative approach and allow also for the possibility that a variety of competing and contested conceptions of the nation exist.

Of those theorists and theories that have been considered, several will prove useful in the course of this research. In particular, Anderson (1991) provides understandings that can be applied to the roles that national representative football teams play in the way that nations are ‘imagined’. Hobsbawm (1992a, 1992b) is also important in terms of detailing the ‘invented’ nature of home nations football teams, and of identifying the ways in which these teams can infuse particular national sentiments and loyalties amongst their populations. On the whole though it is Billig (1995) that provides the most effective theoretical tools with which to work, and his ‘banal nationalism’ is particularly effective in illustrating the significance of the home nations teams in the continuing construction of nations. As we shall go on to see, both Nairn (1977) and Hechter (1975) are also important because they move the discussion of theories of nationalism on to focus particularly on the experiences of the UK. The next chapter will then consider the experiences of nationalisms and the UK, and will go some way to illustrating some of the points made in this brief summary.
Chapter Two: Nationalism and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Having looked at some of the key theoretical understandings of nationalisms in the previous chapter, this chapter will look more specifically at political manifestations of nationalism seen within the UK. The aim of this chapter will not only be to provide an understanding and assessment of the UK experience of nationalisms, but also to highlight the difficulties of applying grand-narratives and general theories to historically-specific and culturally-diverse nations. The chapter will focus on nationalisms within the three nations of the UK state: England, Scotland and Wales, as well as looking additionally at Northern Ireland. To consider Northern Ireland though as a ‘nation’ is problematic and as such it is more appropriate to regard it at this stage as being a political construct stitched on to the remainder of the UK. Returning to the focus of this chapter, it will commence by looking at some of the theoretical perspectives offered to explain nationalism on a broader level, that of the UK as a whole.

2.1 Contextualising the UK State

In preparation for the task of assessing the nature of nationalism in the UK, it would surely be apposite to briefly consider the historical development of the modern UK state. At the same time, it would also be useful to bear in mind the implications of this history upon the complicated and often misunderstood terminology of the nations and states involved. Hugh Seton-Watson (1977) offers a simple understanding of the differences between these two important terms:

A state is a legal and political organisation, with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens. A nation is a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness (1).
The long road towards the modern UK came in 1707, when England and Scotland were formally brought together by an Act of Union that created the united ‘Kingdom of Great Britain’ (Osmond, 1988). In 1801, Ireland, which had been subject to a series of brutal English conquests, most notably that launched by Oliver Cromwell between 1649-50 (Cohen, 1994), was formally brought into the Union to create the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’. This state lasted until 1922 when partition in Ireland led to the creation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland (Colls, 2002). This final amendment left the state we now know as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.8

Whilst on paper this simplistic history seems clear enough, the reality is that the common usage of these terms is often ambiguous, misconstrued or sometimes plain wrong. In this respect, when many people speak of England what they actually mean is Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales but not Northern Ireland) or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and vice versa. In the introduction to his impressive text, The Isles: A History, Norman Davies suggests that ‘the true extent of this morass of mix-ups is marvellous to behold’ (2000: xxvii). His sarcasm though reflects his concerns that both a vast number of the citizens of the UK and numerous supposedly authoritative historians fail to understand both the political realities of the state and also the correct terms with which to make reference to it. This leads Davies to conclude that ‘one would be hard put to find another state or country which is so befuddled about the basic framework of its past’ (ibid.: xxxvii). Having tried to shed some light upon the complicated nature of the situation in which we find the UK, we can now start to look at some of the ways that nationalism has been explained in these

8 For a fine account of the history of the United Kingdom see Norman Davies (2000).
islands, commencing with some general theories.

2.1.1 The UK and Nationalism

To many, the problems of identifying and employing the correct terms for this state may seem either pedantic or of little consequence, but this betrays something slightly more than just mere quibbling over terms. Kumar (2003) counsels that students of nationalism would do well to examine carefully what those unselfconsciously used terms connote/what attitudes and assumptions lie buried in them, what historical myths they enshrine or promote (4-5).

McCrone and Kiely (2008) have suggested that the problem is more reflective of a general confusion between the notions of ‘citizenship’ (UK) and ‘nationality’ (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Cohen too has recognised the confusion inherent in conceptions of British nationality:

the boundaries of British nationality, identity and citizenship are only very imprecisely drawn and understood. This indeterminacy can be thought of as a series of blurred, opaque or ‘fuzzy’ frontiers surrounding the very fabrication and the subsequent recasting of the core identity.(1994: 7).

Osmond (1988) acknowledges the problems inherent in British identity formation, particularly the propensity of the English to conflate the terms ‘England’ and ‘Britain’. This produces what he has termed ‘a fused identity that can be best described as Anglo-British’ (26). Osmond contrasts this with Welsh and Scottish identities, which he argues are more consistent with a dual-identity formation process, allowing people to be both Welsh or Scottish and British (ibid.). Aughey (2001) has argued that ‘unreflective use of the term “British” can suggest a cultural and political homogeneity which does not exist’ (23). Ignatieff (1999) has spoken of the difference between the way the state is conceived and its ultimate reality:
Britain is a civic nation, which still thinks of itself as an ethnic nation. There is a gulf between how it conceives of itself, in ethnic terms, and how it actually is (147).

Kuzio (2002), in critiquing Kohn’s dichotomy of ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nationalisms, has argued that civic nationalism is a myth and that all nationalisms are reliant to varying degrees on an ethnic base. O’Dowd (1998) has argued that what may be considered ‘civic’ nationalisms are still very much concerned with notions of inclusion and exclusion.

One of the most important recent attempts to account for national identity and nationalism in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) is provided by Linda Colley (1992) in her text, _Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837_. Borrowing to some extent from Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’, Colley’s main argument is that it was war, and in particular, continued, regular and sustained war with France that were key to the development of a form of British nationalism:

> time and time again, war with France brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales, Scotland or Ireland, into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it (ibid.: 5).

A further key notion in Colley’s conceptualisation of a burgeoning British national identity is that of religion, in particular the situating of ‘British’ Protestantism against ‘French’ Catholicism. Aughey (2001) acknowledges the impressive nature and scope of Colley’s work but is at the same time sharply critical in three areas. He argues firstly that her over reliance ‘upon the role of Otherness in creating a British identity seemed to have the effect of hollowing out any substance to that identity’ (Aughey, 2001: 18). Secondly, he is critical of Colley’s chosen historical timescale. By choosing to focus on the period post-Union of England and Scotland in 1707, he advocates that Colley ignores the distinct possibility that there may be decisive or significant continuities between the two nations before this (ibid.). Thirdly, and
perhaps most significantly, Aughey is suggestive that rather than being solely something that binds and unites disparate peoples, Protestantism can also prove to be more divisive. He cites the experience of Ireland as an example of this and suggests that Colley would have realised the divisive possibilities of Protestantism had she chosen to consider Ireland in greater depth (ibid.). Crick (2008) too argues that the omission of Ireland from Colley’s text was significant and suggests that she ‘had to exclude Ireland from her narrative to make her claim, although it was a crucial part of the British political agenda for three centuries’ (73).

Kumar (2003) is broadly supportive of the extent of the unifying role given to Protestantism by Colley, but rather he is also aware of the fact that it is a far broader church than perhaps Colley acknowledges in her text. Koditschek (2002) also acknowledges the distinct differentiations within the Anglican Church in the period in question, and states in addition that ‘even in its most generic, “British” manifestation, Protestantism meant something more positive than mere anti-Catholicism’ (392). He also questions Colley’s failure to recognise adequately the role that the British Empire played in forging British identity (ibid.). From a different critical perspective, Davey (1999) argues that Colley’s account ‘needs to be modified to reflect the dominance of the English within that multinational configuration’ (8). Similarly, Langlands (1999) considers that Colley’s account ‘simply presents the English as the “core” who equate Englishness and Britishness’ (57). Colley’s work is important in a number of respects but perhaps none more so than for her understanding of ‘Great Britain’ as being ‘an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties’ (1996: 5). Colley is also adamant that her conceptualisation of British national identity is in addition to other forms of identity:
I am not suggesting for one moment that the growing sense of Britishness in this period supplanted and obliterated other loyalties. It did not. Identities are not like hats, human beings can and do put on several at a time (ibid.: 6).

Langlands (1999) also views ‘Britishness’ as an additional identity to be set alongside other ethnic identities.

Michael Hechter (1975) provides a more structural attempt at understanding British nationalisms, this time from a predominantly Marxist perspective. Hechter’s central theoretical theme, which he has termed ‘internal colonialism’, is that there are similarities between British overseas colonial relations and the political and economic relations between England and the ‘Celtic fringe’ nations within the UK state. By utilising concepts of ‘core’ (England) and ‘periphery’ (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), Hechter argues that because

social stratification in the periphery is based on observable cultural differences, there exists the probability that the disadvantaged group will, in time, reactively assert its own culture as equal or superior to that of the relatively advantaged core (1975: 10).

Hechter sees two main drivers of ‘internal colonialism’. The first is uneven modernization or industrialization which

over territorial space creates relatively advanced and less advanced groups, and therefore acute cleavages of interest arise between these groups. As a consequence of this initial fortuitous advantage there is a crystallization of the unequal distribution of resources and power between the two groups (ibid.: 39).

This results in a ‘cultural division of labour’ whereby those at the ‘core’, in seeking to sustain and augment their privileged position, ‘assign individuals to specific roles in the social structure on the basis of their objective cultural distinctions’ (ibid.). Accordingly, it is this that ensures that ‘the chances for successful political integration of the peripheral collectivity into the national society are minimized’ (ibid.: 43). Hechter suggests that this combined with ‘uneven industrialization’ can explain the relatively late expressions of nationalism in the submerged nations of the UK state,
particularly through Plaid Cymru in Wales and the SNP in Scotland.

Hechter’s theories are significant in that they broadly recognise that the experiences of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can be separated from those of England or Britain. Smith (1998) though argues that the limits of the ‘internal colonialism’ model are shown by the failure of other economically deprived regions (such as Northern England) to develop their own nationalisms. Related to this, Smith finds that it is culture that has a key role to play in the development and suppression of nationalisms. It is not difficult to see what Smith is getting at here and his major concern is the role of ethnies. He argues that Hechter fails to account for this, and that consequently the reason why such other regions fail to develop nationalisms under similar conditions is a function of the absence, not just of differentiating cultural markers, but of sufficiently separate origin myths, differentiating shared experiences and distinctive historical memories in those regions (Smith, 1998:62).

Cannadine (1995) argues that Hechter’s broadly ‘British’ outlook is notable but that overall his approach still remains far too Anglocentric. Both Özkirimli (2000) and Calhoun (1997) have, unsurprisingly given their suspicion of grand-narrative approaches to nationalism, criticised Hechter for reductionism, whilst Nairn (1977) has concluded that the theory remains ‘too abstract, and too neat’ (202).

Nairn is another who has Marxist credentials and his own work on neo-nationalism is something that will be considered in more detail in relation to specific nations below. It is, however, worth mentioning his work at this stage because it is highly relevant to the UK and in fact prophesises the break-up of Britain. His work is an attempt to redress the failings of Marxist thought in relation to nationalism, which is something that he claims ‘can be understood in essentially materialist terms’ (ibid.: 329). Once
more, it is ‘uneven development’ that is the primary concern here but Nairn is at pains to differentiate his approach from that of Hechter. Having looked at some broader approaches to nationalism in the United Kingdom we can now begin to look at Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and to commence, Wales.

2.2 Wales and Nationalism

The Welsh were the first Britons. Since the Tudor Dynasty they have been extremely loyal, and have enjoyed a level of social and political integration unparalleled among the other sub-nations of the UK state (Kumar, 2003). Osmond (1988) has gone so far as to argue that the level of integration with Britishness is such that at times Welshness should be regarded as ‘a merged rather than dual-identity’ (123). This perception though is overstated and does little to recognise not only the distinctiveness of the Welsh people but also of the distinctions between them. The Welsh language is the most obvious indicator of these distinctions, which Osmond concedes for the Welsh ‘carries a symbolic charge out of all proportion’ (ibid.: 122).

Raymond Williams (2003) reflects upon both of these issues. Firstly, he argues that the racial history of Wales is both complicated and complex. This clearly has implications for those seeking organic explanations of the Welsh nation. Secondly, Williams argues that historically, Wales has been the subject of political and cultural colonization, whereby the Welsh language was systematically discriminated against and repressed (ibid.). Hywel Davies (1983) also argues that the linguistic provisions of the 1536 Act of Union of England and Wales ‘sought to end such separateness by extending English cultural homogeneity’ (4). On Welsh national identity, Raymond Williams (2003) concludes that
that this identity was primarily cultural – in language, customs, kinship and community – rather than in any modern sense political is, in this situation, not surprising at all (23).

Adamson (1999), in arguing that intellectuals played a key role in the development of Welsh nationalism, cites that the

Nonconformist, Welsh-speaking bourgeoisie resisted the Anglicization and secularization of the working class by an emphasis on language and religion as the basis for national identity and shared interests (55).

Davis (1989) too has remarked upon the importance of the close association between early Welsh nationalism, language and Nonconformist churches. Gwyn A. Williams (1982) regards one of the greatest influences on Welsh nationalism and identity as being the English. He identifies the eighteenth century as being a particularly important period, when English industrial capitalism had monumental effects on the cultural development and demographics of south Wales, and the population resultanty quintupled. He states that this ‘provided the money and the power for a Welsh revival and the insidious processes which cut that revival down in its prime’

*(ibid.: 193)*. The result of this monumental change was that Wales, rather than being just one nation, in reality became two. *(ibid.)*.

This has presented Welsh nationalists with a huge dilemma. Previously their nationalism was predominantly cultural with the Welsh language as its centrepiece. After the industrial transformation and concomitant Anglicization of south Wales, it became apparent that ‘the application of a strict Welsh linguistic nationalism … would mean instant death to the Welsh people as a distinct people’ *(ibid.: 195)*. That the Welsh language has increasing fallen from common-usage in many areas in contemporary Wales has led Osmond (1988) to conclude that a Welsh nationalism

---

9 My emphasis.
that seeks to identify only those who are Welsh-speaking as authentically Welsh, is likely to be exceptionally exclusive. This perhaps explains to an extent the modern ‘civic’ nation political approach of Plaid Cymru (C. Williams, 1999).

The acknowledgement of the role of industrial capitalism in the development of Welsh nationalism does not necessarily chime with some of the Marxist interpretations discussed previously. Indeed, Morgan (1984) has gone as far as to say that Wales’ ‘complex national evolution is not a crude product of economic determinism, and it fits most uneasily into the Marxist diagnosis’ (249). Hechter’s ‘internal colonialism’ is one such approach that finds little favour with Welsh theorists. Gwyn A. Williams (1982), also writing from a Marxist or more precisely, a Gramscian perspective, regards this paradigm as severely lacking in that it

misses the centrality of a mode of production in all its social complexity … it mishandles the central reality of uneven development and it therefore reads consequences as causes (ibid.: 196).

In contrast, Williams (1982) argues that Welsh marginality was effectively ended by industrial capitalism rather than it signalling the very start of it. This, he argues, is because of Wales’ pivotal status and centrality in Britain’s industrial Empire during this period. The fact that Wales could provide much of the essential raw materials to drive industrialization meant that the principality’s experience was unlike that of any other region in the UK (ibid.)

Charlotte Aull Davis (1989) agrees to an extent with Williams’ understanding, in that she too sees industrialization as fundamentally altering the economic relationship between the ‘periphery’ and the ‘core’. She also concurs with Hechter however that the ‘periphery’ retained its cultural distinctiveness despite these processes (ibid.). For
Davis (1989) though, the problems of ‘internal colonialism’ relate to the inability of the paradigm to adequately contend with the fluctuating nature of nationalist political tendencies:

explanations of the timing, intensity, and character of such movements are to be found at a different level of analysis from that of these purely structural theories (6).

According to Davis, the development of a salient, Welsh nationalism is more the result of

the interaction of structural forces emanating primarily from changes in the British state, with micro sociological processes of individual decision making (ibid.: 19).

The pivotal structural forces here are among others: the rise of the British Labour Party in the 1920s which gained electoral favour in Wales at the expense of Liberal Party (which had Welsh nationalist sympathies) and the gradual introduction of post-war, locally-administered national social policy initiatives such as the Welfare State and National Health Service.

Nairn (1977) has argued predictably that ‘de-centred, invasive industrialization created the whole problem of modern nationalism in Wales’ (212). Fevre and Thompson (1999) are hostile to Marxist accounts of Welsh national development and consequently, are critical of both Hechter and Nairn. Both accounts, they argue, fail adequately to comprehend the realities of Welsh society and the social differentiation therein. They cite the growing influence of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ on Welsh Studies, reflecting ‘the desire to contribute to an understanding of the multiplicity of Welsh lived experiences’ (Fevre and Thompson, 1999: 12). It is also the construction of national identity that concerns Thompson (1999). He criticises the grand-theories of nationalism offered by Gellner (1983) and Smith (1998) for being too abstract and also because they
do not tell us enough about how national identities are sustained and reproduced throughout the course of daily social relations, nor do they provide us with any real acknowledgement that the idea of national identity may be given any number of different inflections by different individuals (Thompson, 1999: 244).

The failure of many theories of nationalism to account for the ways in which nations and nationalisms are maintained and reproduced after they have emerged and established themselves is significant here. In this respect, whilst Thompson and Day (1999) have also argued that Welshness is socially constructed within everyday social encounters and interactions, they fail to identify how these processes might be routinely undertaken and achieved. More particularly, they also fail to acknowledge the many ‘banal’ characteristics that these processes entail, and the significance of the work of Billig (1995). Billig’s ‘banal nationalism’ approach is of particular use in determining the ways in which nations and nationalisms are sustained and reproduced, and also of the ways that these concepts are reminded to people in the course of their everyday lives, though in ways that are ‘forgotten’, or that are not consciously recognised as such: ‘National identity embraces all these forgotten reminders. Consequently, an identity is to be found in the embodied habits of everyday life’ (Billig, 1995: 8). Thompson and Day (1999) do though contend that Welshness is not essential in nature and provides space for contestation and resistance, and this is also an important point to remember.

In summary, we can see that Welsh nationalism has always retained a cultural base and that by the time that Plaid Cymru was formed in 1925 the process of imagining Wales was complete and the character of the national movement was centred on the hearth of a rural, pre-industrial golden age (Adamson, 1999: 57).
Cohen (1994) has argued that this preference for a cultural rather than a harder political nationalism stems from the belief that the perceived benefits of integration within the UK state are seen to be greater than that to be gained from independence. Kumar (2003) too has argued that ‘the Welsh lack both a lever and a material incentive to break away and go it alone’ (244). Though Plaid Cymru promotes a contemporary ‘civic’ Welshness, Pittock (1999) has argued that the 1997 Referendum on Welsh devolution still shows the close linkage between a linguistic, cultural and now more political Welsh nationalism. Pittock concludes that the vote was effectively won by Welsh-speakers, who voted overwhelmingly in favour of devolution, in contrast to their English-speaking compatriots (*ibid.*).

2.3 Northern Ireland and Unionism

This section of the thesis will focus specifically on Unionism in Northern Ireland. The reasoning behind this decision relates to questions of relevance to the research project and the notion that Ulster Unionism is the only UK relevant expression of nationalism in Ireland. Though it may be the case that the Nationalist/Republican communities in Northern Ireland would be against combined Great Britain and Northern Ireland football teams competing in the London 2012 Olympics, this represents one of several stances that may be taken. For example, if it was felt by Irish Nationalists that such a UK team would be a high profile means of demonstrating the pressures on the IFA to merge with the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), then it may receive their qualified support. Alternatively, they may be indifferent to the whole process, seeing it mainly as an issue for the ‘British’. Ultimately, Irish Nationalism is extraneous to the debate that will form the main part of this study. As such, it seems relevant to focus on the Ulster Unionist communities in respect of this research.
The history of Unionism in Northern Ireland and its attitudes towards the UK are less clear-cut. According to Jackson (1994), Unionism in Ireland before 1905 was a unified, all-Ireland Unionism, and though Ulster Unionism existed before then, it was mainly as a regional Irish identity with strong links to Scotland. Only between 1905 and 1920 when pressure for Home-rule increased and the ideology of Irish nationalism significantly advanced was it that ‘Irish unionism became Ulster Unionism, and Ulster Unionism became a six counties Unionism’ (ibid: 35; Miller, 1998). Northern Ireland was created after the partition of Ireland in 1922, in what might be described as the invention of a ‘nation’, which was then unceremoniously ‘bolted on to the UK, but in a characteristically nebulous way’ (Cohen, 1994: 11).

Haseler (1996) has argued that the Northern Irish are an uneasy fit within the UK state: ‘their support for the Union being … more to do with necessity than with a homogeneous “one nation” common identity’ (110). Before progressing further, it is worth considering an often-misunderstood aspect of Northern Irish identity politics. Common perceptions often assume incorrectly that religion is the defining characteristic of Northern Ireland’s chequered history. However, Bruce (1994) argues that though religion is a significant factor, its is ethnicity which remains paramount:

it is always attractive to attend to religious differences because religion most effectively unites large numbers of Protestants and separates them from Catholics. Evangelicalism provides a common bond that crosses divisions of class, religion and denomination (29).

Miller (1998) too agrees that the dominant feature of the Northern Ireland political spectrum is ethnicity, of which religion is an important component. Brewer and Higgins (1999) concur broadly with this view. Bruce (1994) makes an additional important point in his assertion that neither collectivity in Northern Ireland is a homogeneous community: ‘not all Protestants are Unionists, not all Unionists are
Loyalists, and not all Loyalists wish to harm Catholics. Ditto for Catholics’ (128). Equally, it is probable that not all Unionists are ethnically Scottish or English. Consequently, though much emphasis is placed on ethnicity it is clear that using both it and religion as categorisations are problematic, and that this is the case for both Unionist and Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. Walker Connor (1994) is significant in respect of theories of nationalism that rely upon ideas about historical ethnicities. He argues that what is often important to people is not what is actually the case, but rather what people believe or feel to be the case. As such, whether or not people are actually ethnically related in these instances is not important.

In terms of Marxist views of nationalism and Northern Ireland, Bruce (1994) has characterised them as being centred upon a vision of ‘an uneven distribution of power to minority and majority peoples’ (130). Nairn (1977) cites the role of ‘uneven development’ as being important again here. He argues that massive industrial development made Northern Ireland into ‘one of the major capitalist and working class areas of the British Isles’ (235). Significantly, the double threat posed by the nationalism of the Republic of Ireland and the very real possibility of betrayal by the British, meant that Ulster Protestantism ‘was unable to formulate the normal political response of threatened societies: nationalism’ (ibid.: 236). Coulter (1994) has criticised Nairn’s argument as being flawed on a number of counts. Firstly, aside from Nairn seeing the answers to Northern Ireland’s problems residing in the acquisition of a Unionist, ‘ethnic’ nationalism, Coulter accuses Nairn of making a naïve assumption about the inevitable progressive functions of nationalism (ibid.). Secondly, he proposes that Nairn ‘seeks to characterise Unionism in terms of anachronistic imperialism and vulgar sectarianism’ (ibid.: 12).
In seeking to understand the complex Northern Ireland situation, it should be made clear that Unionism does not offer the sole ideological perspective available within the Protestant communities. Jennifer Todd (1987) has argued that the best framework to use when attempting to do this is that of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’. This is because such an approach ‘allows the analysis of a group’s self-ascribed identity without the theorist imposing alien categorisations on the group’ (Todd, 1987: 3). Pittock (1999) has also argued that ‘imagined communities’ are the most appropriate concepts to use in Northern Ireland. Bruce (1999) too supports the use of Anderson’s concepts in a Northern Irish context, but is mindful that ‘collectivities require ideological work; members need to create and maintain myths’ (143).

Todd (1987) identifies two main categorisations within the Protestants of Northern Ireland, the Ulster Loyalists and the Ulster British. The primary ‘imagined community’ of Ulster Loyalists is that of Northern Irish Protestants, with a secondary identification with Britain considered ‘a conditional loyalty’ (ibid.: 3). Coulter (1994) regards this conditional loyalty as being a form of ‘contractarianism’, a result of the ‘manifestation of their well-founded suspicion that in political reality their devotion to Great Britain is unrequited’ (4). In terms of ideology, Cairns (2001) has argued that Ulster Loyalism is regressive in that it eschews constructive engagement in favour of basking in historical sectarian triumphs such as the Siege of Derry and the Battle of the Boyne. Todd (1987) adds thus:

Ulster Loyalism approximates a closed system resisting refutation by experience or argument. In its deep structure it derives its intelligibility and power from the evangelical fundamentalist religious tradition (3).

In terms of being a form of nationalism then it might be asserted that Loyalist
allegiance is primarily to that of a people rather than a place itself (Todd, 1987: 6).

According to Todd (1987), the second main form of Protestant identity that is common and indeed predominant in Northern Ireland is that of the Ulster British (often commonly referred to as Ulster Unionists). This is a democratic-based view and, in contrast to Loyalism, sees a British identity first and then a secondary loyalty to Northern Ireland. Todd summarises this aspirational position thus:

"they see themselves as primarily British, where being British means having a particular ethos, holding particular ideas and, moral principles (ibid.: 13)."

In what can be seen as a paradox of Ulster Unionism, Osmond (1988) has noted that whilst the Northern Irish are often seen by the English as ‘ultimately peripheral’ (95), they proffer what is perhaps ‘the only pure proclamation … of pure “Britishness” to be found anywhere in the Divided Kingdom’ (ibid.: 117). Coulter (1994) regards the true objective of Unionists’ commitment to the Union as being ‘the more prosaic concerns of ethnic self-image and economic self-interest’ (5). Miller (1998) too concurs with this view. This appeal or claim to ‘Britishness’ is also of interest to McCrone (1992), who concludes that in this context it can only ever be an aspiration rather than a political and geographical reality (208). For Miller (1998), in the absence of this reality, this claim is justified in imperial terms. As a result, though to a degree integrated into the UK, he regards Northern Ireland as in some ways ‘less integral’ (ibid.: 6), particularly when compared to Scotland and Wales.

What are the implications of this for a study of nationalism? Miller (1998) has argued

---

10 However, this does not necessarily reflect the ways in which everyday loyalties are countered and constructed in relation to the places where people actually live. This is a perspective mentioned by Bairner (2001).
that some analyses of Unionist ideologies tend to overlook the fact that these identities ‘were not historically contingent and were constructed by human beings in the context of social, political and economic processes’ (11). Kearney (1997), in relation to Northern Ireland, has spoken of the problems of constructing nations to adequately reflect the ‘porous and interwoven nature of the communities themselves’ (180). As a result he concludes

there is no such thing as primordial nationality. Every nation is a hybrid construct, an imagined community that can be reimagined again in alternative versions’ (ibid.: 188).

Dixon (2001) has highlighted that Loyalist historians have attempted to add a primordialist slant to the history of Northern Ireland by arguing that the Scottish settlers who arrived there in the seventeenth century were simply the original people of the area, the Cruthin, returning to their homeland from Scotland.

2.4 Scotland and Nationalism

When Elizabeth I of England died in 1603 without an heir apparent, James VI of Scotland was, in favour of others and with succession open, invited to accept the Crown of England. The two countries would remain formally independent until The 1707 Act of Union. The Union is significant for Scottish nationalism for a number of reasons but perhaps the one that is most salient is that it legislated for the retention of Scotland’s key institutions as independent: law, education and the church (McCrone, 1992). Several key contributors to the field of nationalism studies have remarked upon the significance of this. Seton-Watson (1977) for example has argued that the continued independence of these institutions from London provided ‘an essence of cultural autonomy’ (471). Nairn (1977) has described Scotland as being

a nationality which resigned statehood but preserved an extraordinary amount of institutional and emotional baggage normally associated with independence – a
decapitated national state (129).

Osmond (1988) too regards these institutions as being central to ‘the basis of a Scottish sensibility’ (74). Though McCrone (1992) concludes they are a basis for civil society, he warns against regarding the old institutions as being a major influence on twentieth-century instances of Scottish nationalism. He argues that ‘it is hard to claim that these are as powerful determinants of social life as they were a century ago’ (211). Brand (1978) too is certain that something akin to Scottish nationalism has existed for a long time (13), though he considers that fully blown Scottish nationalism is actually ‘a modern movement responding to modern social and political conditions’ (ibid.: 8).

As we have seen, Tom Nairn (1977), a Scotsman himself, has long regarded the end of the Union as being imminent. He argues that it is ‘neo-nationalism’ that has revealed itself in Scotland in recent times, a form of nationalism that arrives at a much later point in history than that summoned by modernism or industrialization (128). He says that this Scottish nationalism still remains comparable to elemental nationalism in being a forced by-product of the grotesquely uneven nature of capitalist development (ibid.).

The particular facet of capitalist development that Nairn considers pivotal in the manifestation of contemporary Scottish nationalism is that of North Sea oil, ‘the largest, most aggressive, and most international form of capitalism in the world’ (ibid.: 127). Others such as McCrone (1992), Harvie (1998) and Pittock (1999) have agreed on the positive influence of North Sea oil upon the fortunes of the modern SNP which was formed in 1934, but do not necessarily share Nairn’s general theoretical perspective. With regard to Nairn’s perspective, Smith (1998) argues that other factors such as ‘ethnicity and uneven ethno-history’ (55) may have a significant
role in the development of nationalisms. As such he concludes that

in trying to account for each and every explosion in terms of the single factor of capitalism’s uneven development, Nairn’s arrow has overshot its mark (ibid.).

Though he is suspicious of sociological approaches to nationalism, Pittock (1999) has cited Smith’s work as being important in respect of Scottish nationalism in particular. He has argued that Smith’s approach stands out because it prioritises ‘continuity and ancestry more than “invention” or “imagination”’ (129). Certainly McCrone (1992) has argued powerfully that Scotland possesses an ample amount of images, myths and symbols with which constructions of the nation can be attempted. This certainly chimes with Smith’s insistence upon the role of ‘vital memories, values, symbols and myths, without which nationalism would be powerless’ (1998: 45).

McCrone (1992) then links this to Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’. He argues that Smith’s emphasis on the importance of historical continuity is indispensable to this notion, which he argues ‘implies that Scotland is not simply a collection of rocks, earth and water, but a transcendent idea which runs through history’ (28). In response to assertions that such imaginations are false, McCrone retorts that this is ‘not to imply that they are “false”, but that they have to be interpreted as ideas, made and remade rather than simply as actual places’ (ibid.: 49). Pittock (1992) though has criticised the nature of ‘imagined communities’, as allowing those imagining to act in a fashion similar to consumers who pick and choose lifestyle products at will.

Hugh Trevor-Roper (1992) has argued that much of what is regarded as ‘traditional’ Scottish Highland myth tradition, particularly tartanry, bagpipes and kilts, is in fact
modern and invented. This corresponds closely to the views on ‘invented traditions’
presented by Hobsbawm (1992a) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992). Trevor-Roper
(1992) suggests that Scotland was in fact ‘racially and culturally a colony of Ireland’
(15) and that the creation of a ‘Highland tradition’ was undertaken in the late
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries firstly to culturally distance Scotland from
Ireland, and more latterly for the material gain of merchants. Hearn (2006) has been
critical of this view and the suggestion implicit that ‘Scottish national identity and
nationalism are similarly inauthentic, and not to be taken seriously’ (204). Hearn
maintains that although in the terms of the ‘banal nationalism’ of Billig (1995) these
symbols do have limited significance, he concludes that they are ‘not a focus of
identity or political contention’ (Hearn, 2006: 204). To an extent, Hearn misreads the
importance of ‘banal nationalism’ here. Whilst he himself contends that ‘a much more
diverse and sometimes subtle complex of symbols has leant expression to Scottish
nationalism’ (ibid.), he fails to acknowledge that it is the seemingly everyday, routine
and ‘banal’ expressions of the nation, in this case tartanry, that enable more open and
explicit expressions of the nation to be articulated at other times. Brand (1978) has
pointed out that Scottish nationalists consciously rejected the image of the Highlander
from the start, whilst McCrone (1992) has argued that myth-histories are often
decidedly different to actual history.

Whatever one thinks of the significance of Trevor-Roper’s assertions, he does identify
something that questions the historic homogeneity of the people of Scotland, namely
the requirement for the invention of a ‘Highland tradition’ for Scotland at all. Osmond
(1988) has decided for himself that the Scottish population is diverse and not
homogenous, with many different types of Scottish people living in the country:
Highland and Lowland, Gaelic and English-speaking, a Scots-speaking working class, and a highly anglicized middle class, Catholic and Protestant (72).

Nairn (1977) too has argued that different though England and Scotland undoubtedly are, Scotland ‘actually contained a much greater internal differentiation within its own historical frontiers’ (147). Gellner (1983) discerns the linguistic distinctiveness of the Highlands in much the same way as Nairn, but argues that rather than develop its own nationalism as one might expect, it is but another example of a culture that has been ‘led to the dustheap of history by industrial civilization without offering any resistance’ (47). Brand (1978) is again important in this respect. He argues that Scottish nationalism is implicit in its rejection of appeals to objective criteria:

‘true’ nationalism is defined, not by the presence of a peculiar language, culture or race, but by a feeling that the community is separate (17).

In many respects, the accumulated history of Scotland provides ample opportunity to do this.

The key question though is why Scottish nationalism as a fully formed ideology arises at this specific point in history. The influence of North Sea oil has already been mentioned above. Pittock (1999) cites the end of the British Empire, witnessed first in the 1930s and then again more evidently in the 1950s and 1960s, as being significant in reigniting nationalism in both Scotland and Wales. This is significant because it emphasises the part that Scotland’s role in the Empire played in sustaining dual-identities of both Scottishness and Britishness. Kumar (2003) has spoken of Scotland’s prominent role in the British Empire and Pittock (1999) of ‘Scottish complicity’ (136). Haseler (1996) has also commented on the active role Empire had in uniting England and Scotland. However, he adds that whilst Scotland played an enormous part in forging and sustaining the Empire, the imperial ideology that was
Brand (1978) argues that no single factor attended to the modern rise of Scottish Nationalism. He espouses that a desire for modernisation to lift ‘Scotland out of the wreck of the nineteenth century and the “gothic” mists sponsored by the tourist interests’ (18) was one influence. Brand also points out, that once the Labour Party began to be seen as part of the establishment then a renewed interest in Scottish nationalist politics followed soon after (ibid.)\textsuperscript{11}. On the other hand, McCreadie (1991) also acknowledges the political dominance of the Labour Party in Scotland as stifling political nationalism to a degree. The influence, and new possibilities offered by the modern European Union for a new independent Scotland are additional, important influences on the SNP according to both Haseler (1996) and McCreadie (1991). For McCrone (1992), Scottish nationalism ‘draws only very thinly on cultural traditions’ (214) and is more accurately identified as a resistance to the continued dominance of the UK state.

In relation to the SNP, Leith (2008) has charted their development of notions of Scottish nationalism from an exclusive, anti-English viewpoint to the current inclusive, territorial (residence) view. However, the research that has been conducted by Kiely, Bechhofer and McCrone (2005) suggests that ‘celebrations of a new sense of Scottishness based on belonging rather than birth … seem somewhat premature’ (170). What may also be regarded as premature is the idea that Scots have dispensed with any semblance of Britishness from their identities. Bechhofer and McCrone (2009) concluded that ‘most Scots have not ceased to think of themselves as British,

\textsuperscript{11} This is in contrast with the earlier experience of Wales, which saw support for the Welsh-interest Liberal Party decrease as the Labour Party moved into the political foreground.
although 35 per cent say they are more Scottish than British\(^{12}\). So in conclusion, it is apparent that in contrast to Welsh nationalism, culture and language are less significant constituents of Scottish nationalism. More important is the history of the Scottish people as ‘separate’ and it is the idea of ‘separateness’ rather than any objective criteria that is very much reflected in the modern day politics of the SNP.

2.5 England and Nationalism

The nationalisms of Scotland and Wales, and the position of the Northern Ireland’s Protestants are best understood when considered in relation to England, and in turn with England’s relationship with Britain. Like all of the nations mentioned thus far, England is comprised of a diverse range of peoples and can no longer be termed homogeneous, if indeed it ever actually could. Haseler (1996) for instance, has remarked upon the distinctly German origins of the pre-1066 ‘English’, and of the influence of the Normans soon after. He then lists further influences on the English make-up that dilute the mix again as being ‘Flemish, Huguenots, Jews, Welsh, Scots, Irish, West Indians, Indians, Pakistanis and other immigrants’ \(\textit{ibid.}: 11\). Renan (1990) too spoke of the different ethnic elements and influences that make up the ‘Englishman’.

Many theorists still accept that nationalism in its ideological form is a modern phenomenon. Efforts to establish the first stirrings of England’s national identity before this period in history therefore have added significance. Kumar (2003) issues a warning when he suggests that many historians have ‘a natural propensity to find the original example of national consciousness in “their” own period’ (41). He adds that

\(^{12}\) Author’s italics.
‘the period-bound historians cannot all be right; or rather, the likelihood is that they are looking at different things’ (*ibid.*). Perhaps the most celebrated attempt at identifying such a national consciousness in England is that undertaken by the perennialist nationalism theorist, Adrian Hastings (1997). Hastings, who emphasises the role played by religion in this process, not only goes as far to say that he believes an English nation-state and national consciousness precedes all others, but also that it was ‘detectable already in Saxon times by the end of the tenth century’ (*ibid.*: 5). He finds evidence of an English national consciousness throughout the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a consciousness that was stronger still by the close of the fourteenth century and identifies the late sixteenth century as the period where it was most prominent (*ibid.*). Hastings also boldly claims that his work identifies the need for ‘a considerable rewrite of the standard modernist history of nationalism’ (*ibid.*).

One of the weaknesses and potential criticisms of Hastings’ perspective is self-acknowledged. He anticipates that the issue of consciousness might be problematic when he argues that it cannot be said that

> for a nation to exist it is necessary that everyone within it should want it to exist or have full consciousness that it does exist; only that many people beyond government circles or a small ruling class should consistently believe in it (*ibid.*: 26).

Kumar (2003) is critical of Hastings not least because of his blind use of terms such as ‘nation’ and ‘nation-state’. For Kumar,

> a nation presupposes a relatively high degree of cohesion and common consciousness among its members, together with a regular and effective system of communication between them. It always entails some sense of a relationship between elites and the commonality, the ordinary people of the community (*ibid.*: 47-48).

As such, Kumar does not agree with any of Hastings audacious assertions, and though he too sees that a sense of nationhood began to grow in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he is careful to distinguish this from modern understandings of the terms
‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ (ibid.). Smith (2006) suggests that to go as far as Hastings would be wrong, but that an ‘early sense of common English ethnic identity’ meant that

the foundations of an English national identity had been laid early, even if the community of England did not approximate to the ideal type of the nation for several centuries more (442).

Colls (2002) argues that the principal origin of the English nation was a powerful English state, and that by the fourteenth century ‘nearly all the requirements for an English national identity were in place’ (17). Greenfeld (1992) finds the genesis of an English nationalism emerging in the sixteenth century but Hastings (1997) is uncomfortable with her emphasis on the linkage between nationalism and modernity. Haseler (1996) identifies that ‘Englishness was built upon a pre-industrial trinity of “land”, “class” and “race”’ (17). As a result he surmises that

a serious idea of Englishness – a self-awareness of England and its people as a sharply separate and distinctive cultural entity – did not begin to cohere until the eighteenth century, alongside the emergence of nationalism (ibid.: 11).

Langlands (1999), taking her lead from Smith, sees ethnicity as being central to the development of an English nation, though she is eager to dismiss the implication that this is suggestive of an essentially racial viewpoint. Rather she argues that

an English ethnicity embodied in a number of customs, traditions, codes and styles has existed at least since the early modern period, and this provided the basis for the state-aided development of the British ‘nation’ during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (59).

Kumar (2003, 2006) is significant in relation to why and how English nationalism and national identity developed towards and through modernity. Though he also cites the influence of Protestantism and industrialization, he mainly proposes that English nationalism and national identity developed in a particular way that was directly
related to the British Empire and such that would conceal English nationalism from view. He considers that the imperial form of nationalism that the English developed is probably more comparable to other imperial nations such as Russia or Austria, and that

though in principle opposed to claims of nationality, may be carriers of a certain kind of national identity which gives to the dominant groups a special sense of themselves and their identity (2003: 34).

Smith (2006) has offered criticism of Kumar for failing to define the key terms adequately and also for regularly conflating the terms ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’. Aughey (2007) has also criticised Kumar for his reliance upon a search for just one type of ‘classic’ nationalism. Crick (1991) though has offered support for Kumar by suggesting that ‘imperialism became the substitute English nationalism’ (92). Haseler (1996) identifies an important aspect which imperial life firmly embedded within the English national psyche, that of cultural and racial ‘superiority’. He argues that with an English-dominated state controlling a third of the globe a certain superiority was bound to develop, but that significantly ‘this sense of superiority was enhanced, not diminished, by the nature of the English contact with their subordinate “foreigners”’ (ibid.: 38). Aughey (2007) nominates English nationalism as being ‘bad’, most notably because ‘it had been forged in a long and disreputable imperial history whose cult of supremacy had become constitutive of its very character’ (92). Hall (1991) concludes that ‘the thing that is wonderful about English identity is that it didn’t only place the colonized Other, it placed everybody’ (21).

A common aspect of English nationalism is its very close association with Britishness, and notably, what was identified by contributors to the debate on a UK Olympic football team was a conflation of Englishness and Britishness. This mainly
takes its political form in the Conservative Party, which has long been the leading exponent of English, British and Unionist forms of nationalism, and to a less politically significant extent in the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the far-right British National Party (BNP)\textsuperscript{13}. Bryant (2003) has argued that ‘for the English, Britishness came to subsume Englishness, so that often the two were indistinguishable’ (394), though research undertaken by Bechhofer and McCrone (2009) suggests strongly that in recent years ‘people in England have become less British, rather than more English’ (11). Smith (2006) importantly notes however that the English have regarded the terms as ‘interchangeable’ since the eighteenth century. This conflation that confines the English, is very rarely replicated by the Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish. For them this would be ‘a constant reminder of what they perceive to be … England’s hegemony over the rest of the British Isles’ (Kumar, 2003: 1).

Aslet (1997) offers a fine example of such conflation. The basic objective of his text is to criticise what he considers to be the decimation of British national identity. In practice, what he actually considers to be British is rather more a Home Counties Englishness, rural and middle class, undoubtedly white and sprinkled liberally with large doses of sentimentality and nostalgia. Throughout the text he conflates the terms England/Britain and English/British at will, most noticeably when he comments on the semi-final match at 1996 European Football Championships (staged in England) when ‘Britain played Germany’ (\textit{ibid.}: 14). Though one may forgive Aslet for failing to understand the subtleties of international football and national representative

\textsuperscript{13} A recent addition to this list is the English Defence League (EDL), a far-right organisation that purports to promote English nationalism in direct response to a perceived threat from Muslim extremism. Thus far, the organisation has arranged a number of street demonstrations but has shown little or no desire or to adopt democratic means to deliver its message or achieve its aims.
sporting competition in the UK, it is less easy to forgive his overall view that British national identity is actually an English identity that is fixed and unchanging.

Colls (2002) has concluded that ‘being English is not natural, or fixed, or an absolute quality’ (378). Bryant (2003) has identified four distinctive categories of English national identity (Anglo-British England, Little England, English England and Cosmopolitan England), which complicate further the nature of Englishness nationalism and its relationship to Britishness. Turner and Edmonds (2001) have also identified differing interpretations of Englishness (Benign and Malign) that again reflect the complexity of the terms involved. That there are differing constructions of Englishness reflects the fact that England is made up of a diverse and highly differentiated population, not simply in terms of the ethnicity already remarked upon above, but also in relation to other structural factors such as class and regionality (Haseler, 1996). In many ways, the English nationalism that we have seen conforms to the definition of state-building nationalism offered by Hechter (2001). Crick (1991) thus concludes that any open expression of English nationalism would have disrupted the Union and acted contrary to the intentions of the ruling classes to keep the Union strong at all costs. Kumar (2003) agrees with this contention.

There is little doubt that questions of English nationalism are more salient now than at any time in history. Hall (1991) has gone as far to say that ‘everywhere, the question of Englishness is in contention’ (26). For Haseler (1996), the crisis of Englishness has been brought about by a variety of factors including Britain’s relative industrial and economic decline and consequent increased reliance upon the United States of America, and the Americanisation of English culture. For McCrone (1992),
Englishness went underground, only to re-emerge when the assertion of ‘Celtic’ forms of nationalism and the perceived threat to ‘national’ sovereignty from Europe called it up (59).

Kumar (2003) too cites the loss of British economic power, the rise of ‘Celtic’ nationalisms, but also the loss of Empire, the increasing multiculturalism of society and the rise of the European Union:

in whichever direction they look, the English find themselves called upon to reflect upon their identity, and to re-think their position in the world. The protective walls that shielded them from these questions are all coming down (16).

Davey (1999) meanwhile has argued that the ‘boundaries which were based on former identifications and differentiations are dissolving’ (10). As such

for any new social arrangements to work, and inclusive if provisional identifications to form, England’s national imaginary must be brought up to date (ibid.).

2.6 Summary: Nationalism and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

In this chapter it has been clearly shown how difficult it is to offer theoretical perspectives and paradigms that explain particular instances of nationalisms effectively. The case of the UK is particularly complex, and in this case to offer any explanation that favours any one particular theoretical understanding or approach would be foolhardy, not least because of the cultural differences that exist both between and within the peoples of these islands. In many ways though it is a particularly appropriate example to use because it gives glimpses of most, if not all, of the theoretical perspectives and paradigms that were considered in the previous chapter. Before discussing how sport reflects and contributes to versions of nationalism within the UK, let us first consider the more general relationships between nationalism and sport.
Chapter Three: Sport and Nationalism

This chapter will look at the relationship between sport and nationalism, nationality and national identity. The aims of this chapter will be to attempt to demonstrate the complexities of sporting nationalisms and to show that to attempt to theorise them in general terms is again problematic. Consideration will also be given to two particular forms of sporting nationalism that have relevance for this research, namely those that seek to unify nations and those that seek to promote submerged or stateless nations. Before looking specifically at these instances and at how nationalism has been utilised in different ways by particular sporting nations, it is pertinent to consider how and why sport is so intimately linked to ideas about the nation. In doing so it will also be useful to consider how such concepts are constructed in relation to sport and the meanings that are attached to them.

3.1 Understanding Sport and Nationalism

To commence, Dyreson (2003) has argued that modern the form of sport has consistently been ‘an arena for the exhibition of tribal and especially national identities rather than an occasion to celebrate universal human communities’ (92). Cronin (1999) concludes that ‘sport is, and always has been, inextricably linked to the forces of nationalism and identity’ (52). He cites the influence of industrial capitalism as both encouraging and normalising competition between nations, and consequently the competition that exists between modern sporting nations (53). Bairner (2005a), in his discussion of the relationship between sport and the nation in the global era, has argued that supporting national representative teams in international sporting contests ‘is one of the easiest and most passionate ways of underlining one’s sense of national
identity, one’s nationality or both in the modern era’ (92). Polley (1998) links sporting nationalism to the concept of ‘banal nationalism’ offered by Billig (1995) and consequently suggests that the nation is ‘formally enshrined in sport, through the use of flags and anthems in ceremonial aspects’ (35).

However, Polley fails here to draw a clear distinction between ‘banal’ nationalism, and expressions of sporting nationalism that might be regarded as being ‘hotter’, or more explicitly and knowingly voiced. It can be said with some certainty that Billig (1995) would not consider the waving of flags and scarves at national sporting events to be examples of ‘banal nationalism’ at work. Billig’s main concern is with more familiar, routine and unknowing reminders of nations and nationalisms, and it is important that this clear distinction be maintained. He would then be less concerned with the Cross of St. George flags and banners being waved at an England football match, but would instead be interested in more routine symbols of the English nation (and a particular version of it) that might accompany it. This might be seen in the Cross of St George flags that often adorn public houses or cars, or those flags that are printed on sponsored, commercial products being sold during particular sporting tournaments and events. Allison (2004) also sees the national symbolic possibilities of sport as an easy, convenient and wholly appropriate vehicle for collective expressions of national identity. In a point made in relation to the Olympic Games, but one that has parallels with many other international-level sporting competitions, Hargreaves (2000) notes the ‘extraordinarily rich opportunity it affords for deploying symbols of the nation’ (55). Clearly then, there is a tangible relationship between sport and nationalism, but to understand this correspondence we must look closer as to why this should be so.
By drawing on the influence of Anderson (1991) on ‘imagined communities’, Maguire (1999) is rightly insistent that sport plays a significant role in the creation and construction of identity in these respects. He argues that sport contributes to the ways in which

shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs and disasters are recounted in compelling ways. It is these that give meaning to the notion of the nation and national identity (ibid.: 178).

Numerous other theorists cite the influence of Anderson (1991) in the theorisation of imagined, national sporting communities. Guttmann (1994) for example has argued that in keeping with Anderson’s understandings, ‘modern sports are an important and popularly accessible aid to this politically indispensable form of imagining’ (183). Cronin and Mayall (1998) are particularly prominent in this respect. They are keen to emphasise the significance of Anderson and argue that his work

is particularly useful for the way it moves beyond a merely political focus and examines the construction of the nation in a variety of political, social and economic levels (2).

Specifically they contend that ‘it is within this idea of imagined community, as set out by Anderson, that sport functions’ (ibid.). Importantly though, they argue that as an effective symbol of the nation and national prowess, sport is benign:

sport cannot win territory or destroy an opposing ideology or religion which the nation seeks to demonise. It can only support the construction of a nation which has been imagined (ibid.).

Further support for the appropriateness of Anderson’s work for conceptualising national sporting communities is offered by Duke and Crolley (1996) and Lever (1983)\textsuperscript{14} in relation to football, and by Harvey (2000) in his general study of sport and Québécois nationalism. Importantly, Hobsbawm (1992b) argued that ‘the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people’ (143).

\textsuperscript{14} Lever’s concern is with the ability of football to create bonds between strangers and also those people already familiar with each other. This clearly has parallels with the work of Anderson.
Hargreaves (2002) has criticised Maguire for his leanings towards Anderson in this regard, but his criticisms might also be levelled at the many others who look to Anderson for theoretical support. Hargreaves argues that Maguire is ‘totally unaware of the importance of ethno-nationalist elements’ (36) in the constructions of national communities. In this regard, Hargreaves takes a view that is sympathetic to the ethnosymbolic perspective held by Smith (1989, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2007). This criticism is somewhat unwarranted insofar as Maguire does look to a form of historical continuity that Smith so covets. This is evidenced when Maguire (1999) talks about the construction of identities in a national sporting context. He argues that these meanings are contained in the stories that are told about the nation. They are also evident in the memories that connect a nation’s present with its past (177).

Duke and Colley (1996) also cite the influence of historical continuity for their associations between sport and Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’.

According to Hargreaves (2000)

sport and nationalism are interrelated through their anchorage in common cultural traditions that may undergo sharp transformation as modernisation occurs (12).

In common with perennialist views of nationalism that promote the pre-modern origins of nations, Hargreaves considers that sport too has pre-modern origins but that the processes of modernization have transformed the meanings and functions associated with it, a view with which Silk, Andrews and Cole (2005) broadly concur. For Hargreaves, modernization and the modernization of sport are central to the relationship between sport and nationalism:

through sport highly condensed and instantly effective images of the nation can be diffused to mobilise the potential nationalist constituency and to legitimate the movement externally. The power of such images resides in their impact, not only at the cognitive level, but above all at the emotional level, and in their appeal to the aesthetic senses (ibid.: 14).
Allison (2004) too identifies that emotion and identification play a central role in the appeal of sport to nationalism, citing ‘the immense added meaning that a sense of shared national identity gives to watching a team and (sometimes) an individual perform’ (345). Hobsbawm (1992b), whilst simultaneously making an interesting point about the gendered nature of the relationship between sport and nationalism\textsuperscript{15}, concludes that

what has made sport so uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feelings, at all events for males, is the ease with which even the least political or public individuals can identify with the nation as symbolized by young persons excelling at what practically every man wants, or at one time in life has wanted, to be good at (143).

What can be seen is that the appeal of sport and nationalism extends from the ease with which individuals can identify with national teams and to the depth of feeling and emotion that they evoke. This, to an extent, explains why sport has sometimes been used by nationalists to assist in furthering their aims. The task now is to try to understand how this has happened. Perhaps one of the most significant points to make with regard to sport and nationalism is made by MacClancy (1996a) who argues that ‘any particular sport is not intrinsically associated with a particular set of meanings or social values’ (4). Rather, he suggests that

sport is an embodied practice in which meanings are generated, and whose representation and interpretation are open to negotiation and contest (\textit{ibid.}).

Guttmann (1994) takes a quasi-Gramscian perspective by arguing that the essential meanings of sport are areas of cultural contestation. Budd (2001) is also confident of the possibilities for resistance afforded by sport but is equally certain that national rivalries are essential to capitalism. Along similar lines to MacClancy, Sugden and Bairner (1993) propose that sport itself is not inherently political but rather that it

\textsuperscript{15} Maguire (1999) also identifies the gendered nature of sport and identity construction.
possesses certain basic qualities that make it vulnerable to political manipulation. They argue

sport has developed as a significant medium, or collection of symbols, through which the individual can identify with a particular social formation, thus exaggerating sport’s capacity to become politicised (ibid.: 7).

Maguire (1999) argues that

the discourses promoted in and through sport by dominant groups construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which people can identify (ibid.: 177).

However, one should be careful not to fall into the trap of assuming that sporting nationalisms can be explained by simplistic or general theories. Cronin (1999) importantly identifies that

as with nationalism itself, the constructs of nationalism connected with sport can be representative of many different themes, groups and ideas, and are formed and shaped by a multitude of different forces (57).

Bairner (2001, 2005a) too notes the diverse nature of theoretical perspectives on nationalism and concludes that ‘there will be a marked variation in the manner in which sport is used in such different contexts to promote the nationalist cause’ (164). Cronin and Mayall (1998) are adamant that

the concept of nationalism must be seen, therefore, as both a historical reality and as a contemporary continuum, which has been therefore, and still is, central to the construction of identity and one which performs a vital function in sport (3).

Allison (2004) points out that there is no compunction to universalise the relationship between sport and nationalism and emphasises the differentiations between each case and also of the importance of context. He is also mindful of the complexity of sporting nationalisms and warns against making assumptions about the straightforward appearance of many examples:

most cases are more complex and the idea of nationality that is represented by any given expression of sporting nationalism is usually divisive in some way (347).
As we shall go on to see, this points to a particularly important aspect of sporting nationalism, namely that it has possibilities to be both unifying and divisive. Several other commentators have remarked upon this. Dyreson (2003) notes that both the disunities and unities accentuated by modern national sporting contests coalesce along the lines of national identities. Bairner (2001, 2005a) highlights the role of culture and contestation in these processes, whereas Lever (1983) prefers a more structural analysis which suggests that it is

the organization of sporting institutions that determine whether the culture’s pluralism or its unity is reinforced through ritualized contests (149).

Guttmann (1994) agrees that sporting nationalisms produce both integrative and divisive effects but thinks it most likely that the former outweighs the latter.

Before moving on to look at some examples of sporting nationalisms, it is worth spending a little time considering the thoughts of Cronin (1999) on the subject, which will also act as a basis on which to tidy up some loose ends. We have already mentioned that the complex nature of sporting nationalism broadly reflects theories of nationalism in general and that this consequently manifests itself in a number of diverse ways. Cronin (1999) adds that sporting nationalisms can be both real and imagined and can take various forms such as

the manner in which a team plays, the idea that the players involved have common elements with the nation watching, that is, that they are ‘our boys and girls’ (55).

He also adds that sporting nationalisms can be either creative (stimulating a wholly new nationalist project) or projecting (clasping to or being grafted onto an already existing nationalism) (ibid.). Furthermore, sporting nationalisms can be either positive or negative, though context and perspective are clearly important in these respects (ibid.). Significantly, Cronin also identifies ‘the transient or temporary nature’ (56) of
sporting nationalisms, in that often the effects last only until the final whistle blows or until the Olympic flame is extinguished, a theme also explored by Johnes (2000) and Jarvie and Walker (1994).

3.2 Sport, Nationalism and the Consolidation of National Identity

Having attempted to show the linkages between sport and nationalism and also to identify their mutual appeal, it is now possible to move on to look specifically at how sport has been used in nationalist contexts. The two forms of sporting nationalism that will be considered here are both deemed to be of relevance for this research: sporting nationalisms and state-building (or unification nationalism) in multi-national or divided states; and sporting nationalisms and submerged or peripheral nations. Commencing with the former, it can be understood that this model largely conforms to the definition of state-building nationalism offered by Hechter (2001): ‘the nationalism that is embodied in the attempt to assimilate or incorporate culturally distinctive territories in a given state’ (15). Importantly, Hechter identifies the key-distinction between state-building and unification nationalisms: ‘the former is inherently territorially inclusive, whereas the latter is culturally inclusive’16 (ibid.: 91). In practice though, it is quite common to find at least some overlap in these theoretical perspectives.

The main concern of this variant of sporting nationalism is to seek to use sporting contexts to bring diverse, divided or multi-national states together by promoting a single, dominant national identity. This has often been termed ‘nation-building’ and is defined by Harvey (2001) as being where ‘sport is used as a platform for promoting a

16 Author’s italics.
sense of belonging to a specific political community or nation-state’ (360). Although Guttmann (1994) finds the term ‘nation-building’ apt in some limited respects, he is aware that it is problematic, and claims that it ‘has fallen out of favour because of its associations with an ethnocentric conception of modernization’ (183). Cronin (1999) states that sporting competition between nations does much to raise national prestige, and he cites the role of government as being central to this form of sporting nationalism. He argues that ‘the demand for sporting success is made by those groups wishing to underline the ideal of a unified identity’ (ibid.: 51). Cronin goes on to suggest that the continued focus on elite sports by organisations such as UK Sport, rather than a concentration on developing more wide-ranging campaigns aimed at promoting sport for health-improvement or mass participation, proves these nationalistic intentions (ibid.).

Hobsbawm (1992b) has suggested that international sporting contests were originally instigated to demonstrate the unity of multi-national states such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. According to Hobsbawm, it was only between the wars that the focus of sport changed to promote contests that highlighted differences between teams symbolizing state-nations, which would later become a central feature of modern sport. However, Hobsbawm’s assertions are questionable. In relation to his first point, the administrative development of football in the UK actually saw the institution of separate national Football Associations at a very early stage: FA (1863), SFA (1873), IFA (1880) and FAW (1876) (Wagg, 1995). With competitive matches regularly being played between England, Scotland, Wales and
Ireland\textsuperscript{17} and the existence of separate, independent national governing bodies, the absence of a single UK-wide football association does not tend to support Hobsbawm’s view of the early unifying functions of football in the UK\textsuperscript{18}. Indeed, Robinson (2008), has clearly argued contrary to Hobsbawm’s view, when she says that matches between the four nations of the United Kingdom were fiercely competitive from the very beginning, particularly those matches between England and Scotland. Rather, Hobsbawm may be mistaking the reluctance and unenthusiastic approach of the British football associations towards wider international competition and regulation (Beck, 1999; Duke and Crolley, 1996) as being indicative of the ‘unifying tendencies’ of football in the UK.

Hobsbawm is also wayward on his second point, when he asserts that it was only between the wars that the focus of sport changed to promote contests that highlighted differences between teams symbolizing state-nations. Beck (1999) has argued that the Olympic Games had already become an important context for international sporting competition by the time Great Britain (represented by an all-English team on both occasions) won the football gold medal in the Games of both 1908 and 1912. In light of this, it has been claimed by Beck that these victories ‘reaffirmed impressions regarding the high standing of British football’ (ibid.: 55). Whilst historically there was undoubtedly a distinctive British dimension to football, the opportunities for this to be extended much further were few and far between. Aside from a few notable friendly matches, including the 1947 match between a Great Britain select team and the Rest of the World XI to celebrate the British Associations return to full FIFA

\textsuperscript{17} Northern Ireland competed as a team after partition and the formation of the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) in 1921.

\textsuperscript{18} These are examples that will be discussed at greater length and in greater detail in the chapter that follows.
membership, and a match in 1955 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the IFA between Great Britain and the Rest of Europe, the occasions on which the nations of the UK have played together competitively in football championships are restricted to Olympic football tournaments.

Further support for the idea that early sporting contests began to reflect national rivalries also comes from Maguire (1999), who concludes that from the late nineteenth century, international sporting contests became ‘a form of patriot games in which particular views of national identities and habitus codes were constructed and represented’ (176). In relation to sport, both Silk, Andrews and Mason (2005) and Maguire (1999) have also offered support to the concept of ‘invented traditions’ offered by Hobsbawm (1992a, 1992b) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992). Maguire (1999) suggests that sport and monarchy are both founded upon myths. He concludes that these myths seek to locate the origins of the nation, the people and/or national character much further back in time and place than the evidence supports (179).

As we shall see, examples of this phenomenon are commonly located in sport.

Allison (2004) argues that the nature of sport within the multi-national UK, which is commonly centred on separate England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales teams, has ‘persisted because of a fundamental British separation of the ideas of state and nation and because of their commercial viability’ (347). Using the case of sport and another multi-national state, Russia (formerly known as the Soviet Union), and

---

19 Two other games were played between Wales and a team representing the rest of the United Kingdom, with players from England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The first match, in 1951, commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Football Association of Wales. The second match, in 1969, commemorated the investiture of the Prince of Wales. In both cases, the England, Scotland and Northern Ireland select team played under the name of the ‘Rest of the United Kingdom’.

81
Georgia, one of Russia’s now independent satellite nations, Allison (2004) shows how it is possible for two separate and compatible sporting identities to exist at the same time. Though this is undoubtedly possible in the vast majority of cases, it should be remembered that each instance is different and the degrees to which these distinct identities are compatible will vary markedly.

It should also be noted that these sporting cases are best viewed from a Gramscian perspective of hegemony, as proposed by Hargreaves (1986) and Sugden and Bairner (1993). In this way we can see how attempts to promote a unified national identity through sport are part of a series of cultural contestations that are taking place and which point to

the fact that political relationships between the rulers and the ruled cannot be characterised as simply the result of absolute domination by the former and absolute submission by the latter (Guttmann, 1994: 6).

Bairner (2001) is significant here in the way he links the concepts of sport, national identity and hegemony:

we should not ignore the fact that in most nation-states there exists a hegemonic national identity that is not necessarily inclusive. In such instances, some citizens may well choose to celebrate an alternative national identity, with sport playing an important part in their activities (169).

For example, in their study of Spanish football Duke and Crolley (1996) have shown how the Franco regime used sport in attempts to promote a dominant vision of Spain and Spanish national identity, and also to extinguish the regional and submerged national loyalties of the Basques, Catalans and Galicians. However, this process was never complete and various attempts at resistance, and the promotion of submerged nationality through football, became evident (Giulianotti and Armstrong, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000; MacClancy, 1996b; Walton, 2001). In his assessment of the effects
of the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona on Catalan nationalism, Hargreaves (2000) concluded that the games promoted

not only a clash between Catalan ethnic nationalist identity and a civic conception of nationality, but a division within the nationalist community, between separatists and those who want to remain part of Spain, or in other words, a clash between exclusive and inclusive nationalism (164).

Furthermore, both Kidd (1992) and Harvey (2000) have considered how sport has been used in Canada to promote and present national identity in a state founded upon real cultural and ethnic difference. Again, these studies identify the resistance and contestation that occurred as the pan-Canadian national, and Quebecois regional, governments battled to use sport to promote civic and ethnic conceptions of the nation respectively. Bairner (2001) has also highlighted the problems posed by sport and national identity in modern Canada. In particular, Bairner focuses on the ways that sporting cultures in Canada have provided opportunities for the articulation of national identities that are resistant to the perceived increased threat of Americanization. Hargreaves (2000) has also shown how the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona were subject to contestations between competing Catalan and Castilian concepts of the Spanish nation. In another example, Elder, Pratt and Ellis (2006) have shown how the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, and in particular the role of Australian-aboriginal 400-metre runner Cathy Freeman, were used by the Australian government to promote discourses that attempted to bring the white-Australian majority and Aboriginal minority groups closer together. Again, it was shown how this process was essentially contested and challenged by the existence of contrasting discourses. John Marks (1999) has shown how competing discourses of French national identity were played out around the French national football team that won the 1998 FIFA World Cup. Specifically, whilst identifying that the ethnic diversity of the 1998 French team
was not particularly new or unique, Marks concludes that ‘this diversity of origin is now embraced in the positive light of multi-cultural integration’ (55).

In the case of Swiss sport, Tomlinson (2000) identifies an exception to the norm. He concludes that in Switzerland,

> the contribution of sport is not to generate and promote social division, rather it is to celebrate cultural diversity. At local, regional and national levels sport is one of the cultural forms which expresses and symbolizes an authentically felt social harmony and unity-in-difference (133).

The Swiss case is enlightening for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates rather well the point made earlier concerning the differences between the various ways and forms that sporting nationalisms can take. Secondly, it demonstrates the range and degrees to which differences between cultures can exist and be reflected through sport. In the Swiss version it is clear that a balance has been struck, but in other examples it is evident that the weight is less evenly distributed. Moreover, it is apparent that in many cases, wherever there exists tacit or explicit attempts to unify a nation through sport, there will also be accompanying challenges or claims to nationhood by submerged or ethnically-minority nations. It is to these sporting nationalisms that we now turn.

### 3.3. Sport and Submerged Nations

It is clear from the available evidence that sport has been commonly used to promote the nationalist ambitions of state-less or submerged nation states. One of the main reasons for this is identified by Bairner (2001), who argues that sport has the capacity to help to undermine official nationalism by linking itself to sub-nation-state national identities and [by] providing a vehicle for the expressions of alternative visions of the nation (18).
This manifests itself for many in the way that

sport provides athletes and fans with opportunities to celebrate a *national identity* that is different from and, in some cases, opposed to, their ascribed *nationality* (Bairner, 2005: 91).20

Historically, the first uses of sport to express resistant national or ethnic identities were born of colonialism and emerged in particular from the British Empire. Guttmann (1994) argues that the British (and other colonial powers) intentionally introduced modern sports into their colonies for a number of reasons, including the drive for political and cultural domination. Resistance to these processes took various forms. Firstly, some countries continued to develop and promote their own particular sports and games, although even these ‘continued to reveal the influence of the British approach to sport’ (Bairner, 2001: 13).

Ireland presents the most obvious example of this process, which can serve to make some sporting cultures exclusive, and often ‘reflect a contest between ethnic and civic representations of the nation’ (*ibid.*: 167). The cultural and national significance of the sports associated with Ireland’s Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) such as Gaelic football and hurling are discussed in detail by Bairner (2001, 2005a, 2005b), Cronin (1999), Cronin and Mayall (1998) and Sugden and Bairner (1993). Secondly, Bairner (2001) notes how nations undertook the transformation of existing British games and sports to reflect ‘the development of unique sporting cultures’ (13). He cites the case of the United States of America as a good illustration of this. The United States’ sporting preference for baseball and American football over cricket and rugby is discussed in detail by Majumdar and Brown (2007), whilst the relative failure of soccer to find mass, popular appeal and commercial success in the United States is

---

20 Author’s italics.
considered by Collins (2006).

A further example of the ways which colonial nations resisted imperial sporting domination is identified by Bairner (2001). He argues that indigenous people took up the British games but sought to give them a distinctive flavor and, thereby link them to broader anti-imperialist struggles (13).

In light of this, Allen (2003) shows how between 1899 and 1948 Afrikaners took rugby union and transformed it to reflect their own distinctive culture and meanings. As a result the game became a powerful, if informal, indicator of Afrikaner national identity and also provided them an opportunity to defeat the English at their own game (54). Alegi (2004, 2010) offers the most comprehensive account of the colonial experience of Africa and football. Whilst the role of the British is seen to be important in respect of the Africanisation of football in colonial contexts, Alegi (2010) concludes that the ‘Africans were not simply duped into adopting Western sport: they enjoyed the game for their own reasons and on their own terms’ (13). In his study of footballing nationalism in colonial Calcutta, Bandyopadhyay (2003) has shown how the game became an important signifier of cultural and political resistance against the British. He argues that the defeat of a team from the East Yorkshire Regiment of the British Army, in the 1911 IFA Shield Final, brought about ‘a national reawakening’ (7). Guttmann (1994) too has identified the enormous cultural and political capital to be made from the occasions when colonial teams go on to beat their masters (or former masters) at their own game.

There are many other contemporary examples from beyond the colonial sphere whereby submerged or stateless nations have used sport to further their political and national aspirations. Once again, and in common with the examples of state-building
and unification sporting nationalisms seen above, it would be foolhardy to assume that any such cases are straightforward and without contradiction. We can use the case of football to illustrate this. Duke and Crolley (1996) argue that where political conflicts regarding submerged or stateless-nations exist, even if only as potentialities, ‘these movements may find expression in the football stadium’ (5). As has already been mentioned, Spanish football has historically been an arena where constructions of diverse national identities were presented and contested.

For example, MacClancy (1996b) has considered the history of the Basque nation and the football club Athletic Bilbao and concluded that

local support of the team, however, is based not just on its sporting achievements, deeply impressive though they may be, but on what it represents, for Athletic is seen as the team of the Vizcayans (the province whose capital is Bilbao), and, in national contests, as the team of the Basques

This approach has though been severely criticised by Walton (2001), who as well as being less than impressed with MacClancy’s general grasp of football knowledge, argues that

his [MacClancy’s] account needs to be set in the wider context of the complexities of Basque local and provincial identities, which cross-cut the ‘national’ one in interesting and changing ways; and we need especially to take account of the rivalry between San Sebastian and Bilbao, Real Sociedad and Athletic Bilbao, for supremacy in the Basque Country and beyond (183).

Walton identifies the issue here as being a problematic conception of hegemonic Basque nationalism and national identity which

failed consistently to take account of the divisions within the Basque Country, especially the ways in which provincial and local loyalties cut across attachment to the idea of a Basque nation (ibid.: 122).

This view is also reflected by Giulianotti and Armstrong (2001). They argue that the fierce rivalry between Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad

Author’s italics.
calls into question the tendency of European intellectuals to conceive routinely of Basque identity as a relatively uncomplicated, homogenous and teleological project (274).

This is most appropriately illustrated by noting the two differing policy approaches to the selection and recruitment of players adopted by Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad. Both clubs have in the past allowed foreign players to play for them, but Athletic Bilbao have implemented a Basque-only policy for almost a century (MacClancy, 1996b). Whilst being slightly more flexible in contemporary times, in that the sons of Basque parents, born elsewhere and/or raised in the Basque Country may now be sometimes considered to play for Athletic, this policy has continually confirmed the exclusiveness of the club’s approach to Basque identity (Walton, 2001). In contrast, Real Sociedad, whilst still relying predominantly on a pool of Basque players, do allow foreign players to join their playing ranks, although this policy is not extended to Spaniards (*ibid*.), which many Spaniards find more offensive than the ethnic purity of Athletic’s recruitment policy. The distinctions between the two club’s notions of Basque identity can therefore be seen within these two differing approaches to player selection and recruitment. Bandyopadhyay (2003) also identifies the problems of assuming the straightforward and unproblematic nature of such sporting nationalism projects. He argues that although football in Calcutta played a significant role in bringing anti-imperialist discourses to the fore, it failed in the long run to establish a lasting unified identity and eventually foundered upon communal and sub-regional lines.

### 3.4 Summary: Sport and Nationalism

What we have seen is that sport and nationalism are closely linked. Though sport
itself is largely free of ideological content, it is a conveyance that is often borrowed and driven by nationalist causes because it provides scope for easy, accessible and deeply profound and emotional expressions of national identification. As a result, in some cases, sports functions as a point of coherence for national movements to the extent that it is central to the culture, or can be made so by a nationalist movement (Hargreaves, 2000: 12).

Significantly though, it is important to remember that each case of sporting nationalism is the product of a particular cultural and historical context. This serves as a reminder that one should not attempt to conceptualise any such instance in general terms, and that what might initially appear to be a straightforward case of state-building or peripheral sporting nationalism is on closer inspection quite likely to be more complex, and also never static. Another issue to bear in mind is that people have many different identities and although national identity is undoubtedly important to many people, it may not be so to others who choose to define their identity in different ways and to different degrees (Bairner, 2001). Additionally, not everybody in a particular ‘nation’ may actually be interested in sport (ibid.). Clearly this should be borne in mind when one considers any instances or examples of sporting nationalisms. And finally, Rowe (2003), in his seminal text on the questionable relationship between sport and globalization, makes a key point. He argues that the continued dependency of sport upon the nation ‘operates as a perpetual reminder of the social limits to the reconfiguration of endlessly mutable identities and identifications’ (286). As we shall go on to see in the next chapter, the UK provides some of the most interesting examples of the various themes that have been addressed in the course of the preceding discussion.
Chapter Four: Sport, Nationalism and the United Kingdom

In this chapter, specific consideration will be given to the relationship between nationalism and sporting cultures in the UK. It will become clear almost immediately that, as with the earlier discussion of nationalisms in the UK, any singular attempt to use respective sporting cultures as general indicators of national identity or concepts of nationalism is at the very least problematic. This relates in particular to the propensity of sporting cultures to serve two simultaneous functions in connection with issues of national identity and nationalism, namely the ability to be both unifying and, at the same time, divisive (Dyreson, 2003; Bairner, 2001, 2005a).

Additionally, within these analyses, though it is possible to detect a degree of shared sporting culture between all of these ‘nations’, it is apparent that even where the same games and sports are present and commonly enjoyed, they are infused with values and meanings which are specific not only to their geographical location but also to the particular social, cultural and political contexts in which they operate. This might conceivably assist in identifying how a combined Great Britain representative football team, competing at the London 2012 Olympic Games, would be located within existing national sporting cultures. The course that this chapter will take will commence by contextualising the relationship between sport and the UK as a whole, before moving on to look more specifically at the sporting cultures of the Unionist community of Northern Ireland, and then on to Wales, Scotland and, finally, England.

4.1 Contextualising Sport and Nationalism in the United Kingdom

The preceding discussion of nationalisms in the UK highlighted the problems that
such an examination poses, not least the significant cultural differences that exist both
between and within the peoples of these ‘nations’. An examination of the respective
sports cultures embraced by these peoples does little, if anything at all, to alleviate or
circumnavigate these problems. In considering the existence of the UK as a political
entity, but the lack of a representative combined UK football team, Ben Carrington
(1999) argues that sporting culture actively adds to the confusion surrounding the
national identities of the people who live within what Norman Davies (2000) has
termed, The Isles:

sporting nationalisms therefore reveal the schizoid nature of British identity – we are
British in most, but not all, athletic events, with a separate Republic of Ireland squad,
five nations in football, yet four when it comes to rugby union, and one team – though
sometimes four – if it’s rugby league, and one team called ‘England’, plus whoever
else is good enough to play, and a separate Scotland team when it comes to cricket
(Carrington, 1999: 75-76).

If only to add to the confusion, it is also worth clarifying that at international levels in
both rugby union and cricket, Ireland is represented by an all-Ireland team, meaning
that players can be selected to play together from both Northern Ireland and the
Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, and somewhat confusingly, players from both north
and south of the Irish border can be selected play for the England cricket team. As if
any further complication were needed, it is also worth mentioning that Carrington has
neglected to include in his analysis the British and Irish Lions, the occasional rugby
union touring-side for which players are selected from the four representative ‘home
nations’ of the British Isles. Holt and Mason (2000) have argued that though the
British and Irish Lions are popular with rugby fans, they have failed to significantly
imbue rugby culture in the United Kingdom with a ‘British’ dimension, and that
consequently the game remains ‘national’ in virtually every sense. Two factors may
influence this. Firstly, this may be related to the fact that the British and Irish Lions
only play matches outside of the British Isles\textsuperscript{22} and then only every four years. Secondly, the presence of players from the Republic of Ireland who would not consider themselves ‘British’ under any circumstances may also be influential. Additionally, with regard to the Lions, Tuck (2005) has argued that

the residual nature of British identity ensures that the nation remains a more primary source of identity. The players feel English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh either instead of or as well as British (117).

The Lions example is indicative of what is often the case, namely that in terms of a substantive ‘British’ sporting identity, outside of the summer and winter Olympic Games, there are very few sports where competitors from all four ‘nations’ of the UK compete together as a single representative team. Even then, matters are often not as clear-cut as they might initially seem. For example, Northern Ireland’s boxers compete for the Republic of Ireland in the Olympic Games rather than for Great Britain and Northern Ireland\textsuperscript{23}. Additionally, and again in relation to the Olympic Games, hockey players from Northern Ireland can elect to represent either Great Britain and Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. Even so, Holt and Mason (2000) consider that not only has the Olympic Games ‘been a crucial arena for Britain to compete as a nation-state’ (142) but the growth and increase in media coverage, in particular by television, also ‘clearly gave a new national significance to Britain’s role in the Olympics’ (\textit{ibid.}). This is an interesting perspective that nonetheless identifies that Holt and Mason have a less than adequate grasp of the term ‘nation-state’, but for many theorists the role of media resonates loudly.

\textsuperscript{22} Apart from a solitary 2005 tour warm-up match against Argentina at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff.

\textsuperscript{23} This is the official, IOC-recognised name of the UK’s Olympic team.
For Maguire and Tuck (1998), it is the medium of the press that has a key role to play in relation to the construction of discourses surrounding sport and national identity within the UK. Overall though, they recognise that the complexity of the sporting culture of the UK reflects a far from homogeneous domain, and that any sense of a ‘British’ sporting identity is often a symptom of the same conflation of England and Britain that is evident in certain conceptions of English nationalism:

the predominant, Anglo-centric, view of Britain (the product of an effective hegemony of English culture) tends to obscure the identities of Wales, Scotland and Ireland into an amorphous ‘Celtic fringe’ and inflate the ‘English’ identity to British dimensions (Maguire and Tuck, 1998: 106).

Hargreaves (1986) too cites the role of media sport as being significant but is concerned that ‘it invokes national unity in a manner more consistent with the dominant classes preferred view’ (155). A second concern for Hargreaves, in relation to the possibilities for conflation, is that this process too is problematic:

a difficulty is presented … by a degree of ambiguity about being British, which is not present in being English, and in some ways the consensus on what constitutes the nation is more firmly rooted in the latter than the former conception (ibid.)

Moorhouse (1996) takes a similar line with regards the possibilities for conflation between England and Britain, as do Holt and Mason (2000). The latter prefer to conclude though that ‘different sports had different structures and myths celebrating the unity and diversity of the United Kingdom and its component parts’ (144).

If the possibilities for an unabashed ‘British’ identity through sport are limited, there was some semblance of ‘Britishness’ or British identity in football. This often found expression in the British exceptionalism that was a feature of the development of association football in the United Kingdom for over half a century. Both Beck (1999) and Duke and Crolley (1996) have detailed the ‘splendid isolation’ (12) and ‘aloofness with a hint of arrogance’ (ibid.) that were characteristic of the dealings of
the four UK-based football associations with non-British footballing institutions, at least until after the end of the Second World War. Moorhouse (1996) advocates that these attitudes represented an attempt by the British to retain what they saw as their central, key role in the governance of world football, but also reflected their view that British football was far superior to any other. The fact remained though that it was the FA that more often than not lead the British associations as a collective group in terms of policy and attitudes overall. Beck (2000) has argued more generally that during the period 1900-46 the FAW, IFA and SFA whilst ‘consistently stressing their separate histories, identities and points of view, were prepared to accept, even welcome, the FA’s leadership’ (113).

In terms of the development or expression of a more discernible or transcendent British identity in football, Taylor (2008) has argued historically that the extent to which the home nations individual identities was expressed through football was ‘restrained and held in balance by a broader British context’ (102). He states that the annual matches between the home nations in the British International Championships served a dual purpose in that they promoted the distinctive and separate identities of the home nations, whilst at the same time demonstrating their unity within a wider British context. Taylor concludes that whilst British football ‘articulated a series of singular (though far from coherent) national identities’ (ibid.: 295), importantly, ‘it had rarely been a forum for the articulation of a merged British identity’ (ibid.).

This is a view that is very much evident in Hill’s analysis of the contribution made to nations and nationalism by the English FA Cup Final (1999). He concludes that it ‘stands as an essentially English event in which a peculiar interweaving of local,
national and British allegiances takes place’ (16). In these terms, Hill fails in many respects to differentiate adequately between England and Great Britain, or indeed, to reflect upon the conflation of these categories that customarily takes place. He also takes an overly simplistic view of the national significance attached to similar events held at other venues within the United Kingdom, such as rugby union internationals in Cardiff, or football matches at Hampden Park in Glasgow. Nevertheless, his account is still of interest. In terms of theoretical perspectives, Hill focuses most prominently on the work of Billig (1995) on ‘banal nationalism’ to explain the significance of the FA Cup Final to nations and nationalism:

the Cup Final, though a more elaborate affair than the symbols studied by Billig, is none the less a part of the ‘banal’ construction of nationhood. Its familiarity serves to mask its ‘flagging’ function (Hill, 1999: 3).

In so doing, Hill largely ignores the ‘invented traditions’ thesis of Hobsbawn (1992a), who has already drawn a clear and direct line from the FA Cup Final to the reproduction of nations and nationalisms. This is unusual, given the prominence that Hill places on the ceremonies, rituals and traditions that have become such an important part of the FA Cup Final, and which he additionally relates to notions of power and privilege. That being said, Hill’s account is one of very few that takes the ‘banal nationalism’ thesis as its starting point in understanding sport.

Despite the antagonisms between the British associations and their European counterparts, Duke and Crolley (1996) argue that ‘the Europeans retained a lingering admiration for the originators of the beautiful game’ (12). Although, FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) ultimately triumphed in this contest to control world football, the British dimension and overall contribution to the development of football was also recognised and acknowledged by FIFA and this
contributed to the existence of a semblance of British footballing identity. For example, FIFA designated both the 1950 and 1954 Home International Championship as *de facto* qualifying groups for the 1950 and 1954 World Cup finals in Brazil and Switzerland respectively\(^{24}\). Additionally, the structural component of a British identity within football was formalised within FIFA’s organisational statutes in 1947 with the award of a number of privileges that the FA, FAW, IFA and SFA retain and enjoy to this day. This manifests itself in several key ways. Firstly, all four remain highly influential as the only association members of the International Football Association Board (IFAB), the body that decides on the laws of association football\(^{25}\). Secondly, the UK retains a permanent vice-president on the FIFA Executive Committee\(^{26}\). Finally, the UK holds an unusual, though not unique, position in world football, in that one political state is allowed to field four separate ‘national’ football teams (Moorhouse, 1996)\(^{27}\).

Whilst there were clearly some elements of the historic organization of British football that contributed to a degree of British identity, what little there was soon to began to dissipate. From the 1930s onwards, there was a growing recognition that the British game should be more open to overseas influences, one of the main

\(^{24}\) England qualified for the 1950 World Cup by winning the British Championship, while Scotland as runners-up, also qualified for the finals. However, Scotland refused to attend the finals having previously stated that they would only travel to Brazil as British Champions. In 1954, as runners-up to England once again in the Home International Championships, Scotland did this time attend the finals, this time being held in Switzerland.

\(^{25}\) Of the eight available seats on the IFAB, the British Associations have four (giving them one vote each) and the remaining four seats are taken by FIFA representatives. For a motion to be passed, a minimum of six votes is required.

\(^{26}\) The FIFA Executive committee consists of eight vice-presidents and 15 members. One of the eight vice-presidents positions is set-aside permanently to a member elected from the four British Football Associations.

\(^{27}\) For a discussion of the many issues for nations hoping to gain full membership of FIFA see Menary (2007).
consequences of this being that more and more matches began to be played between
the British teams and foreign opposition. Up until this point, matches against foreign
opposition had been less common and the British focus and most pressing concerns
had been in contesting the British Home Championships (Taylor, 2008), although
perhaps more important still for England and Scotland was to win the match between
the two (Beck, 2000). Consequently, changing the focus to include more matches
against foreign opposition slowly began the process of diluting the British dimension
to football, and by the 1950s British teams were at last competing in the World Cup
and English club sides began to contest the European Cup in 1956. From the 1960s
onwards, until the British Home International Championships were finally ended in
1984, there was a far less discernible British dimension to football in the UK (Taylor,
2008).

The clear advantages that accompany the privileged status still enjoyed by the British
FAs are at the heart of the debate surrounding whether or not a combined Great
Britain representative football team competes at the London 2012 Olympic Games,
with all-bar the FA showing concern that such an eventuality would potentially
threaten this. Certainly, objections to this status quo have been raised by nations that
regard the situation as being less than fair. Indeed, Duke and Crolley (1996) have
gone as far as to say that ‘it is surprising that separate representation of the four
nations has been maintained’ (13). Moorhouse (1996) has suggested in respect of this
and of the respective football associations, that ‘it is not sensible, at least in football
terms, to be seen to be too close’ (72).

Through Holt (1989), we can see that a wider conception of British national identity
was a historical necessity of the British Empire project and that significantly, ‘sport played a major role in the transmission of imperial and national ideas from the late nineteenth century onwards’ (203). Arguably, since the passing of the British Empire and the implementation of the National Assembly in Wales and devolved governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the requirements for a unifying sporting culture have changed. The realities of British sporting culture and, in particular, association football, are according to Moorhouse (1996), more likely to reinforce the ‘diversity of conditions within the “United” Kingdom and to highlight the unthinking arrogance of rule from England’ (71). Indeed, for Holt (1989), the evident differences between the ‘nations’ was ‘the very stuff of sport’ (237), with the result being that the sporting rivalries between the nations ‘run deep and remain tenacious’ (Holt and Mason, 2000: 121). Specifically in relation to football, and aside from the political dominance of England, these contentions may be attributed to the fact that

these ‘nations’ and leagues have been structured in relations of dominance and subordination, both in terms of wider political and economic forces and in terms of football finance, so that the top stars of all countries have tended to gravitate to just one of the leagues, the English (Moorhouse, 1996: 57).

If this situation were to be related to broader theories of nations and nationalisms, then it is quite clear that the neatest fit would be with the ‘internal colonialism’ of Hechter (1975) or the ‘uneven development’ thesis of Nairn (1977). Both of these approaches focus on the United Kingdom specifically, and also give prominence to unequal relationships of power and economic disparity in explaining the emergence of nations and nationalisms. Amongst those who positively assert that the sporting rivalries of the ‘nations’ of the UK are based on antagonistic relationships are Holt

28 Author’s italics.
(1989) and Maguire and Tuck (1998). There will be a more in-depth consideration of this phenomenon below but it is worth noting also that within Britain sport has been one of the main strands to which the submerged nations have clung in order to assert their distinctiveness, but this cultural nationalism has lacked a sustained political drive (Moorhouse, 1996: 71).

Evidently, national sporting culture at the elite, representative level in the United Kingdom is indeed confusing, clearly reflecting some of the problems of conceiving national identity in relation to sport. It is undeniable that the amount of academic attention paid to the ‘British’ dimension of sporting culture is sparse. Although there are seemingly few opportunities for sporting competition and spectatorship at events where unequivocally ‘British’ athletes are in competition, the Olympic Games offer such an opportunity. Given the global scale and spectacle of the Games and the amount of media coverage that they can gather, particularly in the UK, it is surely appropriate that more specific and nuanced research on the nature of ‘British’ sporting identity be undertaken.

4.2 Sport, Nationalism and Ulster Unionism

4.2.1 Introducing Sport, Nationalism and Ulster Unionism

Having considered the context of sporting cultures within the UK, we can begin to look more specifically at the individual ‘nations’ that constitute this political state, commencing with the Unionist community of Northern Ireland. Any consideration of the sporting preferences and predilections of the communities of Northern Ireland

---

29 As previously discussed, the focus will remain broadly upon the Unionist community of Northern Ireland, not because the sporting cultures of Northern Ireland’s Nationalists are not significant, but rather that it is the Unionists that offer an approach to the UK that is appropriate and relevant to the research project.
should acknowledge that these often contain ‘competing national identities and ethnosectarian attitudes that are intimately involved in a “real” conflict’ (Bairner and Shirlow, 2000: 10). Though the political situation has clearly improved since the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, this has not made attempts to analyse the sporting cultures of Northern Ireland any easier. Bairner (2005b) has commented on how early analyses of sport in Northern Ireland were ‘somewhat crudely mechanical’ (160), in that it was considered that participation and spectatorship in sport was consistent along lines of ethnic and religious separation (ibid.).

In this respect, the following analysis will consider the most popular sports within the Unionist community to see how they serve or function in terms of nationalism and the construction of national identity. Though this approach will focus on the sporting practices of the Unionist community, it is certainly worth looking briefly at the overall sporting context within which these various sports cultures operate. The work of Bairner (1999a, 2001) in differentiating and categorising these main sports by considering their origin and diffuseness as British, Gaelic or Universal sports is insightful in this respect. However, useful as these categories are, one should be cautious not to fall into the trap of assuming that they offer an explanation in themselves as to the sporting preferences of the peoples of Northern Ireland. Rather, they should be considered as a guide only and an indicator of the possibilities for different meanings that sport may have for different communities, at different times. This revised perspective is developed by Bairner (2002).

The first category, British sports, are those that ‘arrived as a direct result of British influence and continue to be played primarily in countries that have had historic links
with Britain’ (Bairner, 1999a: 287). The sports that are being referred to here are principally cricket, rugby union and field hockey. The second category, Gaelic sports refers in the main to (Gaelic) football and hurling, both of which became politically and symbolically associated with Irish nationalism during the late nineteenth century, ‘as a reaction against the growing popularity of foreign (i.e. British) games’ (ibid.). Support for this contention is also given by Sugden and Bairner (1993). Third and finally, there are the universal sports, which undoubtedly arrived in Ireland as the direct result of British influence, but that have since ‘become so universally popular as to make it nonsensical to describe them as British games’ (Bairner, 1998a: 287). The sport being referred to chiefly in this final category is association football, though it also includes track and field athletics and golf.

With regard to the sporting cultures of the Unionist community of Northern Ireland, it is the first and last categories, British and universal sports that will be focussed upon in this analysis. The reason for this is that although it is true that some unionists have played Gaelic sports, it is certain these are few in number (Holmes, 1994; Bairner, 1999a). There are several reasons for this, not least the fact that the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) historically banned its members from playing foreign (British) games (Bairner, 1999b), as well as precluding the playing of such games on its own grounds or pitches (Rule 42), and operating a blanket ban on the membership of players drawn from within the ranks of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and British Armed Forces (Rule 21) (Cronin, 1999). Additionally, many Unionists believe that there is a close association between the GAA and ethnic, Irish

30 And previously the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC).

31 Rule 21 was rescinded in 2001, whilst Rule 42 was temporarily lifted in 2005 to allow the IRFU and FAI to use the GAA’s Croke Park stadium for their respective international fixtures whilst the usual venue, Lansdowne Road, was being refurbished (Hassan, 2006).
nationalism and as such would feel compelled to avoid involving themselves in Gaelic sports on this basis (Bairner, 1999b). Thus, the GAA has in many ways made it difficult for Unionists to play the sports promoted by their organisation. As Bairner (1999b) concludes on the relationship between the GAA and northern Unionists:

the overwhelming majority of northern Protestants are excluded or exclude themselves. There is, of course, no written rule which prevents most of them from taking part. It is disingenuous, however, to suggest that the absence of a written ban is indicative of inclusiveness (24).

As such, our continuing focus will be upon the ways that both British and universal sports contribute to ways in which the unionist communities of Northern Ireland imagine themselves. Primarily, this focus will be centred upon association football. As will become apparent, although this is a game also played and watched by the Nationalist community of Northern Ireland, the abiding context of the game is that of a hegemonic Unionism. Indeed, those that would ultimately decide whether Northern Irish players would be allowed to play in a combined Great Britain and Northern Ireland Olympic football team at London 2012 are undoubtedly and overwhelmingly Unionist.

Bairner (2001) argues that the Ulster Unionists’ sporting culture is closer than any other to that of the English. Though he cites some differences, particularly in the ways that motorcycling, and motor sports in general, are more favoured by Northern Ireland’s Protestants, as well as the greater influence of cricket in constructing notions of Englishness, he concludes that

it is reasonable to state that the English and the Ulster Protestants play the same games and neither group is in possession of sports that are unknown to the other (2001: 30).

Despite these commonalities, it would be foolhardy to continue in the belief that the
same understandings and meanings attached to and made through sport are common to the English and the Protestants of Northern Ireland. This is immediately apparent when one considers the ways that British games are enjoyed in the North of Ireland.

4.2.2 British Games and Ulster Unionism

The sport of rugby union immediately presents us with a problem with regard to the ways in which it may contribute to notions of ‘national’ identity and nationalism among Northern Protestants. Tuck (2005) contends that

rugal union in the ‘British’ Isles represents a unique arena for the construction, reproduction and contestation of national identities and produces a series of national cultural paradoxes (107).

The national cultural paradox for rugby union in Northern Ireland is that like many sports it is organised on an all-Ireland basis, meaning that players from both sides of the border come together to play for a single all-Ireland team. This has posed a problem for those who choose to compete at rugby union for Ireland at the elite-level (Tuck, 2005) and additionally for those who watch the team from the stands or follow their exploits on television, via the Internet or in post-match newspaper reports. Bairner (2005b) argues that in relation to the ‘Ulster British’, ‘this is the unionism of those who are British in political terms but are willing to admit to an Irish dimension to their lives’ (171). This is instructive, not least because it is worth retaining the idea that Unionism is not a homogeneous ideology, but also because it suggests that identity is both flexible and contingent.

An additional and significant factor highlighted by Bairner (2001, 2005b) but largely ignored by Tuck (2005) is the issue of class. In considering how it is possible for Northern Unionists to play rugby for an all-Ireland team, Bairner (2005b) concludes
that the middle class habitus of a vast majority of northern Protestant rugby players are significant here. Drawing on the prominence of Northern Ireland’s Protestant grammar schools in nurturing not only players of rugby union, but also of the other British games such as field hockey and cricket, he argues that

the result is that not only are the overwhelming majority of players of British games Protestant, they are also middle class and, as such, more likely to have grown up in areas less directly affected by political violence and the more extreme ideologies which have flourished in such areas and have helped sustain the conflict (168).

In relation to rugby union, support for this view is offered both by Holt (1989) and Holt and Mason (2000). Bairner (2001) goes on to suggest that although this is not to suggest that such groupings are apolitical or totally divorced from the sectarian realities of life in Northern Ireland, ‘in most cases, they are more able than working class soccer fans to keep their sporting and political interests separate’ (36). In conjunction with this and the realities of the all-Ireland structures of rugby union in Ireland, Bairner states in conclusion that ‘this explains why northern Unionists finish up representing an entity that they would not wish to see being given constitutional legitimacy’ (ibid.). For Hassan (2005), the desire and inclinations of Ulster Unionists to play for an all-Ireland team lie to a degree in a pragmatic approach to the possibilities for sporting achievement, alongside a recognition shared with Bairner, that suggests that ‘identities projected through the medium of sport may not equate to political or constitutional views’ (Hassan, 2005: 134).

The reality of rugby union in Northern Ireland as a predominantly Protestant, middle class sport, alongside the other British games, hockey and cricket, identifies the problematic nature of attempting to use sport to identify an inclusive and all-

---

32 Rugby union is a sport also played by some middle class Catholics in Northern Ireland. Sugden and Bairner (1993) argue though that it would be simplistic to conclude in this regard that the sport is integrative.
encompassing ‘national’ identity. Indeed, this effect is compounded further when one considers the broad antipathy held towards the Ireland rugby union team by working class Ulster loyalists (Hassan, 2005). Arguably, hockey is slightly more contentious in political terms, in that Northern Ireland-based players have been able to choose to represent either Great Britain and Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland, or in the case of male players both countries (Sugden and Bairner, 1993)\(^\text{33}\). In this regard, both these sports may work as a challenge to the Unionist hegemony prevalent in much of Northern Ireland’s sporting cultures. Indeed, it is ironic that these *British* games that are organised on an all-Ireland basis have allowed certain, limited groups of Unionists to exhibit a degree of dual identity (Bairner, 2001) and also ‘to come to terms with the Celtic antisyzygy’ (Bairner, 2005b: 170). Tuck (2005) argues, in relation to rugby, but the sentiments might be applied to any sport organised on an all-Ireland basis, that the Irish players, visibly acting as embodied representatives of the nation, are central figures in activating ‘Ireland’ from the imaginary to the, at least temporarily, real (113).

It has to be said that very few *Gaelic* sports have been able to achieve similar results. It is also significant that the most influential sports in this regard are team sports. Events at which individuals compete such as boxing and golf are ‘less contentious in terms of identity formation’ (Bairner, 2001: 36). Track and field events are similar to a degree, but the Commonwealth Games are important, in that it is one of the very few opportunities that the people of Northern Ireland have the opportunity to compete as a ‘nation’ (Bairner, 2001). The only other main sport that allows a Northern Ireland team to compete at international level is association football.

\(^{33}\) The selection criteria for both the Great Britain & Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland hockey teams remains the same as that stated by Sugden & Bairner (1993). For more information on the selection policies of both please see Great Britain Hockey (2007) and Irish Hockey Association (2008).
4.2.3 Association Football and Ulster Unionism

In Northern Ireland, association football is ‘unique inasmuch as it was the only major sport that, in terms of organization, followed the contours established by partition’ (Bairner, 2001: 31). Holt (1989) too has argued that in Northern Ireland, ‘the tortured organizational history of football neatly encapsulates the conflict between nationalism and unionism’ (244-45)\(^3\). Consequently, the main factor to remember in any discussion of football in Northern Ireland is the ‘overwhelming Protestant ethos with which it is imbued, particularly at the highest levels of achievement’ (Bairner, 1999a: 289). Though the origins of the modern game of soccer are undoubtedly British, in terms of Bairner’s classification scheme for sports played in Ireland, it is quite clearly classed as a universal sport (1999a, 2001). Before going on to look more specifically at the significance of soccer for Northern Ireland’s Protestants, it is worth briefly noting how and why the game became so popular in this region of Ireland.

Sugden and Bairner (1994) identify three key points in this regard. Firstly, Northern Ireland was predominantly Protestant at this time, with a majority of its population descended from original Protestant settlers. As such, they retained a real ‘receptiveness to non-Irish influences’ (122), and consequently, the British-influenced game of soccer had an immediate appeal to them. Secondly, the province’s close links to Scotland ‘had an immediate and direct influence on the introduction of the game’ (ibid.). Thirdly, Belfast was the most industrialized area of Ireland by the beginning of the twentieth century, and

Ulster’s largely Protestant industrial communities provided the ideal conditions for the rapid development of the sport in Ireland and to this day the province’s leading clubs are still important focal points of working class culture (ibid.).

\(^3\) For a more complete assessment of the development of the organizational structures of Irish football in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland see Moorhouse (1996).
Clearly, soccer has had a historic appeal among the Protestant working classes, though significantly, it also appeals to Catholics. In fact, soccer is the most popular contemporary sport in Northern Ireland amongst the Nationalist community (Hassan, 2002; Bairner and Shirlow, 2000). That being said, though the two communities are sometimes momentarily brought together by football, it has more often been the case that ‘soccer has exacerbated rather than improved intercommunity relations’ (Bairner, 1999a: 288), a view also taken by Holt and Mason (2000). This has taken the form of direct sectarian confrontation, such as that in matches in the first half of the twentieth century when Unionist teams such as Linfield or Glentoran played the most important Nationalist team, Belfast Celtic (Magee, 2005). The later withdrawal of the most prominent Catholic teams from the Irish League, such as the aforementioned Belfast Celtic (1948) and Derry City (1971), has left Cliftonville FC as the main representative from the Northern Nationalist community (Bairner, 1999a).35

Despite the waning of the Catholic ‘other’ in the shape of specific opposing teams, the importance and significance of football to the Protestant community, has not diminished. For Bairner and Shirlow (2000), it is clear that ‘the imagined community of Ulster as a Protestant place becomes more real for young loyalists as they express their affiliation at Windsor Park or the Oval’ (16).36 In terms of broader perspectives on nationalisms and national identities, this is clearly a view that is influenced by the ‘imagined communities’ of Anderson (1991). In terms of Irish League football, Magee (2005) too argues that ‘some fans use soccer as a means of demonstrating Loyalism and Unionism’ (187), though he is careful to point out that ‘this is not a

35 Hassan (2002) has detailed how nationalist football teams in Northern Ireland appear to provide opportunities for counter-hegemonic activity and expressions of the desire for a united-Ireland.

36 Windsor Park and The Oval are the home grounds of Linfield FC and Glentoran FC respectively, both are predominantly Protestant clubs but in differing ways and to differing degrees.
unilateral or harmonious process and has different meaning for supporters of various Protestant-dominated clubs’ *(ibid.)*. This has manifested itself far less in direct relation to Catholic teams, fans and players, but most significantly in intra-Protestant football club relations. Notably, this has occurred as a consequence of fans seeking to demonstrate the superiority of their club’s version of Protestantism. This partly explains the rivalry between clubs such as Glenavon and Portadown, and Linfield, the supposedly ‘supra-Protestant’ club *(ibid.)*. Bairner and Walker (2001) are cautious in this respect and point out that supporter dislike of Linfield is often the result of general footballing antipathy, that which is common throughout the football world, and a response to a club’s success and wealth compared with other teams.

Aside from the Northern Ireland national soccer team, arguably the most significant and important team for Protestants is Linfield FC, although as has been shown above, this is not universally the case. For Bairner and Shirlow (2000), Linfield’s broad appeal from across the province and beyond its traditional south Belfast heartlands is suggestive of its ‘quasi-national status’ (15). In relation to Linfield’s status as the principal Protestant team, Bairner and Walker (2001) have argued that

> it is undeniable that Linfield Football Club is deservedly associated with Ulster Unionism and Loyalism and that the club has been justifiably criticized over many years for promoting an essentially sectarian message, not least by its reluctance to employ Catholics (96).

For Magee (2005) too

> it is certain that many supporters are attracted to Linfield because following the club affords them the opportunity to display themselves as Ulster Protestants and in the process to celebrate their broader culture (180).

This may go some way to explaining the appeal of the club to some Unionists and there is little doubt that Linfield remains a potent and crucial symbol of Unionist and Loyalist identity for many people of the Protestant tradition in Northern Ireland.
Magee (2005) suggests that the contemporary ban on contentious marches by Orange Lodges has also influenced matters as ‘the local football team takes on a greater significance as a remaining yet isolated symbol of Protestant identity’ (187).

Additionally, the importance of Linfield may be related to its associations with the Northern Ireland national team that plays its home fixtures at the club’s Windsor Park stadium. There is little doubt that Windsor Park is a Protestant territory and one that has historically utilised overt Unionist and Loyalist symbols and imagery to denote it as such (ibid.). In this regard, it has always been a difficult place for Catholics to visit, not least because of its location in a Protestant-dominated area of Belfast, but also because of what the place means for Protestants. In many ways, Windsor Park conforms to the ‘banal nationalism’ thesis of Billig (1995), not only because some of the imagery in the streets that surround the stadium are so clearly demonstrative of Loyalism and Unionism, but also because of what the name of the stadium alone connotes in the minds of so many. The situation has changed to some extent in recent years because of demographic changes in the districts that surround the stadium and as a result of IFA initiatives to improve the atmosphere at Northern Ireland matches (Hassan, 2006). Even so, the Northern Ireland national team remains a powerful symbol of the nation for the Unionist and Loyalist communities. The reason for this is that it provides

living proof that Northern Ireland was and is a separate political entity, whatever politicians in Dublin and London might claim and nationalists in the province might aspire to (Sugden and Bairner, 1994: 130).

For this reason, Hassan (2002) argues that the Northern Ireland football team has become, since the mid-1980s, a ‘more resolute symbol of Britishness, or more
accurately, non-Irishness, for the predominantly unionist support base it now commands’ (71). This is a significant point not simply because it highlights how the Northern Ireland team has contributed to the ways that people can express forms of national identity or belonging based on nationalism, but also that this is a process that is not fixed nor permanent, but rather an ongoing project that is subject to the changing political, social and cultural context in which it operates. In order to provide some balance, Fulton (2005) suggests that the relationship between northern Nationalists and the Northern Ireland football team has evolved over time, and that like their Unionist counterparts, their attitudes too have not been fixed. He argues that 'the popular belief that northern Catholic football fans support the Republic of Ireland simply because they are Nationalists, and because, therefore, they want a united Ireland or justice and equality in Northern Ireland, is clearly insufficient as an explanatory tool' (2005: 156).

4.2.4 Summary: Sport, Nationalism and Ulster Unionism

Clearly, sport remains an important and significant feature of the cultural lives of all communities in Northern Ireland. More often than not, the meanings that are constructed through sports will vary between communities and will be dependent upon which sports are being played. In terms of the sports that are organised on an all-Ireland basis, this provides opportunities for dual-identities to be developed reflecting both Britishness and Irishness, but also the possibility of combining these identities with specifically Northern Irish or Ulster identities. It is important to take into account though that the pragmatic sporting approach often taken does not necessarily mean that a sporting commitment reflects an identical political commitment. Sports such as football, where a Northern Ireland team competes in international
competition, have added significance because there are very few other indicators of
the ‘nation’ available, though this may change in the light of the newly devolved
Northern Ireland government. However, in understanding how sports contribute to
national identity in Northern Ireland, all are problematic to some degree.

Bairner and Walker (2001) argue that to concentrate solely on sectarianism within
sport in Northern Ireland serves to conceal other significant, divisive social factors
such as class and gender. The British games, rugby union, hockey and cricket are
compromised both by their all-Ireland status and their almost total middle class
exclusivity, but importantly remain to many culturally British. The universal game of
soccer is predominantly a working class pursuit, which is suffused with Unionism and
Loyalism, thus alienating not only Catholics but also other Northern Ireland
Protestants. In addition to this, Bairner (2005b) concludes that playing British games
has different meanings for Unionists. Whether such meanings are changed to any
great extent by the introduction of a devolved system of government in Northern
Ireland is an interesting question.

Certainly, there now exists more civic and political institutions that are Northern
Ireland-specific and it might be argued that the new political arrangements reflect to a
degree an acknowledgement on the part of Northern Ireland’s Nationalist community
of the legitimacy of the Northern Ireland state. Whether this extends to turning their
attention to the Northern Ireland football team rather than that of the Republic of
Ireland is less clear. In his analysis of the relationship between Northern Ireland’s
Catholic footballers and their decision to represent either Northern Ireland or the

37 For many Northern Nationalists the new political arrangements may only be a step-off on the long
journey to a unified-Ireland.
Republic of Ireland, Bairner (2010) concludes

there is more evidence of division than convergence – signs of a Northern Ireland football consciousness, perhaps, but not of an emergent Northern Irish political consciousness (236).

What can be said for certain however is that sport as enjoyed by the Unionists of Northern Ireland is quite clearly culturally distinguished from that of the other nations of the UK. As we move on now to look at the sporting culture of Wales this should immediately become even more apparent.

4.3 Sport, Nationalism and Wales

4.3.1 Introducing Sport, Nationalism and Wales

Any serious discussion of sport and nationalism in Wales will inevitably focus on the two dominant sports enjoyed by the Welsh, rugby union and football. Both have contributed much to the ways in which notions of Welsh identity have been historically constructed and this has always been of critical importance to the Welsh ‘nation’. Johnes (2005) has argued that the relationship between sport and Welsh national identity has been of real importance since the late nineteenth century because Wales as a unified entity is an ‘imagined community’ and Welshness has a plethora of different meanings for the people who possess and make it (109).

As such, Johnes has argued that ‘few other cultural forms are as well equipped as sport to express national identity’ (ibid.). In this chapter, the focus will remain predominantly on examining the relationship between Welsh national identity, rugby union and association football. Of real consequence though is Johnes’ assertion that the influence of time, place and context is imperative if one is to understand the manner in which the construction of Welsh identity has been and will continue to be undertaken through sport (ibid.). The objective of this will be to show that these
sports in Wales are enjoyed in ways that are distinctive and specific when compared with the experiences of the other nations from the UK. This process begins with an examination of the ways in which rugby union developed in Wales and how it was imbued with distinctive Welsh meaning.

4.3.2 Rugby Union and Wales

Rugby union arrived in south Wales in the late nineteenth century, as the industrial revolution transformed both the landscape of the region and its social composition. During this period, enormous numbers of people migrated to south Wales to work in the coal pits and steel mills that were driving the expansion of the British Empire, and a large proportion of these workers were drawn from south-west England, a region where rugby union was already the favoured sport rather than football (Johnes, 2000; Holt, 1989). Another significant factor, highlighted by Williams (1991), is the pivotal role played in the establishment of rugby union in Wales by some of the leading lights within the Welsh middle classes, who were drawn from industry, business, medicine and law. Additionally, the role of Welsh public schools and the very real influence of their ideology of ‘athletic exercise, the paradigm national recreation of Victorian England’ (ibid.) contributed to the fact that rugby union established itself more securely in south Wales than association football. Johnes (2000) also cites the importance of the role of public schools in the development of Welsh rugby, particularly given that they often provided Welsh schools with opportunities to compete against equivalent schools from south-west England. Thus, the changes in industrial Wales had significantly diversified the nature of the Welsh people, though in terms of the development of Welsh sporting cultures it is abundantly clear that the influence of English sporting culture was enormous. As a consequence, Andrews
(1999) argues that by the 1890s

a maturing, male-dominated, Welsh industrial middle class sought to create a united, harmonious and liveable present through the creation of a unifying Welsh identity which was relevant to the modern industrial experience (53).

For many commentators (Williams, 1991; Johnes, 2000; Andrews, 1999) the 1905 Welsh victory over the all-conquering New Zealand All Blacks touring team was the pivotal moment in the linking of Welsh national identity and rugby union. The All Blacks had won every one of their previous tour matches, beating all the other home nations (England, Ireland and Scotland), and in doing so, accumulating over 800 points on their journey, conceding just 27 (Williams, 1991). Victory over New Zealand was a momentous event that signalled not only Welsh prowess on the rugby field, but it also
cemented rugby as part of the distinct and confident national identity that was created within late Victorian and Edwardian Wales on the back of a period of economic buoyancy (Johnes, 2000: 97).

For Williams (1991), the enormous coverage that the victory received in the press and in broader Welsh life meant that this was the point that ‘stitched rugby football onto the national flag’ (79). Johnes (2000) additionally argues that in terms of linking Welshness and rugby union,

many of the other symbols of Welsh nationhood were limited in their appeal but rugby was more embracing and further reaching than Nonconformity, the Welsh language, the Liberal Party or any of the new national institutions it created (96).

As part of this process of linking Welshness and rugby union, Andrews (1999) argues that

in spite of the English origins of rugby and the presence of large numbers of gifted exponents of the game emanating from England, the Welsh populace – somewhat conveniently – lost their short-term memories as rugby rapidly became Welsh (54).

---

38 The margin of the Welsh victory was by three points to nil, though there was some controversy as New Zealand had a try disallowed. Certain accounts of the cultural significance of the game to the Welsh, such as Williams (1991), choose not to mention this fact.
The ancient Tudor folk game of *Cnappan*, which resembled rugby union in some limited ways, was critical in this respect. The game, which had survived to a degree in the Welsh valleys due to their geographical isolation and remoteness (Holt, 1989), was thus regarded by many ‘as the direct forebear of Welsh rugby’ (Williams, 1999: 58). Its existence ‘conveniently endowed the later game with a plausible Welsh-British pedigree’ (Williams, 1991: 80). However, the British element is also important here, in that not only was the 1905 victory over New Zealand regarded as a triumph of Welshness, but also a case of the Welsh upholding the honour of Great Britain (Johnes, 2000). Both Andrews (1999) and Williams (1991) see evidence of the historic connections between Welsh and British identities within rugby union. Indeed, the most characteristic example of this for both was the change in the shirt colour of the Welsh national XV from black to scarlet, and also the adoption of the emblem that adorned the Welsh shirts:

the rejection of the leek and the subsequent adoption of the Prince of Wales’ three-plumed insignia as the motif worn on Welsh international jerseys, along with his motto *Ich Dien* (I Serve), represented a move by the Welsh rugby administration to demonstrate emphatically its loyalty to and place within the British imperial state formation (Andrews, 1999: 63).

Whilst for Andrews (1999) the rugby field had ‘long been a setting upon which Wales had sought to win some space from the smothering grasp of an overbearing England’ (54) the reality of the identity that the Welsh sought to achieve was one that ‘would contrast with and yet complement England’ (*ibid.*: 55). However, there was evidence that suggested that there was a more hard-edged element to Welsh rugby. Andrews (1991) perceives that the broad role of the middle classes in the development of rugby union in Wales resulted in a form of Cambrian Celticism:

the industrial middle class immersed the game into the masculine discourse of Cambrian Celticism, which explained national progress in terms of the supremacy of
The result of this was that ‘the Welsh construed the rugby field as a site of struggle upon which a battle of races – and hence nationalities – was symbolically re-enacted’ (ibid.: 56). Morgan (2005) considers however that the predominant ideology of Welsh rugby was somewhat different:

in general, nationalism within the Welsh rugby community was of an inclusive and cooperative nature, as exemplified by celebrations of diversity within the rugby crowd, and furthermore this nationalism was a signifier of identity within the British and imperial frameworks (453).

This is a view that certainly has parallels with a broadly civic view of the nation that often characterised Welsh rugby union. Johnes (2000) states that this inclusive approach was even reflected in the way that all the 1905 conquerors of New Zealand were regarded as heroes by the Welsh nation, even though it was well known that several of them were born in England. As shall be seen below, such a view was also evident in football.

Although it is clear that Welsh rugby union has historically provided possibilities for the development of both Welsh and British identities, there are nonetheless several factors that seek to ensure that there is little doubt as to the separate and distinctive nature of Welsh rugby. Firstly, there is the inclusive nature of the game in Wales in contrast with England and to a lesser degree, Scotland. In England and Scotland class was the main factor in rugby union, but in Wales the situation was different, or at least it was believed to be so:


As a result, the English, middle class dominated rugby establishment compares ‘unfavourably with the more populist image of rugby in Wales’ (Johnes, 2002: 113).
Secondly, in contrast again to rugby union in England that remained steadfastly amateur until the mid-1990s, rugby union in Wales remained amateur in principle only. Although never going as far as the Northern Union in England with its broken-time payments, the Welsh Rugby Football Union (WRFU) preferred to pay an often overgenerous form of ‘reasonable expenses’ with which the respective English and Scottish rugby officials were less than happy with (*ibid.*). Again, this showed the distinctiveness of Welsh rugby and also the independence of the WRFU. The final aspect that has demonstrated the distinctiveness of Welsh rugby has been its anti-Englishness. Whilst a form of anti-Englishness has always been a feature of the relationship between Welsh rugby and England at various points in history, it was most notable in the 1930s depression era and also during the 1980s during Margaret Thatcher’s reign as British Prime Minister. It is important though not to apply cultural significations further across history than is appropriate (Andrews, 1991, 1999).

Although, beating England was always significant, for Johnes (2005), a degree of anti-Englishness became more evident from the 1960s, when a more political and assertive Welsh nationalism was starting to emerge. In terms of rugby union, the Welsh saw themselves on a par with England, and thus, ‘the England national XV takes on the persona of the arrogant neighbour who must and can be cut down to size’ (Johnes, 2005: 113). However, as has been mentioned on numerous occasions, one should be cautious about relating sporting nationalist sentiment directly to political sentiment.

As has been seen, rugby union has had a fundamental role in the way that certain groups of Welsh people define themselves, but also significantly in the way that they are defined by others beyond the borders of Wales (Holt, 1989). However, whether
rugby union should be seen as the unchallenged representative of Wales and of its identity is debatable. Certainly for Johnes (2005), rugby union has served an important purpose for Welsh identity in that it has sought to camouflage the reality of Welsh diversity:

rugby internationals … have mobilized Wales’s collective identities and passions. They gloss over the different meanings that the people of Wales attach to their nationality, enabling them to assert their Welshness in the face of internal division and the political, social and cultural shadow of England (109).

Making a point also made by Andrews (1999), Evans, Davies and Bass (1999) take a more openly hostile stance with regard to the dominance of rugby union in the cultural life of Wales, particularly regarding the effective marginalisation of women, a result of the hegemonic masculinity inherent in the game:

it [rugby union] certainly also reduced and occluded other cultural forms of significance and interest in the lives of many people, positioning them marginally, so that their interests and the voices they represent were either silenced or had continually to struggle to survive, making it difficult to capture glimpses of the many other physical forms that have historically found expression in the routine lives of the people of Wales, that are as much a part of the cultural fabric of Wales as rugby, but because of the privileging of ‘the game’ have had to struggle or have died (Evans et al, 1999: 140).

Furthermore, regionalism was also a factor, in that sporting culture is broadly split between the preferences of north Wales (football) and south Wales (rugby union). According to Johnes (2005) though, ‘the simplistic notion of a north-south split in the devotions to rugby and football is a basic but vivid indicator of a divided nation’ (120). The fact that the south Wales football teams, Swansea City and Cardiff City, are the most popular and the most successful teams in the whole nation is indicative of this. So, it is now to the game of football in Wales that we turn.

4.3.3 Association Football and Wales

Football clearly operates in the shadow of rugby union though there are some
similarities in the ways in which football in Wales, like rugby union, has utilised an inclusive, civic approach to sporting national identity. For example, Cardiff City won the FA Cup in 1927\textsuperscript{39}, defeating Arsenal in the Final by a single goal, which was seen as an extended celebration of Welsh identity (Hill, 1999). Though only three members of the cup winning Cardiff team were actually Welsh, this did not prevent the celebrations continuing, although arguably, there was also an element to the festivities that endorsed a wider British unity (Johnes, 2002). Within these terms, soccer promoted a degree of civic Welshness and consequently it was clear that ‘living and playing in Wales was enough to make them representatives of the Welsh people’ (ibid.: 181).

Duke and Crolley (1996) have argued that the limited success that the Welsh national soccer team has enjoyed at international level\textsuperscript{40} could be attributed to the dominance of rugby union in Wales and the subsequent competition for players from an already limited pool. Certainly, football was initially more popular in the north of Wales, having been originally imported from Shropshire. The game grew rapidly in areas of north Wales that were closer to the major industrial towns and cities of the north West of England where football was already particularly prevalent (Johnes, 2000). However, despite this, Moorhouse (1996) has gone as far as to say that in Wales, ‘soccer is relatively unimportant culturally’ (58). Garland and Rowe (2001), however, are insistent that football should not be seen to be culturally insignificant even in the

\textsuperscript{39} Cardiff were beaten by one goal to nil in the 1925 final by Sheffield United. This had been the first time that a team from outside England had played in the Cup Final since Queens Park FC in 1885. For a discussion of the FA Cup and its relationship to notions of both Englishness and Britishness see Hill (1999).

\textsuperscript{40} Wales have the poorest record of all the UK home nations, having qualified for the final stages of the World Cup only once in 1958 and never having reached the final stages of the European Championships.
face of rugby’s dominance, particularly in the south of Wales.

In club football for example, the two main Welsh clubs are from south Wales, Cardiff City and Swansea City. Both teams play in the English Football League pyramid, a result according to Taylor (2008) of the comparatively inequitable economic relations between England and Wales. In terms of broader perspectives, the dependency of the main Welsh clubs on the structures of the English Football pyramid, and to any resultant expressions of nationalism, is best explained by making reference to two particular theorists. The first of whom is Hechter (1975). He explains the existence and expression of contemporary nationalisms in the UK using his ‘internal colonialism’ thesis. This approach focuses on the unequal relationships of power and economic dependence that are a feature of the links between the core (England) and the periphery (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). This has clear parallels with the reliance of the main Welsh football clubs on the far more lucrative English league system. The second theorist that is worthy of mention here is Nairn (1977). Nairn focuses on the uneven development of industrial capitalism to explain contemporary nationalisms in the UK, and once again, it is clear that this can be related to the situation that the main Welsh clubs find themselves in with regard to their economic dependency on English football.

Returning now to the main Welsh clubs, both Cardiff City and Swansea City have had varying degrees of success over the years. Cardiff City not only had success in the 1927 FA Cup Final but also almost emulated their greatest triumph in the 2008 FA Cup Final, losing narrowly 1-0 to Portsmouth. Having spent many seasons in the bottom two divisions of the league, Cardiff are now near the top of the Championship.
By contrast, Swansea City have had a less successful history. Their major achievement was to reach the top division in the English League in the early 1980s, briefly topping the table for a short time before slipping back down to the lower divisions. Today, they are in the Championship and in a similar position near the top of the table as their arch-rivals Cardiff City, with whom they enjoy a fractious and at times confrontational relationship. Relative success on the field is reflected off the field too with both clubs now playing in new stadia. Cardiff’s new ‘Cardiff City Stadium’ opened in time for the beginning of the 2009/2010 season, whilst Swansea City moved into their brand new ‘Liberty Stadium’ in the summer of 2005.

The significance of these two teams is that both are able to express their Welshness regularly, in that they compete almost exclusively against English teams, which is not often the case in rugby union. Historically, Johnes (2002) argues that rather than expressing a pride in the Welsh nation, it was often a regional south Wales pride that persisted, which was an irony bearing in mind the supposed dominance of north Wales in football. In the course of playing matches in the English League, it has been noted that there does exist an anti-English element, which is significant in the way that the ‘Welshness’ is being celebrated (Johnes, 2000). One might add to this the possibility that, to a degree, both of the main Welsh clubs, Cardiff City and Swansea City, serve as ‘banal’ symbols of the Welsh nation, as proposed in the work of Billig (1995). Additionally, being represented in the English league suggested both a degree of accommodation with Wales’s position in the United Kingdom, and also ‘united Welsh workers with a wider British working class culture’ (208). Often, this has been reflected in the fact that the experiences of the people of industrial south Wales have ‘been much closer to the other industrial regions of Britain than it has to rural west
and north Wales’ (Johnes, 2005: 120-121). In this way, football in Wales can be seen to be ‘demonstrating the dual nature of national identity in Wales: a desire for recognition as a separate identity but without ever pressing for a complete separation’ (Johnes, 2000: 108).

Historically, the Welsh national football team has never been imbued with the Welshness that was afforded to the early Welsh rugby international matches (Johnes, 2005). No specifically Welsh antecedent for the game, for example, was ever suggested. Furthermore, the fact that the Welsh team has been relatively unsuccessful in international competition may also have had an influence upon its failure to capture the imagination of the Welsh nation. Johnes (2002) has argued that the Welsh national team, commonly assembled of Welsh players plying their football trade with clubs in England or beyond, has been of less interest to Welsh football fans than the exploits of Welsh club teams, who are represented by players living and regularly playing in Wales. This has echoes of the civic form of nationalism that was evident in the celebration of the ‘Welshness’ of Cardiff City’s cup winning team of 1927, and of the rugby union heroes of 1905.

Certainly, the FAW are keen to maintain their separate footballing status within the UK. In the early 1990s, some African members of FIFA tabled a motion ‘demanding the amalgamation of the four associations into a single UK association, and a single UK national team’ (Duke and Crolley, 1996: 19). Though the motion was unsuccessful, but with the very real possibility that further pressures would be placed

---

41 Attendances and interest in the national team did briefly increase significantly during the Euro 2004 qualifying tournament, when Wales came very close to qualifying for the tournament’s final stages in Portugal. Wales were eventually eliminated after defeat in a two-legged play-off with Russia.
on FIFA to address the privileged position of the UK associations, the FAW introduced the League of Wales, which they saw as ‘essential to asserting and maintaining its separate identity’ (ibid.)\(^{42}\). Significantly, neither Swansea City nor Cardiff City chose to leave the English Football League for the League of Wales, which has had implications upon the quality and standard of Welsh teams representing Wales in European competition\(^{43}\).

The nature of this discussion of sport and Welsh nationalism has been broadly based on historic accounts of the development of rugby union and football. Very little academic attention has been paid to the ways in which contemporary Welsh sport has contributed to the ways in which Welsh identity has been demonstrated and constructed in the real lives of Welsh people. Whilst this also suggests that there is a need for work that focuses on the contribution of Welsh sport to ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig, 1995), the main concern is that only rarely does this move beyond a consideration of sports other than rugby union and football. Morgan (2005) has commented briefly on this however, and his sentiments are echoed by Williams (1991):

> rugby football retains the image – by now a cliché and often a caricature – it acquired in the early years of the twentieth century as not merely a prominent constituent of Welsh popular culture but a pre-eminent expression of Welsh consciousness, a signifier of Welsh nationhood (86).

Often, this has been an exclusive vision of Welshness that fails significantly to reflect the full diversity of being Welsh. That being said, Johnes (2005) has argued that

> the creation of the National Assembly for Wales signals another redefinition of Wales based upon an institution that has the potential to bestow an inclusive citizenship on

\(^{42}\) For a more in-depth assessment of the FAW’s introduction of the League of Wales and the problems that were encountered see Duke and Crolley (1996).

\(^{43}\) Wrexham FC were also in the English Football League at the time and also chose to remain in that league, though they have since been relegated to the English Blue Square Conference.
people. Sport may thus become less important in defining how the Welsh see themselves and how others see them (122).

4.3.4 Summary: Sport, Nationalism and Wales

To summarise, with regard to the relationship that sport plays and has played with regard to Welsh national identities, perhaps the most significant thing about Wales is the plurality of different conceptions of Welshness. Johnes (2000) has pointed to the fact that ‘Wales is a nation divided geographically, linguistically and ethnically’ (93). Certainly sport, and in particular rugby union, but also to a lesser degree football, have contributed to the ways in which Welshness and Welsh identity have been and are constructed, and arguably this has been at the expense of other ways of doing so. As we have seen previously with Northern Ireland, team games provide the most emotionally charged source of identification, and although individuals who are Welsh, but who most often compete for Great Britain and Northern Ireland can become national heroes by triumphing in the Olympic Games they never reach the heights scaled by a victorious Welsh rugby union team. And indeed, it is rugby union that stands out as being the most significant sport in this regard. In fact, according to Holt and Mason (2000), the classless nature of rugby in Wales means that it has greater cultural significance for the Welsh than football does for the Scots.

But the form of Welsh nationalism has often been framed within the context of Britishness, reflecting a dual identity that seeks to be seen as separate without ever demanding formal separation (Johnes, 2000). To a degree, this is also seen in cricket. Wales is nominally represented by Glamorgan in the English County Championship

---

44 Colin Jackson, Lynn Davis or Tanni Grey-Thompson for example.
and the sport is administered by the England and Wales Cricket Board, although this is often disguised by the fact that this organisation is referred to simply as the England Cricket Board (ECB). Additionally, since 1999, Glamorgan’s home ground, Swalec Stadium, has hosted several England One Day Internationals and in 2009, staged a Test Match for the first time when England faced Australia in the First Test of the 2009 Ashes Series. For Parry and Malcolm (2004) the England team is more properly a team representing the UK, but this conflation of national categories is a consequence of historically specific power balances which have resulted in England, the politically, economically and often sportingly dominant ‘country’ within the union, being assumed (by the English in particular) to be synonymous with Britishness (81).

Robert Croft, the Welsh off-spin bowler, who played 21 Test Matches and 50 One Day Internationals (ODIs) for England between 1996 and 2001, is insightful in this regard. He has likened playing for his native county Glamorgan as being like playing for Wales, and playing for England as being like playing for rugby union’s British and Irish Lions (Johnes, 2005), a perspective that Bairner and Malcolm (2010) are broadly supportive of. Malcolm (2009) has also argued that the attitudes of the Welsh towards the England cricket team ‘are qualitatively different to Welsh attitudes towards English football or rugby teams’ (620). The example of cricket is illustrative, in that it reflects a cultural closeness to England that is a feature of Welsh sport, mainly in rugby union in south Wales and soccer in north Wales. Both sports developed in part because of the proximity of these areas to England. However, as is customary in these instances, one should be cautious before regarding sporting commitment as evidence of a concomitant political commitment (Johnes, 2005). This is again something to be borne in mind as our attention is turned to Scotland.
4.4 Sport, Nationalism and Scotland

4.4.1 Introducing Sport, Nationalism and Scotland

As we reach Scotland, we are exactly half way through our journey to examine the sporting nationalisms of the nations of the UK. It can be said with a degree of certainty that sport in Scotland is dominated by association football. Though some other sports such as rugby union have been associated with Scotland to different degrees and at different points in history, they have in the main failed to significantly impinge upon the dominance of football in constructing notions of Scottish identity. As such, the focus of this chapter will be on association football with some additional reference made to other sports and their relationship to Scottishness and Scottish national identity.

For example, the sport of Snooker has seen significant tournament successes by Scottish players since the 1990s, firstly with Stephen Hendry winning the World Championship a record seven times and later championship wins for John Higgins (1998, 2007 & 2009) and Graham Dott (2006). But despite this, snooker never really spoken to, or for, the Scottish nation, mainly because as has been discussed above, individual sports are largely unable to produce the same levels of identification and emotional attachment as team sports. In this regard, the Scottish experience of snooker is no different (Kowalski, 2004). Another sport, which also suffers from the individual sport puzzle, is golf. It too has been keenly connected to Scottish identity, and strong historical and symbolic associations have developed between the two. Importantly, these links are widely recognised outside of Scotland and are built upon by several factors. Firstly, one of the world’s two governing bodies of golf, The Royal
and Ancient, is based at St. Andrews, Scotland. Secondly, Scotland hosts many important golf tournaments, most notably The Open Championship, which as one of only four ‘major’ world golf tournaments, is rotated annually between nine golf courses in England and Scotland. Whether golf has significant influences upon anything other than limited understandings of Scottish national identity though is debatable.

For Lowerson (1994), golf

lacks the internal divisions of football and its ‘Scottishness’ has never produced the ethical crises and nationalism that ‘Englishness’ has bequeathed to cricket (88).

Bairner (2001) is to a degree dismissive of the supposed democratic and egalitarian notions of golf in Scotland, and consequently, also of the possibilities that it may contribute significantly to inclusive ideas of Scottish identity. Lowerson (1994) argues that

Scotland may not have invented golf, but it has refined it and encouraged its development along lines which have exploited ascribed national identity to such an extent that it has distorted much of what really happens in the homeland. In so doing, it reflects an ambivalence in Scottish society as to what Scotland and its people really are (89).

Although golf is undoubtedly popular in Scotland, as an individual sport it has a limited effect upon the construction of concepts of national identity. Bairner (2009) does however suggest that golf plays a significant role in the ways that the nation, sport and landscape are intertwined to produce substantial insights into the primordial formation of national identities. In this respect, it is quite plain that the ‘imagined

---

45 The Royal and Ancient is the governing body of golf for all areas of the world apart from the USA and Mexico, where the United States Golf Association (USGA) has jurisdiction.

46 Of the nine courses listed on the current rota of Open Championship venues, five are located in Scotland (St. Andrews, Carnoustie, Muirfield, Turnberry and Troon). The venue for each championship is decided by a system of rotation, although every fifth tournament is held at the Old Course, St. Andrews regardless.
communities’ of Anderson (1991) also have a significant influence on Bairner’s perspectives on golf and constructions of Scottish national identity. And so, having considered the importance of individual sports to the making of the Scottish nation, it is to the main team sports of Scotland, association football and rugby union that we now turn.

4.4.2 Association Football and Scotland

In terms of association football, Moorhouse (1991) has argued that ‘Scotland is characteristic of “submerged nations” in sport, and soccer in particular, has an over-determined significance’ (201). For Reid (1998), this has contributed to an overemphasis on football as a major national symbol in Scotland. She sees that such an overemphasis has the effect of limiting dominant notions of Scottish identity to those that are based upon the sporting cultural preferences of working class men. Bairner (2001) agrees broadly with Reid, but for Bairner (1994) one should add to this a region specific focus, as he highlights that the majority of Scottish Football League clubs emanate from an area located between two roughly drawn lines stretching from Dumbarton in the west to Aberdeen in the north east and from Dumfries in the south west to Edinburgh in the east (13).

Kowalski (2004) agrees with both Bairner and Reid on the degrees to which Scottish football is gender, class and regionally exclusive. In addition, a further and significant barrier to football offering a unified and inclusive Scottish identity is provided by sectarianism. The two traditions of Catholicism and Protestantism, broadly associated with the ‘Old Firm’ football teams of Celtic and Rangers respectively, remain

\[\text{Since this was written, several former Highland League teams in the shape of Ross County, Elgin City, Peterhead and Inverness Caledonian Thistle have been elected to the Scottish Football League (SFL), diluting this contention somewhat.}\]
important constituents of Scottish national identity. For Bairner (2001), the significance of the two teams and the tradition of the ‘Old Firm’ are clear:

rival religious identities have manifest implications for the construction of a Scottish national identity as long as Celtic fans prefer to celebrate the Irishness of their forebears and Rangers supporters proclaim a conception of Britishness that is virtually unknown in the remainder of the United Kingdom with the exception of Loyalist areas of Northern Ireland (57).

Bradley (2006) argues that it would be wrong to assume that all followers of Celtic are Catholic and wrong to claim that all also support the Republic of Ireland national team rather than that of Scotland, even though significant numbers do and are. This chimes with the research carried out by Bradley (1998) that showed statistically that Celtic fans were far less likely than fans of any other Scottish club to follow the Scottish national team. Nevertheless, Bradley (2002) argues that

Rangers and Celtic fans do not make up the bulk of Scottish international football support in a similar way as they do Scottish football league attendances (193).

Finn and Giulianotti (1998) argue that the propensity of Rangers supporters to be less antagonistic towards England and the idea of the UK in principle is evidence of the possibilities of a shared or dual sense of Scottishness and Britishness. Despite this, Bairner (1994) is fairly confident in his assertion that football remains ‘perhaps the most emotionally charged, symbol of the Scottish nation’ (10). Bradley (2006) holds similar views and states that the ‘Scottish international team is one of the most significant sources for the generation, expression and sustenance of Scottish identity’ (193). However, he tempers this by concluding that football

ignores the individuals and communities within Scottish society that have little affinity for things Scottish, especially national symbols and the Scottish international football side (194).

As can be seen, with the divisive effects of gender, class, sectarianism and regionalism, notions of Scottishness are highly contested within football, a fact

4.4.3 Rugby Union and Scotland

Robinson (2008) has argued that ‘rugby is the dominant national sport in Scotland’ (222), though she does not develop her claim beyond the spat between England and Ireland, Scotland and Wales that saw the instigation of the International Rugby Board (IRB) in 1886. In this regard, Robinson clearly fails to acknowledge the ability of national sporting cultures to change over time and to reflect the changing social, cultural and political contexts within which they operate. Additionally, the failure to offer a more sophisticated and substantial basis for this claim is evidence enough that Robinson is labouring under a rather large misapprehension. To consider rugby union in Scotland as an indicator of an inclusive and representative Scottish national identity is undoubtedly problematic, particularly when viewed from the perspectives of class and regionalism. Thus, to commence with class, it has been argued that rugby union in Scotland is inherently a sport of the middle classes (Holt, 1989). Kowalski (2004) has suggested that the influence of the Scottish public schools in the development of the game in Scotland produced what was less a Scottish or English sense of identity, but rather ‘a sense of British identity, and a duty and service to Empire’ (79). Bairner (2001) considers rugby union to ‘highlight all the same divisions as afflict soccer, albeit to differing degrees’ (64). Thus, he concludes that in terms of class, rugby union reflects a far sharper division than soccer, though he is minded to point out that neither are class-exclusive, with many middle class Scots enjoying football, and a few working class Scots partaking in rugby union. However, he sees further divisive possibilities evident in the game.
Firstly, rugby union in Scotland remains a predominantly male preserve (ibid.). Secondly, a regional bias is again in evidence, as the Borders region of Scotland remains the only area where rugby union is regarded as the main sport, whilst Edinburgh, and to a lesser extent, Glasgow, are the only areas of central Scotland where Scots engage in the game to any serious extent (ibid.). For Massie (2000), it is only in the Borders region that rugby union in Scotland has anything but a middle class appeal. Holt and Mason (2000) have also added their weight to the claim that Scottish rugby union is predominantly middle class in nature and framed within a rural, Borders paradigm. Gill (2005) has analysed the nature of rugby union and national identity in the Borders area of Scotland. She reflects upon the complexity of the relationship between rugby union and national identity in the Borders by declaring that ‘it displayed the various national identities in Britain, while also raising the possibility of a British identity’ (88). Wagg (1995) argues that the strength of rugby union in the Borders is a result not only of proximity to but also of cultural closeness to England. Finally, Bairner (2001) also casts doubts on the ability of rugby union to overcome either sectarian or ethnic inhibitors to participation or spectatorship.

4.4.4 Anti-Englishness and Association Football in Scotland

Importantly, in terms of football, Wagg (1995) states that there is a degree of consensus that ‘Scottishness consists in an opposition to the English’ (16). If one bears in mind that football offers a divisive rather than unified vision of Scotland and Scottish identity, then a distinctive anti-Englishness offers a respite, albeit often only a temporary one. Indeed, for Bairner (2001), ‘Scottish sporting nationalism is most cohesive when it is clearly characterized by anti-English sentiment’ (65). Holt (1989) concurs with this view, but in doing so places his emphasis more on the ability of
anti-Englishness to bring together competing sectarian visions of Scottishness. There is little doubt about the responsibility that is placed on Scottish sporting representatives when they face English opponents, but never more so than when the two countries meet at football. Finn and Giulianotti (1998) argue that

the curious ambivalence, sometimes downright hostility, of Scotland towards England is so culturally and historically embedded as to lend credence to the argument that this truly represents world football’s most intense ‘derby match’ at any level – civic, national or international (190).

Most Scots undeniably took, and continue to take, great pleasure and pride in beating the ‘Auld Enemy’, though Taylor (2008) has argued that matches between England and Scotland have always been of lesser significance to the English than the Scots. According to Holt (1989), although some of this added significance might have come from the perceived injustices of British history, the main objective stemmed from ‘the desire of a small, poor country to cut its larger and richer neighbour down to size’ (257). Bairner (1994) argues that in football at least, victory over England signalled the superiority of the Scottish version of the game, or the popular ideas that are linked to it by many Scots. He argues that these ideas often have little or no basis in reality. Yet, it is something that many Scots imagine to be the case and as such contributes to identity formation and underlines Scottish football’s difference from that of the English:

there is widespread acceptance of the idea that Scots have imparted to the game of football their own innate qualities to the extent that there exists a particular Scottish style of play. Scottish players are identified with aggression, passion, and in particular, skill. The English, by comparison, are thought of as strong, well organised but essentially lacking in flair (Bairner, 1994: 12).

Kowalski (2004) additionally considers the myths that exist about Scottish football. He argues that despite innumerable defeats for the Scottish national team and thus far,
a failure to advance beyond the initial group stages at either the World Cup or European Football Championships, ‘the view has long persisted that Scottish football remained exceptional’ (74). However, once more it must be reiterated that sporting commitment does not necessarily equate to an equivalent level of political commitment: ‘pride in the supposed virtues of Scottish football before the 1970s should not be confused with the desire to “break-up” Britain’ (ibid.: 75). To a degree, what can be seen here is that football in Scotland has been invested with a distinctive Scottish meaning, a process that resembles what has happened to rugby union in Wales, though with a greater emphasis on anti-Englishness.

Further evidence of this anti-Englishness may also be apparent in the way that the Tartan Army, Scotland’s mass of national football supporters, have changed the way that they define themselves and present their national identities, particularly whilst attending matches outside of Scotland. Finn and Giulianotti (1998) argue that ‘underpinning the Tartan Army’s repertoire is a collective anti-Englishness’ (192). Within these terms, the club loyalties, which are often the source of much antagonism between Scottish fans, are ‘largely submerged within a crossed and common Scottish identity’ (ibid.: 191). Giulianotti (2005) describes this form of support as being

a distinctive, unitary form of fan identity that is gregarious, ambassadorial and consciously non-violent in relations with other social groups, while still retaining a general cultural pursuit of heavy drinking and raucous support for the national team (291).

For Garland and Rowe (2001) this ambassadorial role is

enacted by the exuberant and friendly nature of its constituents, in an attempt to forge an identity in opposition to the perceived hostile and hooligan English following (131).

Bairner (1994) issues a warning however that ‘it would be dangerous to arrive at a totally benign view of the Tartan Army’ (22). Garland and Rowe (2001) point to the
underlying exclusivity of the Tartan Army, in that the image of Scottish identity that it promotes is fairly limited and raises issues of gender, race, ethnicity and class inclusiveness. Bairner (1994) also highlights the irony of the common use of tartan amongst members of the Tartan Army:

a universally popular vehicle is selected to convey national aspirations but it is bedecked in the regalia of an antiquated and even mythical Scotland (12).

It is also worth noting that the particular use of Tartan being indicated here is less appropriately linked to the ‘banal nationalism’ thesis of Billig (1995). While Hearn (2006) has commented on the ‘banal’ qualities of tartanry and kilts for expressions of Scottish nationalism, in this context the reminding of the nation that the Tartan Army is engaging in is done in a far more conscious and explicit fashion, which sits less comfortably with ‘banal nationalism’.

Both Garland and Rowe (2001) and Finn (2000) suggest that the anti-Englishness inherent in the Tartan Army’s expressions of Scottish identity work against the supposed ‘internationalism’ they claim to embrace. Finn (2000) is emphatic in this regard and is highly critical of the inherent anti-Englishness of Scottish football. He argues that this

should act as a warning that Scots are not immune to xenophobic prejudice and provide another antidote to the complacent, smug and self-congratulatory acceptance by too many Scots of their self-awarded prize of inherent egalitarianism (74).

In the last 20 years or so, elements of such anti-English sentiment have also begun to emerge to varying degrees and at different times within the sport of rugby union.

4.4.5 Anti-Englishness and Rugby Union in Scotland

Rugby union has had added nationalist significance for many Scots since 1989, when
the annual football fixture between England and Scotland was ended because of long-running concerns about public-order and hooliganism between the two sets of opposing fans. With the possibility of Scotland meeting England at football now limited to the luck of the draw in international competition, rugby provided an ‘equivalent’ annual fixture. However, rugby union in Scotland has not always been so clearly associated with sporting nationalism. Historically, Holt (1989) has argued that the passionate, obsessive need to beat the English, which has been the driving-force of Scottish international football, was muted by the public school code and the fact that an influential minority of Scotland players had polished their rugby at Oxford and Cambridge.

Kowalski (2004) has suggested that this began to change long before the 1990s, but that the pivotal moment in the development of nationalistic imperatives in Scottish international rugby union came in 1990 when England met Scotland at Murrayfield in the final match of that season’s Five Nations championship. Both teams were unbeaten, and as such the winners of the match would be able to claim three coveted rugby titles: the Calcutta Cup, the Triple Crown and most significant of all, the Grand Slam. The importance of the game was bound up with two important themes that influenced the Scottish approach to the match. Firstly, the controversial Poll Tax had just been introduced in Scotland and to say that it was an extremely unpopular policy initiative would be an understatement (ibid.). Secondly, many Scots were astounded by the arrogance and hubris of the English press which openly and repeatedly suggested that beating Scotland convincingly would be a mere formality for the far superior England team (ibid.). Moreover, for the first time before a Scottish rugby

---

48 The fixture was traditionally played as part of the annual Home International Championship. This tournament was contested by England, Northern Ireland (or Ireland before partition), Scotland and Wales but was discontinued in 1984, leaving Northern Ireland as the last winners and thus unofficial reigning champions of the UK. England continued to play Scotland annually in the Rous Cup until 1989.
union international, ‘Flower of Scotland’ was played, and in a highly charged and emotionally significant match, Scotland won 13-7. The inclusion of the anthem is subject to two contrasting interpretations by Jarvie and Walker (1994). This, they claim,

at one level might seem insignificant and yet at another level it was a profound gesture of sentimentality which in part encapsulated for a brief instant the mood of many Scots.

Drawing on this and the above discussion of rugby union and its relationship with Scottish identity, Bairner (1996) has contextualised the extent of this contemporary sporting nationalism thus:

the majority of those who sing ‘Flower of Scotland’ so lustily … do so as patriots and as sporting nationalists as well, but not as political nationalists.

Furthermore, in a manner that is broadly similar to that of rugby union in Wales, there is also a broader British component to Scottish rugby union. This is most clearly represented by the presence of the Her Royal Highness, the Princess Royal, as the patron of the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU). Indeed, Bairner (2001) suggests that her capacity to join in with the hearty singing of ‘Flower of Scotland’ at Murrayfield further reflects a sporting nationalism rather than an explicit expression of political nationalism. The broadly middle class basis of rugby union in Scotland may also be significant in this respect and is also evidenced in cricket whereby a similar social foundation forms the basis of cricket’s main support and interest in Scotland. That similar levels of anti-Englishness are far less evident in respect of the England cricket team when compared to football and rugby union, to greater and lesser extents, is illustrative in this regard (Bairner and Malcolm, 2010).
4.4.6 Shinty and Scotland

This reflects a thorny issue that sees the failure to translate sporting nationalism into wider political concerns as being a failing of the Scottish people. The most forceful iteration of this view came from Jim Sillars, a former SNP MP, who made reference to Scotland’s ‘ninety minute patriots’ (Jarvie and Walker, 1994, 1)\(^49\). In response to Sillars accusation that sporting nationalism acts as a substitute for political nationalism, Jarvie and Reid (1999) argue that

this thesis is at once too static, too one dimensional and fails to recognise the nature and specific content of nationalism, other expressions or ideas about Scotland or indeed the complexity of sporting culture in Scotland (106).

Both Jarvie and Walker (1994) and Finn and Giulianotti (1998) broadly concur with this view. In addition, in the next section, it will be argued that the absence of a significant political aspect to the sporting nationalism of the Scottish Highlands has contributed to its marginalisation in the dominant sporting cultures of Scotland. Reid (1998) argues that in many ways, the situation of Scotland is very similar to that of Wales in that it too has never been an ethnically or culturally pure nation yet the ways in which specific ethnic or cultural groups might experience the nation and express their Scottish nationalism through sport has been ignored (Reid, 1998: 109).

Reid’s concern here is to highlight the marginalisation of Scottish Highland culture and in particular the sport of shinty, the playing of which is mainly restricted to the Western Highlands and Islands (Bairner, 2001). Reid sees shinty\(^50\) as an important means by which an alternative sporting view of Scotland could have been presented.

\(^49\) The full quote made by Jim Sillars is as follows: ‘the great problem is that Scotland has too many ninety minute patriots whose nationalist outpourings are expressed only at major sporting events’ (cited in Jarvie and Walker, 1994).

\(^50\) Shinty is called Camanachd in Gaelic.
In so doing, she compares the way in which the Irish sport of hurling, which has similar roots to shinty but was politicised with the formation of the GAA, developed in different ways. Bairner (1994, 2001) argues that owing to the lack of a political impulse, the result was that

the vast majority of Scots chose not to take the route followed by north Americans, some Australians and, above all, Irish nationalists who established the GAA and construct a sporting nationalism centred around national traditions (1994: 12).

Although shinty can be used to denote the distinctiveness of Scottish sport and society, ‘it is unlikely to provide a sporting basis for a unifying national identity’ (Bairner, 2001: 61). In terms of the Highland Games themselves, Jarvie (1991) finds a similar imperative since their modernization, which incorporated processes of commodification, professionalization, rationalisation and bureaucratization. Overall, Bairner (2001) argues that

the Highlands and the Highland people have been subsumed within a general history of Scotland that disregards inconvenient facts about the ways in which lowland Scots joined forces with the English to undermine its religion, language and customs of their Highland compatriots (61).

4.4.7 Summary: Sport, Nationalism and Scotland

Sporting cultures in Scotland are and have been significant in the ways that they have ‘developed and reinforced a belief in the idea of a unified Scotland’ (Jarvie and Reid, 1999: 23). However, this has to be tempered with the knowledge that in so doing, ‘sporting patriots have helped to produce a sense of nationhood that conceals real divisions and plurality within Scotland’ (ibid.). This can be seen most clearly in the sports of association football and rugby union, which initially suggest their unifying tendencies, but in reality offer more opportunities for significant social divisions. It is clear that Jarvie and Reid (1999) are wholly accurate when they state that sport in
Scotland

should not be used as a fallacious guide to undifferentiated Scottishness but rather as a subtle reflection of social, cultural and political diversity (22).

This is not to deny that these sports do not have great significance in the visions of Scotland that they offer, but rather to argue that their inherent limitations should be continually borne in mind. Football is clearly the most significant game and offers a very clear and discernible way of internationally demonstrating Scotland’s distinctiveness from England (Moorhouse, 1996), and the other nations of the UK. In addition, all sports, but particularly football, offer the opportunity for ‘imagining’ the nation (Bradley, 2002).

Kowalski (2004) makes an important point when he argues that in attempting to understand sporting nationalisms, one should take care to remember the influence of the underlying historical, political and social context. He argues that in the twenty-first century, sport has become less central to most Scots’ sense of identity’ (84), and as such, the European Championship qualification play-off matches between Scotland and England in 1999 did not matter as much to Scots as they would have done had they been played 30 years earlier. This also highlights that identities that are forged through sport are not fixed or static and are subject to change. Nonetheless, the significance of sport in Scotland is quite apparent, and that being so, it does beg the question as to why some of the more prominent theorists on Scottish nationalism, such as Nairn (1977), pay such cursory attention to it. In this regard, Holt (1994) concludes that if you ‘choose to ignore football a whole dimension of the Scottish male community is closed off’ (72). That this dimension of Scottish community and society is also predominantly working class is clearly of additional significance.
4.5 Sport, Nationalism and England

4.5.1 Introducing Sport, Nationalism and England

In the final section of this chapter we will focus on the sporting cultures of England, the last of the four ‘nations’ of the UK. In the course of this section, several other themes will become apparent that differ from those already seen in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These themes will be considered in relation to some of the most popular sports in England, in particular, association football and, to a lesser extent, cricket. Some reference to rugby union will also be made.

4.5.2 Association Football and England

Robinson (2008) believes that ‘the one place that England exists as England is on the international sports field’ (219). For Robinson, this has been of greater significance since 1996 and the crisis facing England as a post-imperial and post-colonial power. Porter (2004) also recognises the cultural importance of English sport for national identity, particularly football, and argues that ‘the importance of football in its modern form as an identifiable element of English culture and signifier of Englishness has long been recognised’ (31). Robinson (2008) goes on to argue that the often common conflation between England and Britain which is a feature of many areas of English cultural life is banished within football: ‘in almost no other area is the distinction between England and Britain as absolute and clear-cut’ (221). In so doing, Robinson clearly overlooks several indicators of the possibility of a British dimension to the team. Firstly, England’s football team is still often associated with the Union Flag, though arguably less so than in the past (Polley, 2004: Abell, Condor, Lowe, Gibson and Stevenson, 2007). Secondly and, without exception now that the new
Wembley Stadium has been built\textsuperscript{51}, England play their home fixtures in London, the capital of Great Britain and seat of the British government. Thirdly, ‘God Save the Queen’, the British national anthem, is played before all their matches without fail. This is not to disregard the role and contribution of the England football team in constructions of Englishness but in this regard it is clear that the distinction between England and Britain is anything but ‘absolute and clear-cut’.

For Holt (1989), it is certain that ‘Englishness and English nationalism are unjustly neglected subjects, especially where sports are concerned’ (262). Indeed, it is certainly true that not nearly enough academic attention has been paid to discovering and understanding the intricacies and subtleties of Englishness in relation to the sporting cultural forms that dominate its cultural life and life more generally. Polley (2004) provides one of the few accounts that have attempted to understand the sporting nationalisms of England. He reasons that

\begin{quote}
 a critical reading of the apparent traditions of Englishness in sport suggests that the versions of England they have represented have always been limited and selective (14).
\end{quote}

Consequently, this has implications for any claim to universality that specific sports might possess: ‘thus, while an England success in one sport may be deeply meaningful for many in the country, it can also be irrelevant for others’ (\textit{ibid.}). In looking specifically at ‘New Lad’ culture, English football, and the 1996 European Football Championships held in England (Euro 96), Carrington (1998) has been more emphatic in illuminating the reality of the exclusionary nature of English sport. Talking in terms of the symbolism of national sport in England, he concludes that it has

\textsuperscript{51} Whilst Wembley Stadium was recently being rebuilt, England played their home fixtures at various English club stadiums including Old Trafford (Manchester), Villa Park (Birmingham), St. James’ Park (Newcastle) and St. Mary’s Stadium (Southampton).
acquired huge political significance, especially for the political right, in trying to foster certain narrow notions of what Britain’s/England’s … cultural identity should look like (102).

This is clearly a significant claim, but to judge its merits, one should first consider how football, and sport in general, is considered in England in relation to Englishness and national identity.

4.5.3 Association Football, England and the ‘Myth of 1966’

Historically, for Porter (2004), the English approach to football is based on notions of the inherent superiority of their version of the game:

   for many years the history of football dovetailed neatly with the complacent view that English people and the institutions they had created were, innately, superior to those found in other countries (31).

Much of this attitude surely emanated from the fact that modern football was an English game, but also from the belief that English football was indeed better than other versions. This supposed superiority has manifested itself in various ways, such as in the offhand and arrogant way that the FA dealt with FIFA and other footballing nations in the first half of the twentieth century (Duke and Crolley, 1996)52. England refused to take part in the early World Cup tournaments for a variety of reasons, not least that they were not at the time members of FIFA and felt that they had nothing to learn from ‘foreigners’. In fact they were considered, mainly by themselves it should be added, unofficial World Champions, by dint of the fact that they were unbeaten by foreign opposition on home soil (Wagg, 1995)53.

52 Though it is clear that all four UK associations took a similar line, there is little doubt that the FA took the lead and that the others followed.

53 In 1949, the Republic of Ireland became the first non-UK to beat England at home when they won 2-0 at Goodison Park, Liverpool.
By the time England did finally appear in the World Cup in 1950, they were less than impressive, losing two of three games, one of which was against the unfancied USA. A further humiliating 6-3 defeat in 1953 at Wembley versus Hungary, meant that ‘it was no longer possible to look down on these faintly ludicrous foreigners trying to play our game’ (Holt, 1989: 273). In addition to this, for many years, particularly in the post-war period, it was club football that caught the imagination of the English footballing public. Whilst there was respect and admiration for the England team, the latter was not charged with the same emotional attachment as perhaps the team of today is:

English and British nationalism ... had other global and imperial priorities. International success at football was satisfying but not central to the national psyche. English self-confidence meant that football did not have to bear the weight of national expectation it aroused in Scotland (Holt and Mason, 2000: 129).

This is an interesting point, not least because it identifies that the emphasis placed upon the England team has changed over time and is dependent upon the cultural, political and social context in which the team plays. So, as we can see, historically, English football developed from a position of self-proclaimed inherent superiority. An event that would seal this view for eternity was not long in arriving.

In 1966, England won the football World Cup. Before moving on to consider the effect this victory has had upon expressions of English nationalism and national identity, it is worth spending a few moments contextualising the victory. Firstly, the tournament was held in England. Historically, it has been shown that World Cup host nations have a distinct advantage in the tournament, and as such, six of the nineteen World Cup tournaments have been won by the host nation\(^{54}\). Furthermore, England is

\(^{54}\) The full list of host nations to have won the World Cup are Uruguay (1930), Italy (1934), England (1966), Germany (1974), Argentina (1978) and France (1998).
the only host nation to have won the World Cup having played *all* their matches at their home stadium, something that was at the time considered unfair in some quarters (Holt and Mason, 2000). Nonetheless, England won the World Cup and it has been argued that

not since 1953, the year of the Coronation, the conquest of Everest and the Stanley Matthews Cup Final (and despite the Hungarian defeat) had a year seemed to symbolise the pre-eminence of the English nation (Critcher, 1994: 80).

The longer-term implications, however, may have been less than positive. Critcher’s (1994) work is significant in this respect. His critique of English football’s failings, in terms of the lack of technical ability and poor skill levels of current players, lays the blame firmly at the feet of the World Cup victory in 1966. But it is especially his explication of the ‘myth of 1966’ and its ramifications for the ways in which English football contributes to this day to selective notions of Englishness and English identity that concern us here. The main elements of this myth, which has developed throughout the years since 1966, ‘are those of nostalgic nationalism, an unequivocal masculinity and a submerged reference to class’ (86). Overall, he reflects that

what above all, victory in the World Cup was taken to mean was a triumph of traditional English virtues. We did not, at least so we pretended, triumph by trying to play the opposition at their own game; we played it our way, to our traditional strengths: pride, determination, organisation. We did not, so we like to believe, resort to the underhand tactics of lesser nations; even our brutality was honest (ibid.: 86-87).

Garland and Rowe (2001) see that these supposedly ‘English’ virtues that triumphed in the 1966 World Cup are very similar to, or the same as, the qualities that are often cited as being responsible for British war victories. This is something that they suggest must be ‘reassuring for a nation seeing its global influence shrinking’ (112). Alabarces, Tomlinson and Young (2001) have suggested that the myth of the ‘English’ style of play, upon which certain ideas about English football are based,
emanates from the 1966 World Cup winning team.

For Critcher (1994) though, “the myth of 1966” has become the dead weight of history’ (79). Its legacy for English football has been that ‘the national past rather than the international present, has become the yardstick by which to measure success and the model to emulate’ (ibid.). Garland and Rowe (2001) concur with Critcher’s broad outlook, but have developed the idea to argue that

the dominant imagery surrounding this nostalgia is of an ethnically homogenous all-white England, with little acknowledgement of the role and influence of any minority ethnic communities (112-113).

This is important for Garland and Rowe (2001), who argue that England supporters use their support of their national team to present their own particular ideas about Englishness. Sugden (2002) also argues that England football matches provides fans with the chance to emphasize a particularly identity that is based predominantly on a working class, physical masculinity.

Back, Crabbe and Solomos (2001) have also concluded that for a number of England fans, following the England team allows them the opportunity to ‘associate with historically grounded notions of a particular white, working class English identity’ (250). However, they regard this as being

more to do with an appreciation of the normative behaviour and cultural styles associated with football supporter traditions than ideologically motivated notions of England as a nation, or even the racial exclusiveness of these styles (ibid.).

For Abell et al (2007), the contention that sporting commitment does not necessarily represent an equivalent level of political commitment forms the basis of their enquiry into England football fans. In noting the range and complexity of English football fans’ conceptions of Englishness, they concluded that
English national identity is not an all or nothing affair. People can display immense emotional involvement in the fate of the England football team, without expressing any such concerns over the nation as an imagined national community (113).

The central problem however is identified by Garland and Rowe (2001). They conclude that the many different interests concerned with English football, such as the FA, the media and major sponsors, continually return to the World Cup victory in 1966 to provide the basis for their approach to imagining the current England team. In so doing it is argued that they are ‘relishing an ethnocentric view of Englishness’ (122).

4.5.4 Ideas about Englishness and Euro 96

To a degree, this view complements that of Carrington (1998, 1999) who identified that the dominant images of Englishness presented at Euro 96 were ethnocentric and exclusive. Again, the 1966 World Cup triumph is centred, most obviously in ‘Three Lions’, the Official England song for Euro 96. The lyrics of the song draw repeatedly upon ‘the myth of 1966’ and as such are worth reprinting in full:

(Removed for Copyright Reasons)
For Carrington (1998), the significance of ‘Three Lions’ is that it
reinforces the ethnocentric notion that football is returning to its rightful place, back
into the national psyche of England … mirroring the discourse of British colonialism,
‘football’s coming home’ works by seeing England ‘educating’ the world through sport
(113).

Various other accounts have linked the role of the media in retrieving, representing
and reinforcing essentially nostalgic and exclusive visions of English sporting
nationalism. In relation to newspaper coverage of the England versus Germany semi-
final at Euro 1996, Maguire, Poulton and Possamai (1999) concluded that the print
media extensively emphasised the celebration of England through ‘wilful nostalgia’
(Maguire, 1994), serving to reinforce ‘the delicate fantasy shield of its people and
providing a barrier to the growth of a feeling of emotional identification with Europe’
(Maguire et al, 1999: 450). A broader examination of the media coverage of the Euro
96 tournament as a whole (Maguire and Poulton, 1999) found that media discourses were ‘characterized by nostalgia and an ethnic assertiveness/defensiveness’ (18). In relation to the press reporting of the England versus Germany match at Euro 2000 (held in Belgium and Holland), Bishop and Jaworski (2003) argue that such sporting events ‘are perfect sites for the (at times forceful) reaffirmation of the hegemony of national unity, togetherness and homogeneity’ (267). In these ways we can see that the national identity portrayed in English football is often steeped in the past, is sentimental and nostalgic and forever seeking to return to the golden age of 1966, which was regarded as ‘a peak from which England had now declined’ (Porter, 2004: 43).

4.5.5 Rugby Union and England

The essential fixation with nostalgia that is characteristic of the way that Englishness is constructed through football is also evident in some other sports. Tuck (2003) is concerned that rugby union has often been overlooked in studies that focus on Englishness and sport. Within his examination of rugby union and media representations of Englishness, he argues that rugby union in England has historically been ‘based on an extremely resistant social habitus which has traditionally centred on white, upper class, university educated masculinity’ (184). Although he cites the changing nature of the sport in recent years, he senses the recent development of a more aggressive Englishness ‘modelled on the image of the Little Englander and reflecting the fantasy of England as a rural idyll – a land of hope and glory’ (ibid.: 183). He thus argues that

in a new era when the English were being beaten by their perceived cultural inferiors at their ‘own’ sports, the Little Englander could wallow in wilful nostalgia which highlighted both the reawakening of former (sporting) glory days and the
reinvigoration of a ‘purer’ national identity. Rugby union (and the associated media coverage) has provided a fertile soil for such a reinvigoration (184).

The use of the word ‘purer’ in this last quotation has clear connotations relating to ‘race’, suggestive as it is of a previous age before society became more outwardly multi-cultural. Further evidence of a nostalgic and sentimental approach to English sport can be evidenced in cricket.

4.5.6 Cricket and England

Cricket is undoubtedly one of the older team sports still being played in England and though its actual origins are less than clear, this has evidently added to its resonance as an indicator of ‘Englishness’. However, Marqusee (1994) has argued that attempts to claim the game as a native ‘English’ product miss the point about the folk games from which cricket, like most modern sports, was derived. These games were pre-national. Countless stick-and-ball games existed – every village had its own version – but no one of these was more or less ‘English’ than any other. Indeed, the games played in England at this time were clearly part of a pan-European folk culture. Cricket could have been as easily derived from any of the stick-and-ball games played on the continent as any of those played in England (31)\textsuperscript{55}.

Regardless of this, the apparent difficulties in establishing when and where cricket ultimately emanated from prove to be largely academic, particularly when one considers the extent to which powerful and extensive notions of Englishness are already associated with the sport. In relation to this, Holt (1989) concludes that ‘the grip of cricket on the middle class English imagination became very strong from the late nineteenth century’ (265).

Both he and Marqusee (1994) are agreed upon the importance of the British Empire in helping to furnish the game with specific ideas about England and Englishness. For

\textsuperscript{55} Author’s italics.
Marqusee (1994) ‘cricket proved the ideal vehicle for the national/imperial ideology which crystallized at the end of the nineteenth century’ (251). His reasoning for this is that ‘cricket combined an egalitarian premise with a deeply hierarchical culture’ (*ibid.*). For Williams (2001), the most significant factor that linked cricket, Englishness and the British Empire was the notion of sportsmanship, which was seen to be perhaps the defining characteristic of the way the game was played by the English. This, Williams concludes, ‘helped to persuade the white English that they could be trusted to exercise authority over other races in a reasonable and selfless manner’ (2001: 16). Crabbe and Wagg (2000) have identified that the international fixtures and test matches that are a popular and pre-eminent feature of contemporary cricket developed as a direct result of the extensive use of cricket throughout the British Empire.

In their consideration of the changing nature of England’s contemporary cricket fandom, Parry and Malcolm (2004) have identified three fundamental features that coalesce to distinguish English cricket and demonstrate its uniqueness. The first, the *rural idyll*, is particularly important in terms of nostalgic views of Englishness and English national identity as viewed through cricket, in that it fundamentally centres upon an idealized, socially harmonious scene in which a village green cricket match takes place within a picturesque and tranquil English setting (76).

The significance of this image for Williams (1999) is that not only is it based upon the assumption that ‘the rural came to be esteemed as aesthetically and morally superior to the urban’ (9), but also that it was limited to ‘how the countryside in the south of England was imagined’ (*ibid.*: 9-10). In terms of broader understandings of nationalism, the influence of Anderson (1991) here is quite clear. There can be little doubt that cricket provides vivid and powerful images that contribute enormously to
the ways that England and Englishness is ‘imagined’ in the minds of many English people. Marqusee (1994) sees the over-emphasis upon the association between Englishness and village cricket as being based predominantly upon ‘the myth of an enduring and natural social hierarchy’ (29). He concludes that

for many in the inner cities, the unemployed, the low-waged, the homeless, and all those who are abused because of their race or sex, the village cricket match is a symbol of the England in which they have no part, the England which excludes and insults them (ibid.: 30).

Indeed, in his assessment of the efficacy and effectiveness of contemporary efforts to develop official equal opportunity policies within cricket, Malcolm (2002) concludes that ‘the romanticised stereotype of English village cricket to which many adhere needs to be highlighted as part of the problem of closure’ (322).

The second fundamental feature of modern cricket, moral worth, additionally seeks to link cricket to a mythical era when sport was played according to cherished ideals of sportsmanship and fairness: ‘cricket came to be regarded not just as a game but, rather, a venerated symbol of the code of ethics of the English gentlemen’ (Parry and Malcolm, 2004: 77). Williams (1999) makes a significant point in this regard. He concludes that

cricket discourses that emphasised cricket as a form of English morality were monologic; they were the discourses of those who exercised political and social power and determined how cricket should be perceived and controlled (16).

The third and final fundamental, formed by the coalescing of the first two, is to see cricket as the quintessential English game, ‘which best defined and encapsulated English national character and morality’ (Parry and Malcolm, 2004: 77). Once more, it is Williams (1999) who offers a semblance of clarity to this view. He argues that

the moral nature of cricket may have been more supposed than real, more myth than actuality, but the general drift of cricket discourse suggests that cricket was a myth by which the English lived and imagined themselves (17).
This is a view that is epitomised by Aslet (1997). His entire text is a rage against the changing nature of England in the period of late-capitalism, and a defence of his desire to return to an idealised, mythical, white, middle class, rural, English life. It is no surprise then that his views on cricket largely latch on to the fundamentals offered above by Parry and Malcolm (2004). All too predictably he rails against the elements of modern cricket that he sees as being contrary to the true Englishness of the game, such as the unshaven chins of the current England XI, or their match-day casual sportswear: ‘it may be a coincidence, but the less kempt England’s appearance, the worse the team appears to play’ (47). He even disparages the appearance of protective cricket helmets on village greens. Clearly, Aslet views these as symptomatic of the degeneration of cricket and the Englishness that it represents, but also of the wider decline of Englishness per se.

Aslet’s outlook is though also representative of the resilience and sustenance of the images and ideas about England and Englishness that are conveyed by cricket. It is also further evidence of the significant influence that the ‘imagined communities’ of Anderson (1991) has on the ways that ideas about England and Englishness are constructed through cricket. In light of this, Williams (1999) has argued that

the image of cricket as a symbol of England was very much a creation of the Victorians yet even at the close of the twentieth century, when the social milieu and ethos of cricket are very different from the 1920s and 1930s, cricket is still used to create an immediately recognisable vision of England (xiv).

The ease with which one is able to conjure up immediately accessible images of this England through cricket is not lost upon those who might seek to gain most from doing so. On St. George’s Day in April 1993, and in a striking example of an

---

56 From his writing it is clear that Aslet never actually plays or played cricket as he admits to obtaining his knowledge of the game from ‘cricketing friends’.

152
‘imagined community’ in action (Anderson, 1991), the then British Prime Minister and well-known fan of cricket, John Major, made an impassioned and oft-quoted speech to a group of Conservative Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). In what was a fairly calculated attempt to placate members of his own party, he openly alluded to an imagined version of Britain that was much like that of Aslet (1997), in that it was predominantly that of the English, white, rural, conservative, middle-classes. Marqusee (1994) denotes this to be ‘an England that did not exist, except powerfully, in people’s heads’ (10), though the speech is perhaps more significant for the ideas of England that were not included.

Returning now to the issue of the three fundamental features of English cricket, though they acknowledge that the views of English cricket they have identified are idealized, Parry and Malcolm (2004) argue that such views have been mobilised in various ways to ‘protect’ the game from outside threats. Most recently this has been witnessed in form of opposition to the Barmy Army, the new English cricket fan formations, members of which ‘present themselves in direct opposition to the ideological traditions of English cricket’ (81). Although it is unlikely that the Barmy Army will significantly challenge the exclusivity of English cricket, it is clear that they ‘simultaneously and aggressively forge a new and distinctive cultural identity which jettisons many other aspects of Englishness’ (ibid.: 82). Once more, this suggests that sporting nationalism is an ongoing process, with the possibility that it can change and adapt to varying social, political and cultural indices.

A further powerful stimulus to the broad association between cricket and Englishness

57 The speech made reference to ‘the long shadows falling across the county ground, the warm beer, the invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pool fillers … old maids cycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist’ (Quoted in Marqusee, 1994).
is the sheer popularity of the game at different points in history. Holt and Mason (2000) consider the point at which cricket was most popular in England to have been immediately after the Second World War, whilst for Williams (1999) it is the period between the two World Wars that saw cricket reach its peak of popularity. That being said, it would be mistaken to conclude from the game’s broad appeal that this did not pose significant problems of sociological significance. Williams (1999) argues for example ‘that those from all classes played and watched cricket, but much of cricket was riddled with privilege and social distinction’ (15). Holt (1989) argues that cricket has a more pronounced middle class appeal and as such he highlights significant cultural differences that exist within the game based upon region and class. For Holt, the nostalgic dream of peace and harmony that was country cricket can never have been quite the same for those who lived daily with the reality of agricultural decline and rural poverty. Nor did the northern working classes invest the game with the same kind of Englishness that took hold of the south (1989: 265-266).

The approach of northern working class cricket was less sentimental and romantic, and in Lancashire it was soon a professional sport, which contributed to the removal of some of the more overt connotations of Englishness (ibid.). Marqusee (1994) has also spoken of the contemporary distinctions between northern and southern English ideas about cricket, particularly in relation to disputes regarding the regional origins of players regularly selected to play for England.

Clearly, the association between England, Englishness and cricket is a long and powerful one, though arguably the reality of this association is one that has less and less resonance for a modern and multi-cultural England and UK. For Wagg (2007) cricket is predominantly a game ‘still signifying a mythic Englishness’ (25). Although he is willing to concede that the game still carries ‘strong connotations of Englishness’ (ibid.: 29), as far as he is concerned the game never really goes beyond
the level of myth. This is because he now considers the game to be ‘far from a mass
sport and has a shrinking social base’ (*ibid.*).

### 4.5.7 Summary: Sport, Nationalism and England

To conclude this discussion of sport, Englishness and English national identity, it can
be said with some certainty that in England, as in the other nations of the United
Kingdom, sport is enjoyed in ways that are distinctive and different. The focus of this
discussion has been to consider the ways in which nostalgia, sentimentality and
visions of an imagined and idealised past feature prominently in the ways that sport
and Englishness are constructed and imagined. In many ways, these have veiled any
extensive and explicit discussion of how English sport fails to reflect a truly national
and representative sporting culture. Much like sport in Northern Ireland, Scotland and
Wales, there are many structural and cultural factors within sport in England that
exclude numerous people on the basis of their class, gender and ‘race’/ethnicity. In
many ways though, it is this very sense of nostalgia that serves to exclude many
English people from inclusion within dominant English sporting cultures.

### 4.6 Summary: Sport, Nationalism and the United Kingdom

In terms of nationalism and national identity, it is apparent that sport retains vital
cultural significance in *all* the constituent ‘nations’ of the UK. However, it would be
foolish to suppose that the meanings associated with playing or watching sport will be
identical for the same sports experienced in different ‘nations’. Moreover, the
meanings, ideas and perspectives associated with sport will vary and depend largely
on which sport is being played, where it is being played and by whom. As such, the
cultural significance and meanings associated with sports are likely to differ markedly from those of other ‘nations’ playing the same sports. In addition to this, it is also worth repeating what is fast becoming a common lament, namely that a sporting commitment to a nation does not necessarily or automatically reflect an equal political commitment. Additionally, there are clearly very few opportunities for more pan-British identities to be presented in sport. The summer and winter Olympic Games is perhaps the most high profile and meaningful example of where this happens.
Chapter Five: Contextualising the Relationship Between the United Kingdom, Football and the Olympic Games

The preceding analysis of the experience of sporting nationalisms in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales has shown how sport is practised, enjoyed and understood in contrasting ways in the component parts of the UK. What is missing from this analysis is any focussed consideration of the relationship between the UK and the Olympic movement, particularly with regard to the role played, and more recently not played, by association football. Though undoubtedly hampered by the serious lack of academic attention paid to Olympism and British national identity, this final section will attempt to briefly to contextualise this relationship historically. Additionally, this section will seek to offer a limited analysis of the seemingly contradictory position that Great Britain occupies in terms of Olympic competition, inasmuch as a country it can be argued that Great Britain has traditionally been a ‘good Olympian’, its record of participation in terms of Olympic football suggests otherwise.

5.1 British Influence Upon the Modern Olympic Revival

Before moving on to consider the specific relationship between Great Britain and the Olympic Games, it is worth noting the influence that England and especially the English public schools had upon the revival of the modern Olympic movement. It is clear that Baron Pierre De Coubertin, the Frenchman whose drive and unbridled enthusiasm was ultimately responsible for the staging of the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, was a strong advocate of the English public school system, and of the centrality of sport within school life (Krüger, 1999). Coubertin spent a
great deal of time in England researching the public school system and these visits were

a way of reassuring the young baron that the ideal of muscular Christianity – the building of healthy bodies and sound morals – was alive and well in England (Tomlinson, 1984: 89).

It is clear that whilst Coubertin’s Olympic vision borrowed heavily from the Victorian, amateur ethos of athleticism that was dominant within the sporting pastimes of the English public schools, he also looked to other influences. These influences included an interest in the annual sporting festivals held in Much Wenlock, Shropshire during the nineteenth century, which in some limited ways resembled a form of ‘Olympic’ Games (ibid.; Krüger, 1999). Additionally, Coubertin looked to ‘a world of mind-body harmony in ancient Greece, in order to breed a new generation of men to rule the modern world’ (Tomlinson, 1984: 85). However, his main motives were to help revive the national fortunes of his beloved France, motives which had been intensified by France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and which have been described overall as ‘a mixture of nationalism and internationalism’ (Guttmann, 1984: 12).

The continuity between Coubertin’s Olympic ideology and the UK was initially reflected most markedly in the composition of the British teams that competed in the early Games, with a majority of competitors having been educated at Oxbridge and, previously, within the English public schools so admired by Coubertin (Llewellyn, 2008). Likewise, the control of the British Olympic movement, in common with many other governing bodies at that time, was firmly in the hands of the ‘upper-middle class and aristocratic elites’ (ibid.: 109), a factor which for various reasons would prove
problematic for the early history of the British Olympic movement. Initially, however, though the fact that this group was composed of ‘self-proclaimed “true” Olympic apostles’ (ibid.: 122) meant that the loyalty and adherence that would characterise the British Olympic movement’s commitment to the Olympic cause was apparent from the very beginning.

5.2 The United Kingdom and the Olympic Games

It is certainly noteworthy that Great Britain is the only country to have competed at every single Summer and Winter Olympic Games held since their inception in 1896 and 1924 respectively (Tomlinson, 1984)\(^58\). If it is borne in mind that in doing so, Great Britain has managed to skirt safely around some significant and high-profile campaigns to boycott Summer Olympic Games as seen for instance at Melbourne in 1956 and again at Moscow in 1980, then credit is all the more deserved. In addition to this, the BOA, formed in 1905, has, at short notice, agreed to host the Summer Games in London on two occasions during difficult times for the Olympic movement. The 1908 Games were awarded to Rome initially, but after funding issues centred on long-standing regional quarrels caused the Italians to withdraw their offer to host the Games\(^59\), London stepped in to fill the void (Kent, 2008). Although the 1908 Games might be remembered more for the numerous controversies and disputes linked to track and field competition between Great Britain and the United States of America, they were of great significance, not least because they were the very first Games in

\(^{58}\) Records of participation for some of the earlier Olympic Games are often incomplete and subject to debate. In this regard, it has been argued that both Switzerland and France are also able to claim full attendance at all Summer and Winter Olympic Games held since 1896.

\(^{59}\) The withdrawal of the offer was made under the guise of having to divert funds to the relief of the survivors of the 1906 eruption of the volcano Vesuvius, though it is fair to say that this was merely a convenient excuse.
which competitors were formally organized into national teams. Overall, the legacy of the 1908 London Games was that they went some way to ensure that

the Olympic Games were recognised as an Olympic entity in their own right, permanent changes were made in Olympic organization and a degree of credibility was re-established for the Olympic movement (Matthews, 1980).

After the Second World War, London again stepped into the breech to host the 1948 Games, at a time when the vast majority of other countries were reluctant to do so because of the chaotic and catastrophic aftermath of war. Despite the fact that Britain’s athletic performance at the Games was disappointing, the significance of the event was enormous, in that it helped to ‘re-establish the Olympic movement after the Second World War’ (Beck, 2008: 617). It is clear then that the British Olympic Committee was highly committed to the Olympic cause from the very start. Yet, it has been argued that the broader English (British) public were less enamoured of the Olympic Games. Indeed, Llewellyn (2008) has suggested that the British affinity for the Olympic Movement appears to be a very recent phenomenon. In fact, history reveals that Olympism held an extremely tenuous position in Great Britain throughout the early years of modern Olympic competition (101).

As already mentioned, the British Olympic movement encountered numerous problems in the early years of its existence, many of these stemming from the elitist nature of its competitors and organizational structures. Firstly, in an age before the Olympic Games became one of the world’s foremost media spectacles, the dominance of upper-middle classes and aristocracy within the British Olympic movement meant the exclusion and marginalisation of the working classes from its domain (Llewellyn, 2008). Partly as a consequence, the working classes preferred to focus their attention

---

*60 As well as being the first to feature ‘national’ teams, additional innovations of the London 1908 Olympic Games included the introduction of qualifying heats for some events, the formalisation of the marathon distance at 26 miles and 385 yards and the first relay events. Additionally, the Games saw the first black medal winner and Irishmen winning gold medals for the Great Britain team.*
and spend their money on professional sports such as football, rugby league and cricket, sports ‘that they could actually watch and participate in’ (ibid.: 110).

For Baker (1994), from his analysis of the comparative appeals of the two major sporting events to be held in Britain in 1948, the London Olympics and the Ashes Test series against Australia, the evidence is compelling. He states that ‘the prevailing tastes of the average British sports follower were not only traditional, they were also parochial, or at least domestic’ (58). Baker’s conclusion is that Tests with Australia were part of the, so very attractive, familiar routine of ‘domestic’ sporting competition. The Olympics were simply not seen in comparable terms, they were not part of that routine, that familiar pattern. They were an international event staged in Britain, not a British event ... the Olympics were not relished in anticipation by the majority of sports followers in Britain (69).

For Beck (2008), the lack of public enthusiasm for the Games may in some quarters be a result of the sporting isolationism that was exemplified by the attitude of the British football associations to FIFA and their World Cup tournament throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, at least initially, the support and patronage of the upper classes and aristocracy could not be guaranteed nor indeed be taken for granted. On Great Britain’s preparation for the Antwerp Games of 1920, Llewellyn (2008) writes: for the nation’s upper-middle class and aristocratic elites, who were firmly wedded both institutionally and ideologically to the chivalrous amateur values espoused within the late nineteenth century English public school system, the thought of British athletes undergoing rigorous trials and undergoing specialised athletic training as a necessary prerequisite for Olympic success in Antwerp was met with widespread hostility and discord (113).

The main fear for these groups was that Olympic participation ‘put an athlete on a nefarious path towards professionalization’ (ibid.). The reality was however that the BOC harboured not unrelated concerns, and consequently their own raison d’être retained
a strong belief that a continued British presence was needed to educate foreign athletes as to the true spirit of sportsmanship and to ensure that their vision of the ideals of Olympism were being upheld (ibid.: 122).

5.3 The United Kingdom and Olympic Football

Arguably, it is this concern to uphold the ‘true ideals of Olympism’ that has characterised the complicated and often chequered relationship between the UK and Olympic football tournaments. That being said, a British team dominated the two tournaments that immediately preceded the outbreak of the First World War, winning gold medals at London in 1908 and at Stockholm in 1912, overcoming Denmark on both occasions in final ties. However, the performance of Britain’s Olympic football representatives after the First World War and indeed, before and after the Second World War would never again scale the same heights, with two quarter-finals at Berlin in 1936 and at Melbourne in 1956, and a solitary semi-final appearance and subsequent defeat in the bronze-medal match at London in 1948, representing their best performances. Clearly the history of Great Britain’s appearances in Olympic football tournaments has never been such that it was ever going to engender or contribute to any great sense of a collective British footballing identity.

Indeed, the relatively low number of matches that have been contested by Great Britain in Olympic football tournaments also contributes, as we shall see, to its failure to engender a shared British footballing identity. The total number of matches that Great Britain have played during the final stages of Olympic football tournaments is eighteen, and if the matches in the 1908 and 1912 games, which purposely featured all-English teams, are disregarded, the number of matches played by Great Britain between 1920 and 1960 is only twelve. If preliminary and qualification games are
included, the number rises to a total of 35 matches between 1908 and 1972. Most notably, by the time of the first Olympic football tournament in 1908 in London, the British had already been competing against one another in the Home International Championship on an annual basis for 25 years, and thus for 21 years before FIFA was first formed in 1904. In terms of Great Britain’s Olympic football history, it was not until 1920, 37 years after the British began regularly playing separately and against each other, that a truly representative British team took to the field against Norway in the 1920 Games in Antwerp.

Although historically there have been recurrent debates about how a representative Great Britain football team should be devised and composed\(^{61}\), it is the issue of amateurism that would not only be a bone of contention for many years but would also see the end of Great Britain’s involvement in Olympic football tournaments after 1972, although the team had last made it successfully through the qualifying tournament to appear at the Summer Games themselves at Rome in 1960. In fact, the issue of amateurism had already led to the exclusion of Great Britain from Olympic football tournaments in 1924 and 1928 (Rous, 1948), a year which also saw the British associations resign once again from FIFA in protest over the very same issue (Murray, 1999). Britain had left FIFA previously in 1920 in protest against FIFA’s wish not exclude the defeated states of the First World War from international football competition (\textit{ibid.}), only to rejoin again in 1924.

According to Hampton (2008), ‘of all the Olympic sports, the rules on amateurism

---

\(^{61}\) Although Great Britain won gold in the Olympic football tournaments at London in 1908 and Stockholm in 1912, on both occasions the team was comprised entirely of Englishmen, reflecting early the complex nature of selecting a representative GB team from four component nations (see British Olympic Association, 1908).
probably affected football the most’ (289). In terms of Olympic football tournaments, Great Britain interpreted the rules on amateurism to the letter of the law, and consistently entered fully amateur teams in the Games (Baker, 1996; Kent, 2008). This remained the case even after 1948 when many of their opponents in Olympic football tournaments began to engage in a policy of ‘shamatuerism’, whereby nations, often from Eastern Europe but not exclusively, ‘bent the rules by conscripting their best players into the army or civil service so that they could train while under government pay’ (Hampton, 2008: 289). The result of this was that Great Britain’s Olympic football team would often encounter opponents that might be considered to all intents and purposes professional, full-strength national representative teams. This was certainly the case in Rome in 1960, when a fully amateur Great Britain team gained a creditable draw against an Italian under-21 team that included Giovanni Trapattoni and Gianni Rivera (“Glanville's top 50”, 2007). Similarly, the last time Great Britain competed in an Olympic football tournament in 1972, they were eliminated in the qualifying stages by Bulgaria’s ‘suspiciously well-drilled World Cup squad’ (Stewart, 2008).

From an English perspective, the issue of amateurism was only finally settled later in 1972, when the FA Council decided to formally abolish the distinction between amateur and professional players, meaning that from 1974 (when the change was formally enacted) ‘all players, paid or unpaid, should be known simply as “players”’ (Butler, 1991: 189). This change meant that whilst the IOC insisted on restricting Olympic football tournaments to ‘amateurs’ only, Great Britain was no longer able to field a team as it was only the FA, rather than the FAW, IFA or SFA, that is officially affiliated to the BOC, which in itself may offer some form of legitimisation for an all-
English XI to represent Team GB in London. The IOC has subsequently changed the rules regarding professionalism in Olympic football tournaments on several occasions\textsuperscript{62}. In 1984, they admitted all professional players from the Africa, Asia, Oceania and CONCACAF confederations, whilst restricting players from UEFA and CONMEBOL to those that had not previously played in the World Cup. Since 1992, the exemption of players from UEFA and CONMEBO has been lifted but now all players must be under 23 years of age with the exception of three nominated over-age players (Fédération Internationale de Football Association [FIFA], 2007)\textsuperscript{63}. These eligibility criteria have been recently reviewed but will not be changed for London 2012. One additional but nonetheless interesting point to consider in respect of Olympic football is that none of these eligibility rules apply to women’s Olympic football competitions.

5.4 Perspectives on Olympic Football Tournaments

The reality of Olympic football is one of a fairly minor tournament that pales into significance when compared with the major international tournaments such as the World Cup, European Championships, Copa Libertadores and Champions League, that so readily capture the imagination of the world’s football peoples. For Tomlinson (2001) this difference in status is reflected most significantly in the fan cultures that are attached to each interpretation of the game:

\begin{quote}
next to the relational intensity of the [Olympic] football event and the World Cup, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{62} In reality, it is FIFA that is the \textit{de facto} organiser of Olympic Football tournaments, and as such, they are defined within FIFA’s statutes as designated FIFA events.

\textsuperscript{63} Despite the admission of professionals to Olympic football in 1992, Great Britain does not usually enter a team. This is mainly because of the problems posed by the existence of four separate football associations and not least because qualification is usually via a nation’s performance in the UEFA European Under-21 Football Championships. No unified Great Britain team competes in this competition.
Olympics is like a series of teasing flirtations. The spectator body moves on, to another line-up, another queue, another thrill, like punters at Disneyland (224).

In addition to this, Tomlinson intimates that the lack of appeal of Olympic football may in part be related to the absence of some of the more tribal features of football’s common appeal:

for most fans it is essentially excluding of others, assertive of local collective identity. Local derbies and the fierce partisanship expressed by neighbours are the most compelling cases of this feature of football and fan culture (ibid.: 225).

This might be summarised as being an absence of the dominant, working class masculinity that so inhabits football cultures across the world and, most significantly for the purposes of this research at least, within the football cultures of the UK. As Tomlinson argues,

in no Olympic city or around any Olympic event will a set of sports fans capable of the excesses of this traditional rump of football culture be present (ibid.).

The question of whether these attitudes might be subject to change if the age restrictions governing player eligibility were lifted is an interesting one but it is possible that the example of tennis as Olympic sport might offer some guidance here. In Olympic tennis tournaments, there are no restrictions at all on which players are eligible to compete and the top players in both the men’s and women’s games regularly take part. Despite this, the hegemony of the four annual Grand Slam tennis tournaments has been not successfully challenged to any degree by the recent inclusion and growth of tennis at the Summer Olympic Games.

5.5 Summary: The United Kingdom, Football and the Olympic Games

In terms of the British Olympic Association, Great Britain and Northern Ireland might be regarded as being a ‘good Olympian’, particularly in the way that it has been fully
committed to Olympism and has conformed in the past to the amateur ideal, particularly in football. It is questionable though as to whether this enthusiasm has been shared with the broader public at all times, particularly in periods of history where the Olympic Games were not subject to the media saturation characteristic of the last thirty years or so. In terms of Olympic football specifically, it is also arguable as to whether public interest in a combined Great Britain team has ever gone beyond that which characterised general attitudes to the Olympic Games before 1948. As we have seen, the importance of football in the four component parts of the UK is more than significant and not to be underestimated. The relative disinterest historically afforded Olympic football on these islands cannot ordinarily be attributed to a lack of interest in the game itself.

Looking at the overall picture, one of the more interesting aspects of this analysis has been the lack of any acknowledgement of the distinctions between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales within a British, Olympic context. However, one need only remember the names of just a few of the sporting heroes from Britain’s Olympic history, for instance Mary Peters and Wendy Houvenaghel (Northern Ireland), Allan Wells, Eric Liddell and Sir Chris Hoy (Scotland) and Colin Jackson and Lynn Davies (Wales), to see that the Olympic Games has been an important arena for the expression of a particular form of British identity. This particular form of identity enables a balance to be struck between Britishness and the residual forms of identity that exist within Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, though the question of the relationship between Britishness and Englishness is in some ways more blurred. It is interesting however that English medal winners are celebrated as British too, yet it is in a way in which their Englishness is referred to implicitly rather than explicitly.
Although further research and analysis is required to consider British national identity and its relationship with Olympic competition more directly, it is clear that the Olympic Games allows for the celebration and expression of a unique British sporting identity. It is the uniqueness of this identity that makes the history of Great Britain’s participation in Olympic football all the more intriguing and interesting sociologically. But how can it best be researched?
Chapter Six: Methodology and Methods

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it attempts to identify and discuss some of the key methodological and philosophical issues relating to discourses of nationalism and national identity, specifically those associated with the proposed inclusion of combined Great Britain and Northern Ireland football teams at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Secondly, it seeks to provide a framework for the inquiry to proceed satisfactorily. The arguments will thus be structured sequentially, and will start by considering the relevance to the research of the recurrent struggles between the concepts of positivism and interpretivism. Leading on from this will be an assessment of the pertinent ontological and epistemological perspectives that might inform an approach to the research. Finally, the chapter will move to a discussion of the research methods employed and offer a reassessment of their suitability for the specific research question.

6.1 Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches to Research

Discussions concerning the persistent conflicts between positivist and interpretivist approaches to the social sciences are endemic in discussions of methodology but are necessarily revisited in order to facilitate a full understanding of the specific challenges of research methodology and philosophy. The positivist tradition of research in the social sciences is informed by concepts of empiricism and naturalism, and insists that ‘only scientific methods produce knowledge’ (Lazar, 2004: 8). This reflects the belief that to successfully gain insight into social life, the research methods employed in the social sciences should be modelled on those employed within the natural sciences, with the specified aim being to ‘discover “laws” of
society that operate in a similar manner to the laws of nature’ (Filmer, Jenks, Seale, Thoburn and Walsh, 2004: 35). Positivism is also primarily concerned with the establishment of causal relationships between entities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 8).

In contrast, interpretivism is concerned with identifying explanations and understandings rather than causal relationships, and recognises implicitly that

the social world is complex, that researchers and subjects are fundamentally and subjectively attached to the world, and that people define their own realities (Silk, Andrews and Mason, 2005: 7).

In these terms then, interpretivism concentrates on capturing and understanding ‘the particular behaviours, meanings and realities of individuals within particular social settings’ (ibid.). It is perhaps this conscious and concerted search for (subjective) meanings that sets interpretivism apart from positivism more than anything else. The disputes between positivist and interpretivist approaches are fundamental, although they remain of critical importance to the understanding, development and advancement of social scientific research. Interpretivists are referred to disdainfully by positivists as ‘journalists, or soft scientists’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 7) and their work is regarded to be profoundly ‘unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective’ (ibid.: 8). Secondly, positivists contend that their own work is superior to that of qualitative researchers because it is undertaken within an objective and value-free research context (ibid.). Thirdly, positivists maintain that qualitative, interpretivist researchers have no way of verifying the claims to truth that they make (ibid.).

In an effort to deliver a theoretical riposte to these criticisms, a qualitative, interpretivist researcher would insist that it is not possible to ‘deal with phenomena in
the social world as we do with phenomena belonging to the natural sphere’ (Schutz, 1970: 110). Lazar reasons that

the interpretive tradition contends that the meaningfulness of the social world makes the application of scientific methods such as explanation by laws and causes inappropriate⁶⁴ (2004: 18).

Lazar goes on to argue that instead, ‘the social sciences should seek to grasp the meanings that individuals and social groups give to their actions and institutions’ (ibid.). The essence of what Lazar is arguing here is that the interpretivist tradition of social research is founded upon the very subjectivities of which positivist approaches are so critical. Subjectivity and the meanings that social actors make of themselves and their social actions are of critical importance to interpretivists in explaining the social world.

Qualitative research is critical of the essentialist nature of positivist research, and its latent inability to gather rich and substantive research data, not least because of its reliance upon ‘more remote, inferential and empirical methods and materials’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 10). It can be argued effectively that positivist approaches to social science do not gather a sufficient depth of data to allow for an adequate attempt at understanding the social world. In his work on the nature of ethnography and cultural and sociological analyses, Clifford Geertz (1993) termed this ‘thick description’ (14). By contrast, quantitative, positivist inquiry is ‘deliberately unconcerned with rich description as such detail interrupts the process of developing generalisations’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 10).

In relation to values, it is clear that the interpretivist research approach acknowledges

⁶⁴ Author’s italics.
the role that values play in the inquiry process (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 197-8). This is not to say that this role is necessarily disregarded, ignored or interpreted recklessly. Moreover interpretivists recognise the role that values play on two levels, in determining firstly, the selection and design of the research process, and secondly, in relation to the impact of values on the lives and social actions of their subjects. Thus, interpretivist researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning65 (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 8).

The significance of this is that the analysis and interpretation of gathered data should be undertaken as much as possible in a value-free manner to maintain the credibility, reliability and validity of the work. In contrast, positivists emphasise the objectivity and empirical robustness of their work, which seeks to eradicate values wherever possible. One suspects, however, that at least in relation to the selection and development of a research agenda, the elimination of values and value judgements is a hard task for even the most committed of positivist researchers.

We shall go on to look at issues of truth and reality in the discussion of ontology below, but it is worth mentioning at this stage that positivists seek facts and causal relationships ‘that can be objectively obtained through the rigorous testing of hypotheses’ (Silk, Andrews and Mason, 2005: 6). This reflects not only that positivism is concerned with the discovery of truth but also that it is informed by empiricism and ‘a belief in the importance of observation and the collection of facts, assumed to exist prior to theories’ (Filmer et al, 2004: 35). This insistence that knowledge or theories can only be obtained from observation was criticised by Karl Popper, who stated that ‘theories can never be inferred from observation statements,

65 Author’s italics.
or rationally justified by them’ (1963: 42). In fact, Popper went on to argue his belief that theory exists prior to facts (ibid.).

Popper’s criticism of the inductive logic of empiricism was informed by his rejection of the notion that theories generated from observation can be generalised to include all instances of the phenomena being studied: ‘only the falsity of the theory can be inferred from empirical evidence, and this inference is purely a deductive one’ (ibid.: 55). His view is summarised by Williams and May thus: ‘although any number of observations can never conclusively prove a theory, one disconfirming observation is sufficient to refute it’ (1996: 29). This view is suggestive of the potential pitfalls that positivists may face in relating empirical work to generalisable truths and serves to highlight an important conceptual problem evident within the positivist, empiricist tradition.

Before proceeding further, it would seem appropriate to summarise the arguments to date within the terms of the research to be undertaken. To reiterate, the intention is to uncover and examine discourses of nationalisms and national identity in relation to a Great Britain and Northern Ireland UK Olympic football team. In this respect, there remain numerous philosophical objections to the employment of a positivist sociological methodology. Nationalism and the nation are concepts and discourses that are constructed, reproduced, reconstructed and transformed by social action, and the interaction and intervention of people as social actors. Özkirimli (2005) is highly persuasive on this point when he concludes that ‘nations and nationalism may be socially constructed but they are not easily deconstructed’ (166). Smith (1998) is also

66 Author’s italics.
significant in this respect when he argues that

the nation has no reality independent of its images and representations. But, such a perspective undermines the sociological reality of the nation, the bonds of allegiance and belonging which so many people feel (137).

Consequently, the intention is to gain an in-depth understanding of the way that these concepts are felt and experienced by people, the meanings that they produce and the way that ideas about nationalism and national identity in these islands may be informed, represented, reinforced or transformed by the existence and/or absence thereof of a combined Great Britain Olympic football team at the London 2012 Olympic Games. In this case, agreement can be found with the assertion that ‘researchers find that people’s words provide greater access to their subjective meaning than do statistical trends’ (Lazar, 2004: 14). An interpretive framework can thus be said to be of vital relevance to the sociological and cultural study of sport and to this research in particular.

6.2 Ontology and Epistemology

The significance of ontological concerns for any proposed research is clear in that not only will it provide a philosophical basis upon which to proceed but it will also directly inform the epistemological character of the enquiry. When we talk of ontology, what we are seeking to comprehend is the essential nature of reality and existence, or what Crotty (1998) has termed ‘the study of being’ (10). Questions of reality/realities and indeed whether they exist at all, and/or to what extent, are central here and our ontological focus will be informed in some respects by the extent, scope and objectives of the research project. Epistemology is concerned with issues of how we acquire the knowledge that we seek and subsequently learn about the social world or ‘how we conceptualise our reality and our images of the world’ (Denzin and
6.2.1 Ontological Concerns

It remains a useful exercise to consider a broad range of ontological approaches. The first examples that will be considered are broadly associated with positivist approaches to social research and will assist in gauging which might be the most appropriate concepts for the purposes of this research. The first ontological concepts that we shall consider are all realist in character, that is to say that, in general, they claim that ‘things in the world have a real existence, independent of our thoughts about them’ (Williams and May, 1996: 42).

One such ontological position posits that there is ‘a measurable and objective reality that determines a universal truth’ (Silk, Andrews and Mason, 2005: 6). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that this reflects an objective reality (sometimes also termed naïve realism or hypothetical realism), which ‘asserts that there is a tangible reality, and experience with it can result in knowing it fully’ (82). This philosophical understanding presumes that everything physical and social has a substantive real existence. The key to this form of understanding is that although individual inquiry may illuminate only partial or approximate aspects of any one subject of inquiry, ‘sooner or later, convergence will occur’ (ibid.), allowing a reality to be fully comprehended eventually.

A second ontological concept to be considered is that of perceived reality. Again, this assumes the existence of a reality, but in this particular instance, it is considered that ‘reality’ can never be fully known or comprehended. Importantly, this concept allows
for different interpretations of reality to be conceived when it is viewed from different vantage points. *Objective* and *perceived reality* are thus similar in that they are realist views, both believing that a substantive reality exists and is knowable. Epistemologically though they differ, in that they are in contention over what it is possible to know or discover about the social world (*ibid.*). The main contention is that neither of these approaches exhibits the qualities considered suitable for the purposes of this research on discourses of nationalism, national identity and a combined Great Britain Olympic football team. These philosophical stances are more suited to a positivist research focus. A more meaningful approach would recognise that

> the harshest realities of the everyday only exist to us through meanings; they do not exist as such, independently of people’s interpretations and understandings (Alasuutari, 1995: 29).

Thus, in terms of concepts and discourses of nationalism and national identity, the proposed focus will be on the ability of certain concepts to be constructed, de-constructed, transformed and reproduced by social action.

*Constructed reality* may provide a more apposite ontological basis for this purpose. In this context, reality is seen as a construction in the minds of individuals and it remains doubtful whether a true reality even exists at all (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 83). If reality does exist, however, this ontological outlook suggests that it can never be known and that ‘no amount of inquiry can produce convergence on it’ (*ibid.*). This perspective is of significance because it reflects and acknowledges the role of individuals and social action in constructing realities. Crotty (1998) argues that constructionism posits that

> there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world … Meaning is
Another important facet of this conceptualisation relates to multiple realities. *Constructed reality* acknowledges that there is ‘always an infinite number of constructions that might be made and hence there are multiple realities’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 83). This is broadly reflective of a relativist approach, whereby ‘there are only truths and no universal truth, versions of reality but no one reality’ (Lazar, 2004: 20). This is of particular relevance for this research. Discourses of nationalism are subject to a wide-ranging spectrum of influences and potentially may vary across lines of culture, ethnicity, gender, race and class amongst others (Crotty, 1998: 9). A relativist approach is more likely to allow for the capture of the subtleties and variations contained within these understandings and interpretations than any search for an ultimate truth or reality. Williams and May (1996: 69) argue that

all philosophical positions and their attendant methodologies, explicitly or implicitly, hold a view about social reality. This view, in turn, will determine what can be regarded as legitimate knowledge.

This logical progression means that having considered ontological conceptions, we can now move on to look at epistemological matters.

### 6.2.2 Epistemological Concerns

Epistemology may be described as a concern with knowledge and ‘embodies a certain understanding of what is entailed in knowing, that is, *how we know what we know*’67 (Crotty, 1998: 8). Thus, a corresponding positivist epistemological response would be characterised by

controlled data collection, objective distance between the researcher and the subject,

---

67 Author’s italics.
quantitative measurement, hypothesis testing and statistical analysis to prove causality 
(Silk, Andrews and Mason, 2005: 6).

A realist ontology that presupposes a social world that exists independently of language would inform an epistemological stance requiring a suitable methodology (e.g. interviews) to ‘act as a resource, providing real “facts” about the social world’ (Byrne, 2004: 183). In this respect, interpretation would be undertaken and ‘assessed according to how accurately they reflect the real social world’ (ibid.). Notionally, dependent upon the particular form of realism assumed within, these methods would presume the extent of reality that may or not be captured as a result, within the conceptual terms of a reality or truth actually existing.

An empiricist epistemology claims that ‘knowledge and scientific theories of the world are derivable solely from empirical sense experience or observation’ (Lazar, 2004: 10). We have already touched on issues of empiricism and the generalisation of theory above but there also remain specific problems with regard to an empiricist epistemology. In particular, empiricist research relies not only on the use of the senses, but also assumes that we all use our senses in the same way. Williams and May (1996) initially contend that this might not necessarily seem problematic, in that, very broadly speaking, we all use our physical senses in a very similar fashion. On closer inspection though, they are concerned with the idea that what we observe is the result, to a degree, of learning, and more specifically, of social learning (ibid.: 16-17). The potential result of this is that the selection and classification of, and preference for, observations may differ between observers. As with all empirical social research, this approach also assumes that the research subject is easily observable in practice. In a subjectivist epistemology, it is recognised that meanings and understandings are co-created through the relationship between the researcher and the respondent (Denzin
and Lincoln, 2000: 21). Significantly, it is argued that the meanings that are created are not the product of an association between subject and object but rather that meaning is imposed on the object by the subject (Crotty, 1998: 9). In fact, Crotty goes as far to suggest that ‘meaning comes from anything but an interaction between the subject and the object to which it is ascribed’ (ibid.). This view would appear to have some merit insomuch as it allows for the creation of meaning and realities through social interactions. However, it remains too deterministic in character to allow for a range of full range of meanings to develop.

A more incisive approach for the purposes of this particular research would perhaps be offered by a social constructionist epistemology. This approach is appreciative of the role of social relations and interaction in constructing realities but also, rather tellingly, reflects the role of cultures in so doing (ibid.: 58). Unlike subjectivist approaches, it allows also for meaning to be actively constructed by the subject’s meaningful relationship with the object. Additionally, as we have already noted, constructed realities assume that, if there is a reality, it can never be fully known. Instead, this approach considers that there are unlimited realities, and refuses to favour one above any other. Positively, social constructionist epistemology offers a significant opportunity for reinterpretation, for it ‘requires that we not remain straitjacketed by the conventional meanings we have been brought to associate with the object’ (ibid.: 51).

6.2.3 Summary: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology informs epistemology and in turn, epistemology informs research methodology. It would thus be appropriate to state that the approach currently deemed
to be most appropriate for this project is an interpretive, social constructionist one. On the other hand, a significant consideration within interpretivist thought that should not be overlooked is that no single methodological approach is favoured nor privileged above any other (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Social science has thus been termed by Silverman (2004), within Kuhn’s concept of paradigms, as being ‘pre-paradigmatic or at least in a state of competing paradigms’ (57). This is an important feature and a key strength of qualitative, interpretivist inquiry as it allows for a flexible, methodological pluralism. King (2004) has termed this factor methodological contingency, reflecting that ‘effective work in sports studies employs the methodological tools that will best enable the researcher to answer her or his research questions’ (21).

6.3 On Method

It is worth taking time to consider which are the best research tools for the job in hand, within an interpretative framework. The initial methodological objectives are to attempt to understand how understandings of nationalism within the context of the UK might be informed by the potential return of a combined Great Britain football team to the Olympic Games, and how the debate about the team is influenced by various readings of nationalism and national identity. The most sociologically interesting element of this debate is the part that has been engaged in by the fans from the four home nations. However, this sub-grouping would not lend itself to a traditional ethnographic approach, as these fan groups do not constitute a homogeneous, composed group but are diverse in status, role and likely geographic location. The discussion below will thus consider how the key methods adopted in this research were arrived at and decided upon.
6.3.1 Focus Groups: Advantages and Disadvantages

In the initial stages of the research process many particular methods are considered, and their suitability and applicability to the research problem are gauged. The course and development of this research gave cause to consider whether it would be appropriate to consider utilising focus groups. This is an interesting and appealing method in that focus groups have the advantage of being among other things inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to responders, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative over and above individual responses (Fontana and Frey, 1998: 55).

However, there are problems associated with this particular method and though these problems may not be insurmountable, they may still present significant barriers to the research process. Principally, logistical concerns remain prominent, in that arranging numerous meetings with different groups in separate locations may prove to be problematic to administer, as well as being relatively expensive to the cost-conscious researcher in terms of both time, travel and direct monetary costs incurred. These issues are likely to be compounded given the regularity with which focus groups would need to meet in order to make them worthwhile. Furthermore, when conducting focus groups, it should be remembered that a group format can make it difficult to discuss sensitive issues confidently and also in confidence (ibid.). As issues of nationalism are potentially sensitive, and the idea of a Great Britain Olympic football team contentious, particularly close attention would need to be shown to the management of the focus group in practice to ensure the efficacy of the research process.

An additional, and in some ways more pressing concern, is the effect that the interviewer might have on the interview respondents, and consequently, the data that
the issue of how interviewees respond to us based on who we are – in their lives, as well as to the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class and race – is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical one (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 127-128).

For the purposes of this research, and in order to be effective, focus groups would need to be held at fairly regularly intervals at venues in all four of the home nations: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Given the sometimes acrimonious relationship between the fans of the home nations teams, and the anti-Englishness which is often characteristic of fans who support Scotland, and to a lesser extent, Northern Ireland and Wales, there is a very real concern that the presence of the researcher would have an adverse effect on the data generation process and the ‘truth’ of the data that is collected. The primary concern here is with the background of the researcher, given that not only is he an Englishman, but one from an English university that wants to discuss issues which are highly contentious to many non-English football fans. The fact that he is also middle-class, and from the southeast of England, with an accent to match, is unlikely to alleviate these concerns. However, by employing methods that make use of existing, relevant debates and discussions on the Internet and in other virtual environments, it is possible to circumvent not only this problem, but also the others posed by focus groups and detailed above. This can be done by engaging in what might be regarded as forms of virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000). As will become apparent, this is a methodology that is eminently suitable for the research task in hand.

6.3.2 Virtual Ethnography

When presented with research issues such as these, it is only natural to begin to
question whether a change of approach would be the best course of action, particularly when it emerges that a large amount of discussion and debate regarding the research issues under consideration had been and were currently being undertaken on appropriate Internet bulletin boards, and guestbooks attached to online newspaper reports. Certainly, it has been argued that the form of such texts found on the Internet should be seen as ethnographic material which tells us something about the understanding which authors have of the reality which they inhabit (Hine, 2000: 51).

The Internet is developing into an area that is seen as ripe for sociological analysis and this has been recognised within the sociology of sport, with a number of studies employing virtual methodologies. In relation to gender, the role of online fantasy sport league participation and the reinforcement of masculine privilege has been considered by Davis and Carlisle-Duncan (2006), whilst Plymire and Forman (2000) looked specifically at how members of a women’s basketball newsgroup online challenged commonly held perceptions about the sport and lesbianism. In relation specifically to association football, Crolley (2008) has assessed how Spanish Primera League clubs are using their official websites to assert and demonstrate their club and regional identities, whilst Wilson (2007) concluded that the Internet and bulletin boards in particular had become a very important part of soccer culture for many fans who follow Major League Soccer (MLS) in the United States of America. In the context of English football, Millward (2006) has utilised the bulletin boards attached

68 Bulletin Boards, also sometimes referred to as forums or message boards, are websites where users can post messages to specific discussion threads, or start their own discussions on differing subjects. Bulletin boards are easily accessible to any web users, though in some cases, registration is required to be able to post comments or search archives.

69 Guestbooks are different to Bulletin Boards and are predominantly attached to specific web pages, most commonly newspaper websites and blogs, allowing any user to post or comment on the particular news story or web page. Users can and do engage in discussions with each other in this way.
to a particular Liverpool FC e-zine to measure whether Liverpool fans are developing a European dimension to their identities through regularly attending away fixtures in European competitions. Ruddock (2005) also used unofficial supporter bulletin boards, this time associated with West Ham United FC, to consider issues of race and inclusion stemming from the club’s decision to sign controversial midfielder Lee Bowyer. Additionally, the efficacy of using virtual methodologies within the sociology of sport has been discussed at length by Millward (2008), who identified ‘message board comments as a key data source’ (308).

6.3.3 Virtual Ethnography: Lurking and Harvesting

To engage in the existing debates and discussions on these websites by reading and absorbing the information shown but without being compelled to post replies personally, or interact directly in any other way, is a practice known as *lurking*. For Brownlow and O’Dell (2002), the practice of lurking is one that ‘can take place without detection if non-participant, covert observation is required’ (685). To collect such material for research use is known as *harvesting* (Sharf, 1999) and the ethics of using such material for research purposes is discussed below. Millward (2008) argues with some merit that a covert approach to online research ‘potentially adds validity to the research’ (307). For him, this is because the researcher does not ‘intrude or affect the personal lives of those being researched and so they do not change their behaviour accordingly’ (*ibid*.).

6.3.4 The Appeal of Using a Virtual Ethnographic Approach

There are a number of advantages that the adoption of a virtual ethnographic approach
can offer, but before these are considered, it is worth summarising first the sociological significance of online environments. Bakardjieva (2003) maintains that ‘virtual communities cannot be declared inferior to real-life communities simply because they lack face-to-face materiality’ (293). Murthy (2008) has strongly argued that ‘the sociological “field” continues to be delimited to traditional physical configurations’ (849) and that ““everyday life” for much of the world is becoming increasingly technologically mediated’ (ibid.). He adds that ‘new media and digital forms of “old media” are additional, valuable methods in a sociologist’s toolkit’ (ibid.). Robinson (2001) concludes that ‘unsolicited first-person accounts on the Internet can be extremely valuable sources of rich, authentic data’ (714).

It can also be argued that a virtual ethnographic approach can overcome most of the issues that make focus groups less appealing as research methods, as well as also bringing additional, positive benefits to the research table. For example, concerns regarding the ability of focus groups to successfully discuss sensitive issues in a confident and confidential manner are alleviated to a degree with online discussion groups. Both Sharf (1999) and Joinson (2005) have argued that the anonymity afforded by the Internet may encourage more open and intimate disclosures than research interactions that are based on face-to-face meetings. Richman (2007) argues that within online discussion groups,

the ability to ignore others or selectively respond is a powerful component of computer-mediated communication and suggests a level of agency that may not exist in offline sites (195).

Moreover, there is much agreement that by implementing a virtual ethnographic approach there are considerable savings to be made in terms of costs (Joinson, 2005; Mann and Stewart, 2000; Hewson, Yule, Laurent and Vogel, 2003; Sharf, 1999;
Gatson and Zweerink, 2004), as well as savings in both time and travel (Mann and Stewart, 2000; Hewson et al, 2003).

Further advantageous features of this particular virtual ethnographic approach are those related to data collection. For Hine (2000) the nature of online social interaction means that the whole of the discussion is laid out, as it happened, and reviewing events in the field is no longer mediated by the technologies of data recording (23).

Mann and Stewart (2000) concur with this view, and argue that virtual ethnographic approaches are particularly useful in eliminating transcription biases: ‘the script is complete and immediately available for analysis. Nothing is left out – a most unlikely state of affairs in FTF [face-to-face] research’ (22). Millward (2008) shares this view and concludes that a virtual ethnographic approach has distinct advantages over more traditional forms of ethnography that rely upon field notes that are written and updated later, and often, long after the researcher has left the field. Gatson and Zweerink (2004) also agree on the essential convenience and ease of collecting and transcribing data in virtual environments. Using a virtual approach to ethnography may also allow for a wider and more diverse range of respondents to be included within the study than with traditional ethnographic approaches. Both Robinson (2001) and Hewson et al (2003) have alluded to this.

Additionally, the asynchronous nature of exchanges featured in many of these online spaces also has appeal for the researcher. Brownlow and O’Dell (2002) have

---

70 Most messages are posted in an asynchronous fashion, whereby users can read, browse and post to different discussions at their own behest. Messages might be replied to almost immediately, or it might take days, weeks or even months, although on these issues surrounding a combined GB football team debate has been generally quicker to develop.
argued this can provide equal opportunities by reducing the need for keyboard proficiency, which can potentially widen the field of respondents. Joinson (2005) also suggests that the asynchronous online social interaction can lead to hyperpersonal interaction because the communicants can devote a special time to CMC [computer-mediated communication] rather than being distracted by other goings on, spend more time composing or editing the message, mix social and task messages, and don’t need to use up cognitive resources answering immediately, so can pay more attention to the message (24).

Furthermore, most of these types of website also have searchable archives which enables researchers to discover and gather large amounts of data relating to an issue that existed prior to the commencement of the active research stage of the process. This effectively means that the researcher does not need to be present during the data generation phase (Hewson et al, 2003), whilst also ensuring that the time spent searching through information that might turn out to be irrelevant to the research questions posed is minimised (ibid.).

Whilst there are clearly many advantages in adopting a virtual ethnographic approach, there are also disadvantages that need to be recognised. Beyond ethical concerns, perhaps the two most significant limitations relate to the distinct lack of contextual material that virtual environments present to researchers (Menon, 2007; Mann and Stewart, 2000). For Joinson (2005) and Mann and Stewart (2000), the lack of visual cues provided by online environments contributes to this problem. Millward (2008) provides not a solution to this, but rather a way of at least alleviating this difficulty. His response is for the researcher to engage in a lengthy fieldwork period, in which supporters are likely to make statements that reveal insights into their ‘offline’ personal lives (2008: 308).

For Guimarães (2005) the wide range of analytical themes and perspectives that can be applied in online research ‘makes it virtually impossible to elaborate a
methodology that could be employed widely in different online contexts’ (141).

6.3.5 Ethical Concerns and Online Research Methods

The other significant issue relating to using online sources, which is alluded to above, relates specifically to ethical concerns. More particularly, the concern is whether the information posted by individuals to bulletin boards, blogs and newspaper guestbooks can be regarded as public or private information and thus whether the informed consent of the authors is required before it can be utilised by researchers. To a degree, this is only a hypothetical and theoretical debate, as many of the Internet sites that have the most interesting and stimulating debates do not provide a means by which to contact posters to seek the appropriate consent, and this is perhaps the central issue that will be discussed below.

Brownlow and O’Dell (2002) argue that to use an email discussion group or listserv as a primary data source without consent would pose problems for the ethical researcher, because

the message posted to a group could be considered “private” in the sense that only group members or those with related issues are the intended audience, not researchers (687).

Anderson and Kanuka (2003) agree that it would be ethically problematic to use an email list for research purposes without the consent of individual group members. However, they argue that these ethical concerns can be mediated depending on the specific context of the environment being studied:

the ethics of analyzing the interaction in a large public discussion board sponsored by a

---

71 Listserv is an electronic mailing list software application, consisting of a set of email addresses for a group in which the sender can send one email and it will reach a variety of people that have chosen to become members of the list. Often used by special interest groups to discuss and debate relevant issues, messages are not available beyond group members and are considered to be more private.
media outlet such as the *New York Times*, call for far different means to protect privacy than research involving private emails (2003: 69).

They argue additionally that many forms of online environment can be regarded as public spaces because they are open for anyone to join and, hence … informed consent from every participant is not required since the researcher is often not participating and, thus, not affecting the interaction that takes place (*ibid.*: 68).

For Richman (2007) there are distinct parallels between online lurking and the lurking that is undertaken in physical, public environments by ‘traditional’ ethnographers, which more often than not shows ‘little concern for ethical violations’ (196). Richman goes on to argue that the ‘act of authorship and publication that accompanies these postings’ (197) is also important in these regards. She concludes that ‘messages in a forum are authored, entered and posted with the intention of being read and eliciting responses’ (*ibid.*). Consequently, Anderson and Kanuka (2003) conclude that if the researcher has no interaction or intervention with the participant and if there is no disclosure of private information, then it is generally not necessary to obtain informed consent from the participants (69).

Hewson *et al* (2003) broadly concur with the views of Anderson and Kanuka, and in so doing also conclude that using data that have been deliberately and voluntarily made available in the public Internet domain … should be accessible to researchers, providing anonymity is ensured (53).

In their research on gender perceptions and online basketball bulletin boards, Plymire and Forman (2000) did not feel the need to ask contributors for permission to use their postings, nor inform them of their intention to do so. For Ruddock (2005), the decision not to contact fans in any way to supplement or enhance their online contributions is central to his approach:

... to ask the fans to reflect on their words would be to violate the nature of web sites as a
distinct communicative event in which the self that exists beyond the moment of interaction is irrelevant (378).

Additionally, Millward (2008) argues that it would be ethically justified to use this type of data having first ensured that every attempt be made to protect the anonymity of the supporter, in that all identities could be stripped and fans referred to only as numbers (e.g., Oldham Athletic fan 1) (307).

6.4 Methods

6.4.1 Sampling and the Identification of Sources

This research employed a form of theoretical sampling, whereby data was selected on the basis that it would provide the most worthwhile contribution to emerging theory (Byrne, 2004: Gratton and Jones, 2004). The identification of particular websites, bulletin boards and guestbooks containing data deemed appropriate to the study was undertaken in a series of searches using the web-based search engine Google. By simply entering the search terms ‘Great Britain Olympic football’, it immediately became apparent that there was an enormous amount of data on the Internet relating to the debate surrounding a Team GB football team and whether it should compete at London 2012. Much of the material, Whilst interesting on its own terms, did not provide any great insight into fan perspectives on the debate, which was considered to be the most likely way to gain rich and fruitful data with which to consider contemporary discussions about nationalism and nationalism in the UK\(^{72}\). However, it was possible to identify a number of websites that did provide the sort of data that was being sought.

\(^{72}\) Much of the material consisted of comment from other websites (both commercially administered and personal) and blogs, as well information relating to Olympic history and the previous occasions when Great Britain competed in Olympic football tournaments.
Firstly, there were a number of online media reports from newspapers, radio and television news websites reporting the situation as the main protagonists in the debate publicly shuffled for position. It was from here that the first significant data were identified, from several newspaper websites that utilised guest book facilities, enabling its readers to comment directly on stories and engage in debate with other readers. Significantly, these newspaper websites also had searchable archives, enabling the identification of further relevant data that existed prior to the beginning of the active research phase, again by using the search terms ‘Great Britain Olympic football’. The guestbooks that were selected were freely available to view to any Internet user, and were also moderated73.

Secondly, a number of relevant discussion threads were identified on Internet bulletin boards, several of which were hosted by the BBC, and others which were independent bulletin boards administered by groups of fans of particular football clubs and national teams. Once again, most websites had searchable archives that allowed further data to be located with relative ease, using the search terms ‘Great Britain Olympic football’. Though this initial search produced some interesting data, there was a concern that a vast majority of what was identified was restricted to the views of English and Scottish posters, so it was decided to undertake further searches to unearth some data pertaining to the views of Northern Irish and Welsh fans. To do this it was decided to take a more direct approach involving several unofficial websites associated with specific Northern Irish and Welsh clubs, as well as their respective national teams. A small number of threads were identified as being of

73 Moderation meant that a representative of the website monitored all posts and removed those that were deemed to be offensive, inflammatory, racist, spamming, wildly off-topic or that had been highlighted as such by other users. Though some posts had been removed, it was only ever a very small percentage of total posts and was largely restricted to newspaper guest books rather than bulletin boards.
interest and data-rich. All of the threads that were selected were viewable to any Internet user without any requirement to register as a member and at no time did any interaction with posters take place. With the lurking done, now was the time to harvest.

6.4.2 Collection, Handling and Coding of Data

One of the clearly stated advantages of employing virtual ethnographies is the comparative ease with which large amounts of data can be collected in a simple, convenient and speedy manner (Gatson and Zweerink, 2004). In this case, with a majority of the threads, the data were cut in their entirety directly from the relevant website, and then pasted into an MS Word document. The data were handled manually at all times in that no computer software was used to assist in the analysis. Before coding could begin, a number of other tasks had to be done. Firstly, there was a real need to become familiar with the data. Before anything else was done, the data were read in its entirety, and then read again. On the second reading, two further tasks were commenced. The first of these was to de-select any data that was wildly off-topic and not relevant to the research project. Secondly, the process of contextualisation was initiated. This was of particular importance because it is an area of virtual ethnographies that can be problematic (Mann and Stewart, 2000; Menon, 2007). In short, it can be difficult to gather contextual information about those posters contributing to particular threads, meaning that it would be more difficult to go on to interpret their views without knowing more detailed information about them, in this

---

74 Some bulletin boards, administered using more sophisticated software, allow particular threads to be viewed in a number of ways, one of which is a printable format, which allows the data to be printed immediately without cutting and pasting or reformatting.
case whether or not they were English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh. In some cases, this would be fairly obvious and immediately apparent from posters’ online pseudonyms, or their location status. In other cases there needed to be a more nuanced approach that was sensitive to the language adopted by posters, and to the fact that the use of personal pronouns such as ‘I’, ‘we’ or ‘they’ might betray some important pointers or facets of their identity. On many occasions this would not be something that would be immediately revealed, but rather it would emerge in a later comment on the thread, or even on another thread entirely on the same website. This experience very much replicated those experiences of Millward (2008), who found that the problems of contextualising the lives of his research subjects were only mitigated the longer he spent in the field, as posters slowly began to reveal more information about themselves and their offline lives. That being said, in some cases relevant contextual information was never identified and for that reason it was decided to disregard completely the perspectives of these posters.

With a large amount of data and a huge number of posters to contend with, the control of information relating to posters’ individual contexts had to be approached in a structured manner. Each individual thread was considered in turn, and the online pseudonyms of each poster contributing to particular threads was recorded, together with any contextual information that had emerged such as their national identity, whether they were broadly in favour of a Team GB or against, or anything else deemed to be of significance. Once each thread had been completed, the information was recorded in an MS Excel file relating to the website that the information came from.

Some of the websites permitted users to construct a personal profile allowing them a limited amount of personal details to be available to other posters. More often than not this did not give much information that was not already known, or was not used at all by posters.
from, and then additionally in an alphabetized master file containing the details of all the posters contributing data and their contextual details. This enabled the prompt location of any particular poster’s comments in any thread and was also retained and used to ensure that as much contextual information as possible was available during the coding phase.

With this done, it was possible to start the initial coding process in such a way as to identify the full range of perspectives and understandings that were advanced. All the while that this was happening, further contextual information was being located and noted, whilst more data was being disregarded for being irrelevant to the research question. After the initial coding was undertaken, notice was taken of which threads each individual code appeared in, and then a second sequence of coding was undertaken through which the key themes began to emerge. After the second coding had been completed, a further cut and paste took place and the data were reassembled. From this point onwards, a closer and more in-depth analysis of the data could begin.

### 6.4.3 Data

A key aspect of the data was the style in which posts were written and displayed. One of the most prominent features of the data was the nature of the exchanges between posters, which much of the time was fairly cordial, but at other times was characterised by hostility and rudeness. As Joshi (2007) observes:

> given the anonymous though interactive nature of the Internet, people often express their dissatisfaction with services or other individuals in ways that would never be tolerated in face-to-face interactions (1231).

Given that this was the case, comments have been reproduced in a totally unabridged fashion, adding to the ethnographic feel of the texts and, as Plymire and Forman
(2000) suggest,

in order to preserve, as much as possible, their flavour and tone and to not disrupt the flow of the text with the too frequent use of the word ‘sic’ (147).

For Robinson (2001), the inclusion of posters’ spelling, grammar and syntax errors is representative of ‘a depth of feeling that is not usually present in more formal communication’ (709). Additionally, the use of emoticons has been recognised, and where they are used in posters’ comments they are represented in textual form rather than reproducing the icon itself\(^{26}\). As well as this, it was also clear from the above discussion that whilst the unsolicited use of publicly available Internet postings can be justified ethically, measures to protect the identities of posters should be undertaken. Because of the problems of using web pseudonyms in Internet research (Bruckman, 2002; Richman, 2007), it was necessary to act to protect the respondents’ anonymity at all times. This was achieved by referring to posters by number throughout the findings and discussion (e.g. Scottish Poster 5, Welsh Poster 19 etc), the approach advocated by researchers who have previously undertaken virtual ethnographies where the protection of posters’ anonymity was considered imperative (Plymire and Forman, 2000; Millward, 2006, 2008).

6.5 Summary: Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this chapter has been to show how a flexible and reactive research methodology has developed for this research. The theoretical discussion that frames this re-evaluation of methods might have appeared at first glance to be an exercise in

\(^{26}\) An emoticon is a textual expression representing the face of a writer’s mood or facial expression. They are often used to indicate the true essence of a statement, and can change and improve the interpretation of plain text. In this research, this only occurred in a small number of posts and only with more sophisticated bulletin boards.
de-stabilising positivist social scientific inquiry, but this has never really been the intention. Hopefully, it has been shown that these different approaches each have their merits and that they can be used both effectively and appropriately in particular circumstances and specific contexts. The main concern of this chapter throughout has been to consider the most appropriate research approach and methodology within the terms of the circumstances, context and objectives of this research. As such, wherever subjective meaning and understanding is sought, it is clear that social phenomena are distinct enough to require not just different standards but a distinct conceptual framework upon which social investigation can be based (Williams and May, 1996: 47).

In this case, therefore, it has been established that the most appropriate philosophical approach to take is to adopt an interpretive approach that reflects an ontology that draws on constructive realities, a social constructivist epistemology and theoretical sampling techniques. In some respects, an interpretive approach such as this requires the sacrificing of breadth in favour of depth (Seale, 2004a), but in an inquiry that operates in search of deep understanding and meaning, this is not necessarily a negative thing. In terms of methods, a virtual ethnographic approach that makes use of existing discursive interactions concerning a Great Britain and Northern Ireland Olympic football team among football fans is deemed to be the most appropriate approach to adopt.
Chapter Seven: Data Findings

This main objective of this chapter is to outline the major themes to emerge from the data. The chapter has been organised into seven sections that reflect these themes. As will be revealed throughout this chapter, the stances and viewpoints of posters are varied and often complex in their construction. Some views are clearly held and stated, whilst others are often provisional, conditional and open to any number of caveats. A poster’s particular national identity can give some clues as to his or her likelihood to be for or against the proposals under discussion, but in truth, the broad range of views are represented albeit in differing numbers and degrees from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

7.1 An All English Team Should Represent Team GB

The first major theme to emerge from the data is concerned with the prospect of an all-English team representing Team GB at London in 2012, rather than a mixed-team composed of players from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Certainly for some posters, many of them non-English though not exclusively, an all-English team would address their primary concerns adequately, namely that the independent status of the four Home associations is maintained and remains unchallenged by FIFA or its members.

The prospect of an all-English football team representing Team GB at the London 2012 Summer Games provides an interesting and insightful introduction to the themes that have emerged from this data. Though this is the outcome of official discussions between FIFA, IOC, BOA, FA, SFA, IFA and FAW, it has been an idea that has been present throughout the debate that began when the games were first awarded to
London in July 2005. The numerous appealing factors of an unquestionably all-English team representing Team GB in London 2012 are revealed in the data. Most commonly it was cited that it moved to secure, or at least lessen the threat posed to, the status of the home nations, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as independent football associations and representative teams with FIFA:

Let England enter an Olympic Football team and it will mean we will keep our status (Scottish Poster 1).

The perceived threat to the home nations football teams is central to the whole debate, and real or not, was reflected across the nations. The proposal to have an all-English squad represent Team GB is seen to be a way to circumvent this possibility:

There will perobably be aGB team with just english playeers, and to be honest, it's probably safer that way, as FIFA cannot be trusted in this (English Poster 1).

Central to this idea is the view that the FAW, IFA and SFA and their representative teams must be seen to have no part whatsoever in the team that eventually goes on to compete in London:

Well if it has to be so. lets just slip an England U23 side in. That way we can dispute it at a later date if we have to, stating quite honestly that the 'home nations' DID NOT amalgamate and therefore the status quo remains! (Scottish Poster 2).

Additionally, it is suggested that this scenario would avoid setting a dangerous precedent that might be seized upon in future by FIFA members intent upon seeing the British associations amalgamated and their privileged statuses removed:

As a Scotsman I admit that given the choice between an all England team or a British select being chosen to represent the UK at the 2012 Olympics I would be more at ease in seeing the all England team take to the field as I do not wish to see any unnecessary precedent set which may now seem insignificant but could in years to come be cast back up to seize our national footballing identity from us (Scottish Poster 3).

This additional concern over the linkages between the individual national representative football teams of the UK and constructions of national identity was
also revealed:

England are entering as sole representatives of Team GB, without any additional communication with FAW, SFA and IFA. This is the only way that a team can compete without any concerns over national identity (Welsh Poster 1).

Though there is clearly a view that an all-English team would address some of the issues that posters have with the potential threat to the status of the individual British teams and associations, the prospect itself raises further questions and problems. Would such a team be representative of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, or simply England? For some, the answer is quite clear and unequivocal: ‘No there won't, there'll be a team representing the English FA’ (Northern Ireland Poster 1). Indeed, some posters have gone so far as to request that if an England team does compete in London then it should be exactly that, an England team:

I would be satisfied with England representing the UK as long as it was officially recognised as England representing the UK - ie in England strips. There is no UK football strip as there is no UK football association (Scottish Poster 6).

For others, most notably posters from Scotland, the potential for an all-English team to represent Team GB provides opportunities to openly express their opposition to, and dislike for, the England football team:

I'm actually thinking now i'd like them to put forward a team (without any scottish involvement) so it'll at least make the olympic football remotely interesting, would be delighted to see them getting pumped out in the 1st round in front of their own fans, even better play it at hampden... (Scottish Poster 7)²⁷.

These expressions of anti-Englishness are never far from the surface in this debate and there is clearly a large degree of pleasure and joy taken by some posters in the continuing misfortunes of the England team: ‘so let them have their pseudo team GB and enjoy watching them get trashed’ (Scottish Poster 8). Views such as these though

²⁷ Hampden Park is the stadium in Glasgow where Scotland play all their home fixtures.
are not universally held, and there are also non-English posters who are able to offer an all-English Team GB football team their full support:

I would have no problem with a team GB being made up of 11 English players and would support them as I did with the other athletes representing GB at the olympics (Scottish Poster 9).

One particular poster explained that s/he would be happy to make an exception and support an all-English team at the Olympic Games:

I would also support the England football team if they were playing for the UK in the Olympics, even though as a Scot I don't support them usually (Scottish Poster 10).

This prospect prompted another non-English poster to ask questions of himself concerning his own particular attitudes to such issues:

Would I refuse to support at 'Team UK' if they were only English?? No, I'm not a bigot (Northern Irish Poster 2).

For some, the arrogant attitudes expressed by some English posters concerning their expected dominance in any future Team GB football team is one issue that fuels expressions of anti-Englishness. In commenting on one such posting, one particular Welsh fan suggests as much:

When you read arrogant English rubbish like this it makes you realise why none of us want to be involved in a GB team. Well England you bunch of mighty world beaters, team GB...its all yours you carry on ok (Welsh Poster 17).

Other posters pointed to more practical issues, predominantly those which relate specifically to Olympic history to rationalize the appearance of an all-English football team to represent Team GB. Some point to the precedent set in past Olympic Games when an all-English football team has competed previously such as in 1908 (London) and 1912 (Stockholm): ‘England, IIRC, have played in the Olympic fitba tourney before-and won it-let them enter again’\textsuperscript{78} (Scottish Poster 11). Others point to more

\textsuperscript{78} IIRC is internet code for the phrase ‘If I remember correctly’.
recent Olympic history, in which team events other than football have been contested by British teams comprising of athletes from but one of the home nations: ‘Scotland do it for the curing [curling] in the Winter Olympics...’ (English Poster 2) and:

There have been all english sides in our hockey team before and nobody cared, same here just put out a team of englishmen (Scottish Poster 12).

From another perspective, the geographical location of the Olympic Games in London is of particular significance. In referring to this, one particular Welsh poster explains why the team that represents Team GB at football in 2012 should be drawn exclusively from English players:

if the english want to put a side out in london feel free to do so, at the end of the day, the olympics is in london, its your olympics , and we wish you well, Cymru am Byth (Welsh Poster 2).

This statement strongly suggests that this poster also has a less than complete understanding of the way that the Olympic Games are awarded to particular cities and nation-states\(^79\). Logical thought is applied to another view of an all-English team and acts as a riposte to earlier findings that suggested that such a team would not be representative of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a whole, and indeed should compete as England alone in the Olympic football tournament. Here, at least some reference is made, if not explicitly, to the political and constitutional reality of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland:

England don't really need to force through a united team, an all English team is still technically British and could represent Britain. If the other nations aren't interested, fair enough. If they are, great. If doesn't matter which British country the players come from (English Poster 3).

\(^{79}\) Whilst the 2012 Olympic Games were awarded to London, it is the United Kingdom that is recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Prior to the bid being submitted the UK government had to provide certain guarantees to respect the Olympic Charter. As such, it is the nation-state that the Games have been awarded to, rather than the host city.
For other posters, on this occasion predominantly those from England, the prospect of an all-English team offers opportunities to espouse the overall superiority of English footballers to those from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For those posters then, even if the team was organised and assembled on a combined basis, and was selected on merit, the team would still be an all-English XI:

After all, there wouldn’t be many (if any) of the other home countries’ players in the team. Maybe one of Given or Gordon but there is no need for any outfield players (English Poster 4)...

Other posters are willing to concede that, whilst generally the standard of non-English players is below that which would warrant places in a Team GB combined football team, some non-English players might still be good enough:

It is debateable anyway if any Scots, Welsh and Irish would be good enough to get in the side, although the Welsh do have some good youngsters in Bale, Ramsey and Gunter coming through (English Poster 5).

Though some of these poster’s views are gracious enough to acknowledge in small part the contribution that the non-English teams might make to a fully UK representative team, the prospect of an all-England team also generates some far more openly aggressive and confrontational views and exchanges. These range in the main from a number of generally abusive dismissals of Scotland’s refusal to play any part in such a team: “If they don’t want there players in the team, **** em!” (English Poster 6); “If the scots don’t like us that much then shut your mouth and don’t help out like selfish children” (English Poster 7); and “Good! Let them whine! Let them not join in. I don’t care. Good riddance as far as I’m concerned *smiley***” (English Poster 8), to more open expressions of English nationalism:

---

80 The not uncommon mention of players that are ineligible to play for a UK team, in this case, Manchester City and Republic of Ireland goalkeeper Shay Given, do reveal the rather tenuous and simplistic grasp of the constitutional and geographical reality of the British Isles held by many, mainly English posters.
With any luck England as a nation might be independent of these leeches by 2012 anyway. That would save us a few bob, and it would save all this aggro (English Poster 9).

I WOULD NEVER SUPPORT A TEAM OF GB\textsuperscript{81} not even as a one off... scotland, wales and NI put us out of our misery and push forward the independance movement!! (English Poster 10).

### 7.2 Why Should Football Be Different From Any Other Sport?

One of the main issues for many of those who are broadly in favour of proposals for a combined Great Britain football team at London 2012, is that problems such as this are seemingly only ever raised with football:

At the end of the day, we are just talking about a GB team competing in the Olympics, yet it seems to immediately become an argument about who is pro British and who is not. It’s an interesting insight to the football mentality. Every other sport can do it but it’s not for us. In reality, we are being manipulated by the self-interest of the football bureaucrats and it suits the SNP perfectly to jump on the bandwagon and stir up bad feeling (Scottish Poster 24).

Not only is this considered within the context of the Olympic Games, but also in relation to other sports that have combined teams representing Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and it is this which brings into sharp contrast the problematic nature of a fully representative Great Britain football team. Plenty of posters point to rugby union and rugby league to exemplify this with rugby union being most commonly cited in this respect. Many posters believe that the British and Irish Lions, the touring team that is selected of players from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland\textsuperscript{82}, is evidence that a similar team for football is possible:

each of GB’s national rugby teams have a fearsome pride for their sport but here they were putting it asside to show a UNITED front to the world. What I’m saying is who cares where the different footballers come from? Their national association executives

---

\textsuperscript{81} Text typed in capital letters is considered to be shouting to makes one’s point according to chat room and bulletin board etiquette.

\textsuperscript{82} The significant point about the British and Irish Lions is that the players selected to play for them that usually play for Ireland are drawn from two separate states, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).
should get off their petty little thrones and embrace the joy of sport for sport’s sake. Oh and just before I hear howls of Celtic resentment I am actually Welsh! (Welsh Poster 6).

One poster, who may mistakenly consider that the Republic of Ireland is also part of the UK, even goes as far as to suggest that:

well i think you will find that the majority of rugby fans wouldn’t have strong views against team gb(footy) because there invariably support the lions, have less restricting and more intelligent views (English Poster 22).

Hockey is another sport that is often referred to as suggesting that football is out of step when the issue of a combined representative GB team is broached. Hockey is of specific interest here because it is an Olympic sport that Great Britain regularly competes at:

How come other sports in the Olympics such as hockey can produce a GB team with England, Scotland & Wales competing separately the rest of the time? (Northern Irish Poster 10).

It is not uncommon in terms of the Olympic Games for British competitors to compete for both Team GB and their own home nation’s team at different stages and times in their careers, as the example of hockey shows, but also at other events and in different disciplines:

Why would this be an issue? In the commonwealth games an athlete such as Liz McColgan represents Scotland, but represents us all in the Olympics, why cannot a team do the same? If that team was English, Scottish or Welsh I would support it (English Poster 23).

Contained within this last post is also the recognition of another important element of this part of the data, specifically that in terms of Olympic competition, British representatives are for the most part supported unconditionally, irrespective of which home nation the competitors come from:

To the idiots who are damning this idea because of English dominance in the side or say that they could not support a team with English players in it, grow up. I’m proud when any brit stands up to get his or her medal, I'll be cheering on the likes of Andy
and Jamie Murray, Chris Hoy and Beth Tweddle irrespective of nationality (English Poster 33).

Indeed, for a few posters, the national identity of particular athletes representing Great Britain is of no significance whatsoever, even to the extent that it is unknown or the poster is not especially motivated to find it out:

At the last olympics there was widespread support all across the UK, for all of teamGB. I'm fairly sure most people in Scotland didn't know exactly where a competitor was from when watching, nor did they care. There is absolutely no reason to say that they would have equal difficulty supporting a British football team, absolutely none at all (Scottish Poster 25).

This acknowledgement of the broader support that exists for Team GB from throughout the UK was seized upon by many of those in favour of a Team GB football team. For many, it was inconceivable that someone supporting British athletes and other British competitors at the Olympic Games might also be opposed to a Team GB football team. This wider issue of support for Team GB generally framed many questions and confrontations:

Just out of interest, were you pleased with the gold medals won for GB by the likes of Nicole Cooke, Chris Hoy or Geraint Thomas (i.e., non-English Brits)? As a Welshman, I enjoyed the wins by Nicole Cooke and Geraint Thomas, but also those by Chris Hoy (Scotland) and Bradley Wiggins (England). And of course the awesome cycling relay team had representatives from all three component nations of GB. That's the way British sport should be. Contrast the ODI to be played in Cardiff next week between 'England' and South Africa (Welsh Poster 8).

For many, mainly English posters, the heart of the opposition to a Team GB Olympic football team is a feeling of anti-Englishness:

I cant see much of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish public cheering on any English player. I feel I would be speaking for the majority of English football fans in saying that I always like to see the other British teams do well (obviously not at the expense of England). Most of the English get behind our neighbouring Brits, but sadly the same can not be said of the Scots, Irish and Welsh towards us. Obviously this doesn't apply to every Football fan in Britain, but there is definately alot of hostility towards England from the rest of Britain (English Poster 36).
7.3 Hold a Tournament to Decide WhoCompetes as Team GB

For many posters, the question of a Great Britain and Northern Ireland combined Olympic football team presents an insurmountable obstacle, blocked as it is by the intransigence and obstinacy of the numerous organisations involved and the views of fans from all four home nations. Others though believe that a practical solution to the problem was always at hand, in the shape of a tournament featuring the four home nations teams, with the winning team going on to play as representatives of Team GB at the London 2012 Olympic Games:

Here’s an idea that might just solve to most people’s satisfaction this heated conundrum; why not resurrect the good ‘ol Home Championship once very four years. england, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ioreland play each other home and away and the winner gets to represent ‘Team GB’ in the Olympics. The minor countries would be happy even (English Poster 11).

It is believed that such an idea would have addressed the perceived problems in a number of ways. Firstly, it proposed an alternative to the original intention of fielding a combined Team GB football team comprising of players from four home nations. Indeed, for some posters at least, it was seen as perhaps the only way that such a proposal could be deemed acceptable to all and allowed to proceed:

The only way the non-English FAs might be convinced, is if we were to have a Home Nations tournament in 2011 or early 2012, the winners representing GB in the Olympics but playing as their own national team, in national-team colours (English Poster 12).

With many of these views comes an acknowledgement that the possibility of a fully-combined team is an unlikely, and in many ways, an unworkable proposition:

One team will not work, but a team needs to be entered - why not revive the Home Nations Cup for one year and the winner can represent UK? (Welsh Poster 3).

Convincing the official footballing bodies of the United Kingdom was though but one
part of the challenge. If a solution was to be found then it would have had to acknowledge fully the positions of those fans on both sides of the argument, namely those in favour of a fully representative Team GB and those opposed to the proposals. Certainly for some of those posters who have taken an oppositional stance to the idea of a footballing Team GB team, deciding who represents them in London by holding a tournament involving the four home nations is potentially a way around the problem:

Easy solution, 4 teams, Scotland, NI, Wales and England have a play off, winner becomes team GB. I'm not for Team GB but this would resolve it all (Scottish Poster 12).

Those on the other side of the argument who are in favour of the proposals are also willing to entertain the possibility of a four nation tournament to decide who goes on to represent Team GB, though at times their argument is often expressed with little grace, a feature that is not uncommon among the exchanges between posters on these websites:

If we really cannot have a GB team because of the backwards views of the Welsh and Scottish (I am Welsh BTW), then why not have a four team tournament to decide which of the four home nations gets to represent the UK (Welsh Poster 4).

As well as acknowledging issues that fans may have with the proposals for a Team GB football team, it is also argued that holding a tournament to decide which home nation competes as Team GB in London addresses the main concerns of the non-English Football Associations of the United Kingdom, namely the continuation of their independent status within FIFA:

If the associations don't want to risk losing their individual status then why don't the U23 teams from NI, England, Scotland and Wales just play off each other for the right to represent. It wouldn't be that difficult to organise and wouldn't be high profile...simple way of sorting this out (Northern Irish Poster 3).

The solution I'd like to see is that we have a four team summer tournament in 2011 and however wins it takes their nation to the Olympics representing themselves as the GB entry. That way we aren't diminishing their existing rights (English Poster 13).
A tournament to decide who represents Team GB also has a number of other desirable features. Firstly, to hold such a tournament and have the winner compete as Team GB shows a respect for the individual footballing traditions and nations of the United Kingdom:

Why not have a small tourney for the U23's of each nation, to play off for the chance to go to the olympics. its a bit of a hassle i know but it would be a way of having a team gb while respecting the individual nations... (Northern Irish Poster 4).

Furthermore, within this is a further recognition of the role that these teams have and play within their individual nations:

We are ALL separate nations, with separate identities, and in my mind a 2011 Olympic qualifying tournament between the home nations would have solved the problem (English Poster 14).

The second appeal of a tournament to decide who represents Team GB at football is its equitable nature, with many posters regarding this as being the fairest method of selecting the players to represent Team GB. If the arguments about whether a Team GB team should exist at all are anything to go by, the process by which a combined Team GB football team is actually selected would also be subject to excessive, protracted and lively debate. If a tournament were held, it is hoped that much of this would be avoided:

My vote would be for a home nations tournament between the 4 teams: Team A v B, Team C v D. Winner of each plays of to be "GB". That way you get over all the pettiness that would follow about "he was only picked because he was English/Irish/Welsh/Scottish" (English Poster 15).

For other posters, this would also avoid the need to select a team that was representative of all four nations simply so that it was just that very thing, with the intention of not offending any nation that did not manage to have a player selected for the team:

That way, we'd preserve the separate identity of each of the four Home countries. And we'd also avoid any nonsense about having to pick "token" players from all four countries (Northern Irish Poster 5).
Additionally, it has been suggested that, as a whole, the home nations could have no real complaint about not being represented in a Team GB football team if they played in and yet lost in a pre-qualifying tournament:

That way all four nations can feel they've been given a fair go and even make a bit of money in the process. Even the sweaty socks couldn't object to that surely? (English Poster 16)\(^3\).

In this way, it is almost seen that the winning team is earning its right to represent Team GB in 2012, and in so doing, has undertaken a process with which athletes and competitors at other Olympic events would be familiar:

It might seem over-simplistic, but they choose the sprinters by making them race one another, why not choose the football team by making them play one another (Northern Irish Poster 6).

For a number of other posters though, the prospect of a tournament between the home nations is also reminiscent of the old British Home Championship tournament, also known as the Home Internationals, and is remembered and regarded fondly by many, and would be something that would be enjoyed by many fans if it were to return:

For me this question of GB at the Olympics is a no-brainer. For many years the FA’s have been searching for an excuse to reinstate the home nations tournament. This is it. Every four years in the build up to the olympics the home nations should play a tournament with the winning nation representing GB. Is that so difficult to think about and come to terms with! (Scottish Poster 67).

7.4 Any Threat to the Home Nations Status is an Idle One

For many posters, predominantly those who are broadly in favour of a combined Great Britain and Northern Ireland Olympic football team, though not exclusively, the threat of this ever becoming a permanent feature of the British footballing landscape for future World Cups and European Championships, is at best impossible and at worst, extremely remote. Once again these views are held by fans from all four of the

---

\(^3\) ‘Sweaty sock’ is cockney rhyming slang for the word ‘Jock’, meaning a Scottish person.
home nations and coalesce around a number of perspectives, the first being that the existence of a Team GB football team in the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games will simply have no effect whatsoever upon the existing independent status of the home nations football teams:

There is not the slightest danger of the home nations losing their independant status within FIFA, the SFA are just being awkward and big-headed and, quite frankly, I find it embarrassing (Scottish Poster 14).

Following on from the above, this view can also be found amongst the followers of remaining home nations: England “I think you're worrying about something that would never happen in a million years” (English Poster 17); Northern Ireland:

I don't subscribe to the theory that having such a team will pave the way for Scotland, Wales, NI and England not having their own teams in the long run at World Cups and Euros etc (Northern Irish Poster 7),

and Wales:

There is no way the individual Associations within GB would be under threat so i don't see any reason why we shouldn't have a team. It would be mostly English players true, but that's no reason not to have it and i'm sure a few Welsh, Scots and NI would get in, team selection is a different issue anyway (Welsh Poster 5).

So there is reason to believe that many posters do not see a future combined GB team for all international football as being an inevitable outcome of a formal Team GB competing in 2012. There are a number of different reasons to account for this belief that can be identified within the data. For example, there are some posters who are very keen to highlight that there is little or no evidence to suggest that FIFA are hell-bent on dissolving the existing British football associations and imposing a Team GB for all future competitive international football matches:

I would hate to think that the home nations would no longer be allowed to participate independently in World Cups and Euro Champs but neither UEFA nor FIFA have indicated that this would be the case (Scottish Poster 15).

Others point readily to the assurances given by FIFA about the continuing
independent status of the British FAs, and in so doing, suggest that this does indeed ensure that sanctions against the SFA, FA, IFA and FAW would not be taken:

Team GB would NOT threaten the individual sovereign teams, FIFA have even said as much yet the little empire builders at our antional associations are too tied up in protecting their own lot to do what is best for Football and the Olympics. I am a Welshman, I would do anything to keep my national team, however this will 0% effect that (Welsh Poster 4).

A few posters acknowledge that the threat to the individual status of the British FAs is already present and that the existence of a Team GB football side at London does not add much else to the argument, nor the threat already therein:

Scotland, England, Wales and N.Ireland are already British through birth, thus theoretically we are one nation, which means the member nations can demand one team. But why would they do that? If they wanted to do it they would have done it long ago (Scottish Poster 16).

It is this lack of will from the member states of FIFA to address the supposed anomaly of the British teams independent representation and privileged status within FIFA that is also important for some posters. They believe that there is no active campaign or political imperatives that would make this happen:

There has never been a GB team as a member of FIFA in the 104 years of the organisation and I know of no credible ground swell of support for this. No campaigns exist that I know of (English Poster 18).

This lack of will or desire to address the privileges enjoyed by the British associations extends to the senior FIFA figures, and within FIFA itself, which in some ways is viewed as an entity that is separate from its members:

FIFA don't care if we have a GB team at the Olympics or not, why the fuss? I sincerely doubt that the day after a PROPER GB team plays its last game at the Olympics that the head of FIFA will suddenly be calling for a GB league and GB team full-time (English Poster 19).

Others indicate that we can learn much from FIFA’s history on these matters, and that as a result, change is unlikely: “can you find an example, that at any time in history 2 or more FA’s have been forced by fifa to join?” (Northern Irish Poster 8).
Issues surrounding FIFA as an organisation, and as the world governing body of international football are of particular significance within the data, with many posters on both sides of the argument seeing their role as being central to the debate. As such, many of those who take a stance in favour of a Team GB football team competing in the Olympic Games in London point to a perceived lack of power within FIFA as a broader organisation to impose or force amalgamation upon the British FAs: “FIFA can not and would not force a merger of the UK in international football” (Welsh Poster 4). Others though take a more practical and realistic view of the possibilities that exist for amendments to be made to the FIFA statutes that would disrupt the privileges and much cherished independent statuses of the home FAs:

There is absolutely no will among UEFA members or on FIFA’s international committee, nor anywhere near a global two-thirds majority of all FIFA members, to force the four home nations to play as one, so the existing guarantee of their independence within the FIFA statutes is under zero threat, despite anything the Swiss windbag with the underwear fetish says (Northern Irish Poster 9).

Within this understanding is the belief that UEFA as a whole would not be in favour of amending the status quo which sees them enjoying a number of benefits that accrue from the independence of the British FAs, including substantial representation on the IFAB and an additional vice-president on FIFA’s executive committee, as well as other advantages:

It just seems like such a ridiculously small chance of us getting voted against. It would take every other nation in FIFA as well as a couple in UEFA to vote against us. I would imagine that getting the rest of FIFA mobilised to vote against us is difficult enough, without having to convince members of UEFA to give up more power and vote against us (Scottish Poster 17).

Additionally, it is also highlighted that the status of the British associations within FIFA is not as unique as some commentators imply, and that this might have further implications should the issue ever be brought to the FIFA congress for a vote:
The British teams are not unique in FIFA. New Caledonia, Puerto Rico, Cayman Islands, American Samoa, Faroe Islands, Netherlands Antilles, Bermuda, Montserrat, Guam, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Palestine, Anguilla, Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Cook Islands, French Guyana, Turks and Caicos and Tahiti all compete as full FIFA members but are not sovereign states. So, should FIFA decide that the home nations have to compete as GB all of those national teams will be forced to stop playing as well. Additionally, that’s 20 votes that would go in our favour if it did go to a vote (Scottish Poster 18).

The existence of such nations, and other smaller sovereign states that are full members of FIFA was also important for some posters. They concluded that it would be inconsistent for FIFA to potentially force the British Associations to compete permanently as Great Britain whilst still allowing the smaller states and nations to compete on their own terms:

The primary issue is nothing to do with separate teams being threatened. there is not, and never has been, any danger of an organisation which allows Andorra, San Marino etc to compete making the UK compete as aone team (Scottish Poster 20), and whilst also sanctioning full FIFA membership for the many new states and nations to have emerged in recent years:

To think that FIFA would ban Scotland, Wales or Ireland from competing is ludicrous conspiracy theory nonsense. How many "new European" countries have emerged recently? Scotland have had to play in "countries" that don't even have a stadium! To think that FIFA would ban Scotland is a stupid attention-seeking idea! (Scottish Poster 21).

Others suggest that there are additional practical limitations that would give the independence of the British FAs some protection from the threat of unwanted amalgamation. These are not limited to the administrative chaos and upheaval that would undoubtedly follow any such decision:

But do people really think FIFA would make the home nations become a permanent GB team just because of appearing once at our own Olympics? It would be a pretty brave and outrageous decision, do they have realistically have the power to do that? If they did this surely all the football leagues in each nation would then have to join together too, to make a GB FA, it would be a nightmare (English Poster 20).

It is also suggested that this may be open to legal challenge: “tell us how FIFA would
escape the legal implications facing them in terms of their banning of the two oldest Football Associations in the world?” (Scottish Poster 22). Other posters prefer to fall back upon the perceived dominance of British football within a broader footballing culture and context, firstly by suggesting that the unique British history of the game offers security:

This outrage at a possible GB team is completely unwarranted. Yes, there is a risk to the Home Nations that Sepp Blatter would try and implement a British team permanently but would that really be a feasible option for FIFA. All the Home Nations have rich cultural football history and FIFA could not wipe that away if they tried (Scottish Poster 23).

Secondly, it is understood that the contemporary economic dominance of the Premier League in England offers another form of insulation from the threat posed by FIFA and its members: “do you really think FIFA would disband the FA of the most profitable league in the world namely the EPL - get serious!” (English Poster 21). The role of the FA and its overall positive support for the proposal for a Team GB to compete in London 2012’s football tournament is also seen to be significant, in that its apparent confidence with the proposals suggests that it has very few concerns regarding its continued independent status as English football’s governing body:

I think it highly unlikely though that our place as a separate footballing nation would be in jeopardy. And surely England would be every bit as keen to remain independent as I doubt many would want the teams name as England to be lost (Northern Irish Poster 10).

However, by no means all posters are as sanguine on these issues.

Alongside these views, which might be collectively termed those that are concerned with the administration of international football, are others that are more closely related to understanding the attitudes of Scots:

If we’re really being honest we know no-one is ever going to make England, Scotland, NI and Wales play as GB, and what all this is really about is that we have a passionate hatred of the England football team and we don’t want to play ball (Scottish Poster 76).
Some Scots are clearly aware of this viewpoint, and show their dislike of it:

I’m disgusted with the attitudes shown by my fellow Scots on this. How many times do they have to be told it would be a one-off? There is no way on earth that FIFA or UEFA would or could demand that we lose our footballing sovereignty. This ‘I support Scotland and whoever plays England’ bandwagon is so dated. They are rivals, yes, but we’re British too (Scottish Poster 77).

This is a view that is also acknowledged by English posters:

Some Scots, Welsh and Irish leaving messages on here are only opposed because of anti-English sentiments and don't want to support a team that they believe, hypothetically, will be full of "English players" (English Poster 20).

7.5 Team GB is a Threat to the Status of the Home Nations

The predominant theme that brings together those posters who are opposed to the proposals for a Team GB football team in some form in London is the concern that such a team would inevitably lead to calls from FIFA members for the disbandment of the Home football associations and the imposition of a combined Team GB for all future international competitions. For many this threat is very real and emanates from a number of sources. Firstly, there is the commonly held view that FIFA as a wider organisation, and Sepp Blatter as its President, have an agenda, one which is intent upon forcing the British FAs to merge and play permanently as Team GB: “FIFA and Blatter have consistently stated that they want a UK team rather than 4 home nations” (Scottish Poster 26). Secondly, there are commonly held beliefs that not only does FIFA want to merge the British FAs, but also that there is widely held support for this from FIFA’s member states more generally: “we KNOW that many many FIFA Members resent our having four separate teams, and would love an excuse to get rid of us” (Northern Irish Poster 5). This sentiment has also been attributed to specific members and confederations within FIFA’s organizational structure: “the African nations hate the fact that the UK has 4 representatives on FIFA. Any weakening of
that stance could see the home nations “merged”’ (Scottish Poster 27); as well as particular FIFA personalities with the head of the CONCACAF federation and FIFA vice-president, Jack Warner coming in for particular attention:

There are long-standing objections among many members of the fifa family to the ‘special’ status of the home nations. Jack Warner being a major ringleader (Scottish Poster 28).

A prominent concern is that a Team GB actively competing at football in an officially organised and FIFA-sanctioned tournament would set a precedent that could be actively used by those hostile to the position to undermine the privileges enjoyed by the British FAs within FIFA:

The truth of the matter is that the home nations would be playing with fire were we to send a team to 2012, as Fifa would, as many have said, use it as grounds for amalgamating the nations into a single association (English Poster 25).

Other posters have commented on this view: ‘We do not want to give anybody a stick to hit us with - that would be madness.’ (Scottish Poster 29), and

It would give other countries the ammunition to say that there should only be one British team, just like the one that appeared at the Olympics in the 2012 Olympics. The importance of the National sides, and their importance to the identity of the individual Nations, far outweighs appearances by a ‘Football Team GB’ at the Olympics, which frankly wouldn’t rate too highly on many people's list of priorities (Scottish Poster 30).

Clearly the belief is however that a football team representing Team GB at London in 2012 would be “the thin end of the wedge” (Welsh Poster 10) and once such a team became a reality, calls for the formal amalgamation of the British FAs and the end of their privileges within FIFA, would not be far behind:

I believe that the creation of a GB team for the Olympics would be the beginning of the end for the Home Nations having individual football teams (how would England football fans feel about that?) (Welsh Poster 9).

Some posters have concluded that the threat exists regardless of any team representing Team GB taking the field at London 2012 in any form. This clearly has
been a response to the compromise proposals, including calls for an all-English team to compete as Team GB in place of a team drawn from players of all four home nations, or a team that competes having qualified by dint of a tournament or play-off featuring England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales:

A couple of things, the FA's of Scotland, Wales and NI are not in favour for very good reason ie FIFA may dissolve the 4 home nations and make them in future team GB. Under these circumstances we cannot have a team in the Olympics under the GB banner even if it only comes from one nation (Scottish Poster 31).

The rationale behind this viewpoint is quite clearly stated:

I think that the SFA even letting a GB side compete is dangerous. A precedent has been set, that a single home nation can represent the whole of the UK in an international competition (Scottish Poster 32).

Other posters are explicit though that they would be more than happy to see a GB representative football team take to the field if there was some form of written assurance in place, or a legally-binding guarantee from FIFA that the individual status of the home nations teams would remain unaffected:

If we were somehow to get an iron clad document from FIFA saying we could combine for the Olympics and this would never affect our individual FAs’ status from now until the end of time then I wouldn't mind so much but that will never happen, and the fact they have not even hinted at doing this means they probably have an alterior motive and would use this situation to get rid of the 4 nations (Scottish Poster 33).

Although this might go some way to encourage some posters to soften their outright opposition to a Team GB football team, and to encourage those who are in favour of seeing a Team GB compete but who fear for the continuing independent status of the home nations, there is also a recognition among posters that FIFA is unable to offer any formal guarantees in this regard. It is also evident that some posters have managed to gain a fuller understanding of how FIFA’s constitution and statutes are implemented and administered, and this confirms this view more formally:

There is full provision under article 26 of the fifa statutes to change the special
provisions governing the home nations. Our independence is in no way untouchable. Note that this power is attached to the Congress not the IFAB. The home nations have no extra rights in the congress (Scottish Poster 28).

Many posters also feel that FIFA’s assurances concerning the issue are problematic, particularly when viewed against the fact that they cannot offer full guarantees. That some purportedly reassuring words have been forthcoming from FIFA President Sepp Blatter on occasions is not in doubt, but at other times he has urged caution on behalf of the British FAs, and this has caused some to question once again whether or not FIFA can be trusted on this issue. For some it is his inconsistency on the issue that is significant:

Sepp Blatter has also changed his mind on a GB team. He was apparently warm a few years ago to the idea, but was against the idea in March this year stating that a team composed of four national associations would naturally raise questions on the subject. How can we trust the ‘politics’ of FIFA on this? (Scottish Poster 34).

The issue of risk is the main concern of many posters. They have seen the arguments from both angles, with the threat to the home nations’ independent footballing status being a real one, but the possibility of it being formally enacted by FIFA and its member states being limited and unlikely given the way that the governing body’s statutes are administered and changes enacted. For many the cherished status enjoyed by the home nations should be protected at all costs:

Anything that even lets a chink of light onto the idea of a Great Britain team for any other tournament such as the World Cup or UEFA Championships should be avoided like the plague (Scottish Poster 36).

Others have weighed up the potential risk against the potential gains to be had, and have concluded that ‘I know we could probably fight FIFA on this however why even take the risk it is unnecessary for an U23 tournament.’ (Scottish Poster 33), whilst it has also been suggested that while there is clearly no discernible threat at this stage, it is still not a risk worth taking:
The threat to our separate footballing existence is not explicit, but it's there. Any amalgamation, even if it's supposedly a one-off, will be pounced on by Jack Walker and his cronies in FIFA (Scottish Poster 37).

Whereas the main concern that informs much of the opposition to the idea of a Team GB is the continuing existence of British teams at international level, for some this is a position that is informed by a particular view of the England football team:

I think it is playing with fire to unite the home nations in an international competition and may start calls for this to be the case in future world cups etc by other competing nations. Thirdly...I'm Scottish and could never agree to a team of Scots/English together. Sorry (Scottish Poster 68).

For one poster this anti-English stance is one that may be veiled behind broader concerns relating to the future of the Scottish football team as a separate entity:

The real reason most Scots like myself aren't interested is that when it comes to football (not politics or nationalism) England are the enemy and any man who pulls on a football jersey with them is a traitor (Scottish Poster 69).

Some posters are however at pains to refute the accusation that their opposition to a Team GB football team is based on anti-Englishness, and rather that it is indeed the preservation of the Scottish national team that is their primary concern: ‘Most Scottish posters aren't against 'Team GB' because they are anti-english. It is the threat of a permanent UK team that concerns most’ (Scottish Poster 26). The prospect of a Team GB football team at the London 2012 Olympic Games was very much the polar opposite of what some were calling for in their posts:

A team GB for football is a bad idea. Many people in scotland do not want a team Gb at the olympics at all and want an independent scotland team. It threatens the scottish national team's independent status and more to the point the SFA would not let that happen (Scottish Poster 70).

In addition, for some posters, the rich tradition and historical distinctiveness of British football is significant in these regards:

A lot of countries may think it's unfair that the UK has four countries entering competitions and this has been a contentious point to them for years. Perhaps it is unfair in some respects but history and tradition has dictated how this has come about.
7.6 Conflation of England and Great Britain (or Vice Versa)

Concerns were also apparent regarding the linkage of England and Great Britain, to the often blurred and fuzzy lines between specifically English and British varieties of national identity. Many posters, often non-English in origin, though in a few limited cases not so, raised objections to a Team GB competing in the 2012 Olympic football tournament based on these issues. For some, the problem emanates from an inability of some English people to regularly differentiate being English from being British:

The FA is the only association that doesn't feel threatened by a possible British team, presumably because English people feel that being English and being British is much the same thing. Whereas in Scotland and Wales it is not the same thing at all (Scottish Poster 38).

For some posters, this phenomenon has already been evident and experienced within Olympic contexts, and as such serves as a warning of what might be in store should a Team GB football team take to the field in 2012:

I also recall being at a "Team GB" hockey match at the Barcelona Olympics where the entire match involved fans chanting England, England even though there were only 5 or 6 English players on the field. English people never seem to understand why that would annoy fans from other GB nations (Scottish Poster 39).

Others question the level of understanding that this suggests English people have about Great Britain and about the relationship between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales:

Having spent many years down south, England still think the Scotland, Wales and NI are just wee parts of England. Or Britain as they call it. England can play as GB if they want. I wouldn't be supporting them whether they had Scottish players or not. The only people in the Celtic nations who want this have absolutely no idea what it means to be a supporter of your country (Scottish Poster 4).
The concern for some is that a Team GB would be appropriated by the English as their own team, and any contribution from the other home nations to its performance would be ignored or overlooked:

Most English people, far more than any other component of the UK, regard "Britain" and "England" as interchangeable terms anyway. And since the large majority of any Team GB would very likely comprise English players, the English would regard a GB victory in the World Cup as to all intents and purposes the same as an England one. I've lived here for almost 20 years, you can take my word on that one (Scottish Poster 40).

This in some ways also reflects another major concern that some posters have, namely that eventually a combined Great Britain and Northern Ireland football team would simply become regarded as England:

Just like its the english and welsh cricket association. give nit a few years and it will be just the GB football team and then the english football team. You know its true, just ask the Welsh cricketers (Scottish Poster 42).

For some too, the common conflation of England and Great Britain means that the English team have the least to lose by playing in a Great Britain team at the Olympic Games, and, in a worst case scenario, playing in a Great Britain team permanently:

It's simply that they know they have virtually nothing to lose. A GB team would be mostly English players (they have 10x the population if nothing else) but also able to field the best players from the other nations. And it would still be referred to as 'England' by all English fans and by the vast majority of the rest of the world (Scottish Poster 43).

Others point to the symbols of nation that are employed in sporting contexts, and which are also shared between England and Great Britain as being significant in this regard:

It would appear the English FA and BOA just don't share the concern (they don't care). The English FA don't have much to lose do they? They already sing the UK national anthem, fans wave the UK national flag at matches and fans sing the Scottish song "Rule Britannia." It will be hard to convince the FA that a GB team is not desirable (Scottish Poster 44).

The most prominent concerns regarding the common perception that the terms
England and Great Britain are regularly and customarily conflated, are teased out by the compromise proposal to have an all-English team represent Great Britain at London in 2012. For many posters, though they may not necessarily want to risk a threat to the independent status of their respective home football association, they see an all-England team as potentially damaging to Britain as a whole:

A team representing Britain with only English players will reinforce an incorrect stereotype that diminishes British culture as much as it diminishes Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland's. It also, I feel, boosts England's to a certain extent. England cannot be allowed to be seen as Britain, even if by default (Welsh Poster 12).

For some posters that recognise the problems raised by conflating England and Britain, it is the rich history and distinctive traditions of British football that mean that a combined British football team at this juncture is both unlikely and unwarranted:

Because England and GB have always been synonymous to most people in England there is a complete lack of understanding of why the rest of the UK does not want this to happen. I have no problem supporting British runners, swimmers, rowers, cyclists etc but over 100 years of separate football identity means supporting a GB football team is a non-runner I'm afraid (Scottish Poster 75).

Another issue that is very much related to this initial concern, is the view of Great Britain that is presented to the outside world, to non-British countries and people.

Clearly, posters believe that this conflation which is perceived commonly to be practiced by the English, is also adopted by those looking into Britain from the outside:

The alternative proposal, that an English team would represent the British Isles, is I think equally unpalatable. As a proud Welshman living in Spain I am often introduced as "un ingles". British yes, English no, I say, but they do not understand. To most, England and Britain are synonymous (Welsh Poster 12).

For others, an all-English team would also confirm an incorrect relationship between England and Great Britain, that to them is totally unacceptable:

It's utterly insulting and makes me fume. It's bad enough trying to educate the world that British and English is not the same thing, but this farce would just make matters worse. The term 'British' was fist coined to indicate a collective grouping, but that idea
has failed miserably - anyone who believes otherwise is living in cuckooland. It's so obvious - just go anywhere in the world and nobody else uses the 'B' word - everything is 'English' (Welsh Poster 13).

The solution for some would be for all four home ‘nations’ to enter the Olympic Games as individual Olympic teams, and not just in the Olympic football tournament:

The simple solution is to let Wales have its own team to compete in the Olympic in our own right. Our own (Welsh??) politicians (Rhodri included) need to campaign against the English (sorry British) Olympic Association to let us compete in our own right. It makes me so annoyed to be Welsh by seeing our Welsh olympians winning and having to stand to the English national anthem!!! (Welsh Poster 16).

Whether or not this reflected a desire for a similar level of political independence is debateable:

I think it's very sad that the 4 nations cannot be allowed to compete as 4 nations in the Olympics. There are many precedents for countries taking part who are not independent - i.e. Hong Kong, American Samoa, Puerto Rico etc (Scottish Poster 44).

Others wholly object to any broad association with England:

If it was an all england team then i would question why it should be called team GB. i think it is extremely discriminatory to interchange England with Great Britain and Northern Ireland like that. if the team was solely english but called Great Britain then it would be like calling me english which i object to completely (Scottish Poster 45).

In relation to this viewpoint, English posters are largely silent, and this should be regarded as being significant to a degree. In a few cases, English posters suggest the conflation of England and Great Britain in an implicit rather than an explicit manner:

I do understand the concerns about the other FAs losing their identity and believe that this is an argument for entering 4 separate teams... But to enter a GB team and have only England participate out of the 4 GB nations seems a farce (English Poster 34).

Whilst there is plenty to suggest that oppositional views do sometimes draw upon anti-Englishness for their base: ‘I always look forward to England “not” qualifying for any World or European football competitions’ (Scottish Poster 71), there are also some acknowledgements on the part of English posters that this is indeed the case and that this is an important factor for many in expressing their Scottishness:
I can't comment on Wales and NI but having lived in Scotland for 6 years I'm still amazed by the Scots fans who will make it out to the pub for England games, place themselves right at the front by the big screen and enthusiastically support the opposition, whoever they are. Sometimes this is done with a cheeky grin and a twinkle in the eye but often not, and even so there is still something significant behind this about many Scots feelings towards England. I believe you would be hard pushed to find a pub in England where English fans did the same for a Scotland game...in fact I think that you would find many more English fans supporting Scotland. This is clearly a case of being anti-England, not just supporting Scotland (English Poster 34).

In a few cases, this is a phenomenon that is also acknowledged by Scottish posters.

One particular Scottish poster, in commenting on the propensity of the English to incorrectly conflate the terms England and Great Britain, argues that

Just as infuriating are my fellow Scots who base their hatred of the English on a Mel Gibson film because they are too lazy to read a book. I am a Scot who is against independence (Scottish Poster 72).

For some posters, this propensity to take an anti-English stance is a reaction to the perceived arrogance of the English in two main ways. Firstly, this is seen in relation to the likely make-up of any future Team GB football side:

The arrogance that supposes that England by dint of having the biggest country and population in the union will dominate and is entirely misplaced (Scottish Poster 73).

Secondly, this relates specifically to the way that Scottish football is regarded, but may also be reflected in opinions of the standard of the game in Wales and Northern Ireland also:

I hate the arrogance of so many people involved in English football, how the Scottish league is looked at down south as if it is a mickey mouse competition (Scottish Poster 74).

Whilst very few English posters recognise how their perceived arrogance affects the way that they are subsequently viewed by others, there are some who do, but in so doing, also recognise the potential for the debate surrounding Team GB to afford Scots the opportunity to express contrary sentiments:

It gives ample opportunity for the Scots to get really snotty about the whole thing. It
will also give the English ample opportunity to put the backs up of all the other home
nations with an arrogant and patronising attitude (English Poster 35).

7.7 The Status of Olympic Football Tournaments

The status of Olympic football is another theme to emerge from the data, specifically
the standing and reputation that Olympic football has in the eyes of many British
football fans. Again, this would appear to be an area that many who are opposed to
the proposals for a Team GB use to justify their stance, though as with many of the
themes to emerge from the data, it is also patterned by a smaller number of posters
who support the proposals but who nonetheless care little for the Olympic football
tournament. It is quite clear from the data that Olympic football is not held in
particularly high regard by a sizeable number of football fans from these islands, and
is considered as an inferior football tournament when compared with other
international events on the football calendar. At different times, and by posters from
all four home footballing nations, though most commonly from non-English posters,
Olympic football has been described in a number of ways, none of which are
particularly flattering or complimentary: ‘second rate’ (Scottish Poster 46), ‘third rate’
(Scottish Poster 47), ‘half-baked’ (Scottish Poster 48), ‘half arsed’ (Northern Irish
Poster 11), and perhaps most commonly as ‘a Mickey Mouse event’ (English Poster
26). Other posters make reference to Olympic football in even less glowing terms: ‘a
chuffing under 23’s tournament that no-one will watch anyway’ (Welsh Poster 14)
and ‘Olympic football is quite simply a bag of sh*te’ (Northern Irish Poster 12).

The reasoning behind these particular views is also revealed in the data with a number
of factors being cited. The first are the particular regulations relating to the age of
players that is stipulated at Olympic football tournaments, whereby in a squad of 18
players, at least fifteen must be under 23 years of age, with three players over 23 years permitted:

There are age restrictions on the Olympic football teams which is hardly consistent with the rest of the Olympic events and certainly doesn't provide top International football (Scottish Poster 3).

A few posters recognise the reasons for these impositions and show an awareness of the structures and politicking that are a feature of modern international football governance:

It's the Olympic football tournament, It's in the same summer as EURO 2012, but it's a weird Under 23 plus guest stars format. Olympic Football is purposely a bit half-hearted because FIFA & UEFA don't want a rival to their own competitions (Scottish Poster 46).

Other posters take a more cynical view, and make their own assessments of what the age restrictions mean in practice:

This Olympic tournament is designed for players who, by the age of 23, should be expected to be competing in "grown-up football" (never mind the permitted over-age players) (Northern Irish Poster 5).

The implications of the age restrictions are often seen to be a significant influence on how the standard and standing of the tournament are consequently viewed and judged:

In the Olympics they put in daft rules so that the best players don't participate (and don't want to as they have a busy schedule anyway). It is a nothing competition and we should not risk our 4 national football identities for a few over-paid BOA officials' egos (Scottish Poster 49).

The upshot of the age restrictions for many posters is that consequently the standard of football on offer is perceived to be lower than that at other international football tournaments:

I think it's a low-grade (and thus less relevant) competition because, with largely U-23 players, it's clearly of a lower standard than the WC or EC finals. Nothing to do with NI not being in it (Northern Irish Poster 13).
For one poster, to compete in the Olympic football tournament would be to lower one’s own national footballing standards: ‘Over the last number of years our football team has beaten better than who will be at the olympics, why mix our best with the rest?’ (Northern Ireland Poster 14). While there is this perception that Olympic football is of a lower standard generally, there is a related but more limited understanding that as a result, the matches played at Olympic Games will also be unappealing: ‘I will be gutted that I cant watch S.Korea u23 vs Zambia u23........truely upsetting! *winks smiley*’ (Northern Irish Poster 15).

Taken together, these issues mean that Olympic football is seen by many posters to lack any great prestige or honour in the footballing world: ‘ahahaha nobody in football gives a crap if you win the olympics, its far from prestigious. id rather my team won the carling cup than 'GB' won the olympics’ (English Poster 27). Some posters take an even harsher line on Olympic football, and Olympic football’s importance and relevance as an event is described by posters in a variety of ways. Many simply describe it as being ‘pointless’ (Northern Ireland Poster 11; English Poster 28) or ‘meaningless’ (English Poster 22; Welsh Poster 15). Others, in customary fashion, are more forthright and barbed in their invectives: ‘a tournament that in footballing terms matters feck all’ (Scottish Poster 51). Some though see the status of Olympic football as being very much part of the bigger picture:

I love supporting Northern Ireland. I'm very proud of our wee team, and this put's our whole existence in jeopardy, and for what? A couple of games that nobody cares about, nobody watches and means nothing (Northern Irish Poster 16).

Many posters seemingly derive their view of Olympic football by comparing it to other international football events and the outcome is not favourable. Olympic
football is thus seen to be the poor relation to the World Cup and Continental Championships that dominate the international football calendar:

I enjoy watching team GB in other Olympic sports, however when it comes to football the competition itself (despite it being pointed out earlier as the oldest international footballing competition) pales into insignificance compared to the European Championships and the World Cup from the home nations point of view (Scottish Poster 52).

Others are quite sure where their respective nations footballing priorities should lie:

Real football fans don't want it to happen, for various reasons. As a Scotland fan I have my mind and money on the 2010 WC and 2012 EC. Olympics would just get in the way (Scottish Poster 53).

One particular poster was quite clear as to what was most likely to pique his interest in footballing terms:

Although team GB might generate moderate interest, it would be nothing compared to World Cup fever. It's nothing to do with ill feelings towards any other country, but everything to do with national identity (Northern Irish Poster 17).

This lack of interest, it is believed, also extends to players, who are thought to take a rather dim view of the honours and accolades offered by Olympic football: 'a bigger joke is the thought of a footballer regarding the Mickey Mouse Olympic fitba competition as the high point of his career' (Scottish Poster 54). The belief is that many footballers are also more concerned with what are considered to be the true and proper international football tournaments, Continental Championships and the World Cup:

I can't remember any footballing details from previous Olympics, not even a previous winner. I'm happy to wait for the qualifying matches for the World Cup, the real football tournament and hope all the home nations do well and reach the finals (Scottish Poster 55).

The data also reveals a general lack of interest in Olympic football among posters, that is not only quite widespread, but also extends further to include a complete disregard for the tournament as a whole. Again, this is often an expression made by
those opposed to a combined Team GB football team taking to the field in 2012. For others, this decided lack of interest extends to not watching coverage of the Olympic football tournament at all, even with British representation:

I just don't see football as an Olympic sport and have never been excited about it. A bit like tennis. I don't care if "Team GB" field eleven Englishmen or a proportionate representation or whatever, I would not watch a single match (Scottish Poster 56), or indeed, without: ‘My interest level in the football at the Olympics this year has been so little that I haven't watched a single game and only the odd bit of highlights’ (Scottish Poster 57). In terms of trying to demonstrate or explain this lack of interest to others, many posters are keen to test their own and other’s knowledge concerning previous Olympic football tournaments and matches, in order to show its lack of importance to football fans generally:

How many people reading this blog, without going and looking it up, could tell me who the current Olympic football champions were, even though the tournament ended but a few weeks ago? (Scottish Poster 40).

For some British football fans, the fact that Great Britain and Northern Ireland have been absent from the Olympic football tournament for some time has clearly been a factor: ‘the four British Associations who haven't even bothered to enter a team for over 30-odd years’ (Northern Irish Poster 5). For others, this lack of a recent tradition of Olympic football in the United Kingdom has contributed to an overall level of apathy towards Olympic football that is specifically British:

It seems daft that we all of a sudden need a British Football Olympic team. We've never needed one before and I'm pretty sure very few people have watched any previous Olympic football and longed for the day a UK team could compete (Scottish Poster 59).

This is a sentiment that is also expressed in a far more intense fashion: ‘most “true” football fans in England, Scotland, NI or Wales could not give a MONKEY’S **** about Olympic football’ (Scottish Poster 58). Some posters clearly consider that this
disregard for Olympic football is shared by Britain’s European counterparts, whilst at
the same time suggesting that it is only South American and African nations that are
ever seriously interested in the Olympic football tournament:

The olympics is not high on a footballers agenda except for the south americans and
africans. European countries dont seem to care. Watch who gets far in the Beijing
olympics to prove it (Scottish Poster 60).

For other fans, Olympic football itself is not the issue, but rather the Olympic Games
as a whole. Given the relatively low status afforded to Olympic football, it is perhaps
rather unsurprising to find that some fans see greater appeal in other events that are
featured in the Olympic Games:

I'm English, but even though all the GB players will be English, couldn't give a flying
one about the Olympic football tournament. Football has no place at the Olympics -
because it's not the pinnacle of the sport. Instead, as at every Olympic Games, I'll be
watching the athletics, swimming and (because I've always been interested since we
won gold in 1988), the hockey (English Poster 30).

Indeed, this now extends to the argument that football may not even belong in the
Olympic Games.

Much of the debate thus far has focussed not only on whether a British team should
compete at London 2012, but also on whether football should feature at the Olympic
Games at all. Once again, many of those posters who oppose a wholly British football
team are also minded to conclude that football has no place in the Olympic Games.
Their reasoning is based on a number of factors. Primarily, many believe that the
Olympic Games should only feature those events and sports where winning an
Olympic Gold medal is considered to be the very pinnacle of achievement in that
sport:

The BOA should take the stand that it's the British belief that Olympic Sports should
only be those which consider winning Olympic Gold is the pinnacle of achievement in
their Sport. So we Brits will only participate in sports which hold that view, even if we
have to host them on the IOC's behalf (English Poster 31).
Clearly, most believe that the Olympic football tournament is some way from achieving this, and that consequently it should no longer feature on the Olympic programme:

Why is football contested at the Olympics at all? An olympic gold will never be the pinnacle of a footballers career, it will always be the world cup (Scottish Poster 61).

Other posters cite the presence of professional football players within the Olympic Games as a further factor which indicates that football and the Olympic movement are not, or should no longer be compatible:

As for a GB football team - on balance I'm not in favour. I don't believe it should be an Olympic sport. Why should these overpaid, unsporting primadonnas with their love of money and their lack of respect for fellow players and officials, be allowed the Olympic spotlight? (Scottish Poster 63).

The inclusion of professional players in football at the Olympic Games, as well as other high-profile sports such as tennis and golf which also admits professional players has for some meant a distancing from what they consider the Olympic movement should represent:

Why is Football an Olympic Sport? Just a bunch of Overpaid Pansies who should be sunning themselves on holiday when the true Sportsmen and Women take the field! Oh - and Tennis as well. What ever happened to the True Meaning of the Olympics - Yes before TV & Commercialism !! (Scottish Poster 65).

For others, the solution to this issue is quite simple, and one that would be more appropriate to the original Olympic ideals: ‘Why not just get a team of amateurs like it should be for olympics’ (Scottish Poster 64). Additionally, the presence of football at the Olympic Games serves to detract attention and financial support away from other sports and events:

The simplest thing to do would be to acknowledge the fact that football isn't a high

---

84 Eligibility criteria for Olympic competitors is decided upon by the each sport’s international federation in consultation with the IOC. Most sports, with the notable exception of boxing, now admit professionals to the Olympics. In addition, many of those that are not classed as professionals, receive funding from their respective governments to train for Olympic competition.
profile Olympic event and not bother with the whole farce that is detracting from the
efforts of those in other disciplines that are rightfully an integral part of the Olympics
and are therefore more deserving of Olympic attention (Scottish Poster 3).

Others posters clearly consider that their objections to football as an Olympic sport
are based upon the notion that there is already enough international football in
existence:

The debate about whether GB has a footy team at the Olympics should actually be
replaced with whether there should actually be a football tournament at all at the
Olympics. With the World Cup, European Championships and Copa America etc.,
there are more than enough tournaments for football (Scottish Poster 66).

Some posters prefer to cite issues relating to club football as further evidence that
football should not be in the Olympic Games, because of the clash between the timing
of the Olympic football tournament and club football in England, Scotland and Wales:

The domestic league seasons will have already started whilst the Olympic football
tournament continues meaning that many players are unavailable for their clubs at the
start of the season (see Sir Alex Ferguson's comments regarding Cristiano Ronaldo's
inclusion in Portugal's Olympic squad last time) (Scottish Poster 3).

7.8 Data Findings: Summary

Before moving on to discuss the data in more depth, it would be worthwhile
reminding ourselves of the themes that have been identified, and which will be
exposed to a more critical analysis. The first themes to emerge raised two questions:
should an all-English team represent Team GB? And why should football be different
from any other sport? The next theme identified that many fans considered that a
tournament should be held to decide who competes as Team GB. The debate then
moved on to centre on two themes which are both crucial to the deliberations around a
Team GB: whether the threat posed to the home nations independent status is an idle
one, or in contrast, whether Team GB is indeed a real threat to the independent status
of the home nations’ teams. The final themes that emerged relate to the conflation of
England and Great Britain (or vice versa), and the status of Olympic football
tournaments among British football fans. Of these, the themes that will be subject to
more in-depth critical analysis are those that relate to explicit and implicit expressions
of anti-Englishness, and the conflation of England and Great Britain.
Chapter Eight: Discussion of Data

In this final chapter, the empirical data is discussed in detail and the most significant and pertinent themes to emerge are analysed. The structure veers away from that of the previous chapter and as already mentioned instead focuses broadly on the two related themes of anti-Englishness and the conflation of England and Britain that are dominant across the data. In so doing, two things will become clear. Firstly, the complexity of British sporting cultures will undoubtedly be reinforced. Secondly, the inter-relations and inter-twining between themes should become apparent. Whether or not someone’s preference for or against Team GB reflects a more general political preference is difficult to gauge, and, indeed, it is quite clear from the data that to make any such assumptions would be foolhardy to say the least. On the other hand, it is also hard to ascertain whether the sentiments expressed are restricted to sporting contests only and in respect of this the nature and scope of the ‘90-minute patriot’ position has been subject to justified criticism (Jarvie and Walker, 1994; Finn and Giulianotti, 1998). The problem that is the focus of the debate surrounding a Team GB football team is that which is alluded to by Allison (2004), namely the separation in the UK of ‘nation’ and ‘state’, or what McCrone and Kiely (2008) have termed a confusion of ‘citizenship’ (UK) and ‘nationality’ (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

What is clearer though is that many people in each of the home nations attach enormous importance to their representative football teams, and these teams in turn play a significant role in highlighting the separateness and distinctiveness of their ‘nations’. As well as this, it is evident from the data that support for these teams demonstrates the contradictory nature of sporting nationalisms in that the teams are at the same times both unifying and divisive (Bairner, 2001, 2005a; Dyreson, 2003).
Before going on to discuss the data in more detail, brief attention will given to considering the influence that structural factors have in influencing the nature of national football supporting in the UK and its relationship to the debate surrounding a Team GB football team for London 2012.

8.1. Structural Constructions of British Football Identities

In attempting to understand how attitudes to a Team GB football team competing in the London 2012 Olympic Games might inform ideas about contemporary nationalisms and national identities in the UK, it is important firstly to acknowledge the importance of structural factors which fall into two broad categories; the political constitution and composition of the UK; and the ways in which football is organised and administered in these islands. The political structures of the UK, rather than being static, are in fact constantly evolving, and have been subject to a number of significant amendments across the centuries. What this reveals is that not only is national identity fluid, but also that the structures within which concepts such as national identity operate and are constructed are also subject to transformation and change. In terms of the past, structures of government in the UK have been organised and run counter to the structures that evolved in the administration of British football, in that the government reflected a broader UK wide formation, whilst football is governed on the basis of the individual ‘nations’ that form the UK, although Scotland, and to a lesser attempt Wales have always possessed relatively autonomous civil societies. In the contemporary era though, when Scotland has its own devolved parliament, and the Welsh and Northern Irish their own assemblies, it is the administrative composition of British football that now resembles these contemporary political structures more closely than other British sporting bodies such as the BOA.
The BOA suddenly seems to look something of an anachronism, although both it and the football authorities in the UK taken together reflect the potential for multiple identities that are afforded the British.

Now at this stage it must be made quite clear that a focus upon the structural influences on British football fans must not be taken to suggest that the organisational arrangements of British football are wholly determining. Rather, what is being argued here is that these structures have shaped or contoured the ways in which both forms of identity have developed. How football is organised in the UK is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it has produced a broader and historic conception of football as a distinct British entity, with a discernible British dimension, though importantly not necessarily a merged identity. Secondly, these structures have also allowed the development and creation of distinctive national football identities and cultures among the home nations. To suggest otherwise would be to fail to adequately grasp the complexities of sporting nationalisms, as well as the extensive roles that other factors play in the construction of national identities, not least the ways in which individuals create their own cultures and histories. Indeed, we might keep in mind the fact that there are a number of other categories such as gender, class and ethnicity that are also important in terms of identity formation. Our understanding will be aided by our ability to discern how the balance between two particular versions of identity, national and supranational, is maintained, and whether or not there has been any significant change in the ways that these ideas have been influenced by the debate.

8.2 Anti-Englishness and a Team GB Football Team

One of the strongest themes evident from the data is the underlying anti-Englishness
that informs many of the perspectives held by non-English fans concerning a Team GB football team competing at the 2012 Olympic Games. Posters were keen to express this in a number of ways: ‘England are the enemy and any man who pulls on a football jersey with them is a traitor’ (Scottish Poster, 69) and ‘so let them have their pseudo team GB and enjoy watching them get trashed’ (Scottish Poster 8). That this feeling is felt most strongly amongst Scots is perhaps unsurprising, although it would be wrong to say that elements of anti-Englishness, to greater or lesser degree, were undetectable amongst Northern Irish or Welsh fans. Undoubtedly, the social significance of football in Northern Ireland and Wales is not in question (Garland and Rowe, 2001; Hassan, 2002; Magee, 2005; Sugden and Bairner, 1994). But it is clear that the emphasis that these countries place upon anti-Englishness in assisting in the construction of their national identities through sporting encounters varies from that of Scots (Kowalski, 2004).

8.2.1 Northern Ireland, Anti-Englishness and Team GB

In Northern Ireland for example, there are a number of other concerns that might rank equally or higher than concerns about a Team GB football team for the Olympic Games. Firstly, there is the ever-present ‘threat’ of an all-Ireland team. In this regard, the implicit ‘other’ for many Northern Irish fans remains the Republic of Ireland national team and Nationalist supported teams in the North of Ireland (Bairner, 1999a). There is also however anti-Englishness apparent at certain times, and victories over England such as the one-nil home win at Windsor Park in the 2006 World Cup qualifiers are celebrated wildly and widely. Secondly, football in Northern Ireland has long been strongly associated with Loyalism and Unionism (Sugden and Bairner, 1994; Bairner, 1999a; Magee, 2005), and although this has been diluted to a
degree, it remains the case that football is still an important area where a particular expression of Northern Irish identity is celebrated\textsuperscript{85}. Whether this could be expected to generate the same levels of opposition to Team GB seen in Scotland is debateable, a reservation that is broadly reflected in the infrequency that such open expressions were found in the data. Additionally, if perhaps the support that the Northern Ireland team ordinarily enjoys were more balanced to reflect both Nationalist and Unionist communities, rather than being mainly the former as it stands now, then the idea of a Team GB football team may have been more enthusiastically embraced by Unionists.

### 8.2.2 Wales, Anti-Englishness and Team GB

For the Welsh, rugby union clearly overshadows association football in terms of its significance for national identity constructions (Holt and Mason, 2000). The importance of club teams that regularly compete against English teams in the English Football League is also undoubted, and allows expressions of particular types of Welshness, and a degree of anti-Englishness to be regularly celebrated (Johnes, 2000, 2002). Whether Welsh club teams have been or are more important than the Welsh national team as has been suggested (Hill, 1999; Johnes, 2002) is open to question, although the fact that the most successful Welsh clubs play within the English league pyramid is in itself significant. All of this suggests a form of accommodation, or acceptance and recognition of the position of Wales within the UK but also as contributing to a wider British working class culture (Johnes, 2000). This also suggests, the Welsh Assembly notwithstanding, that Welsh nationalism retains a strong cultural basis (Williams, 2003). And, with the ‘imagined communities’ of

\textsuperscript{85} It is worth reiterating here that Irish nationalism has not been disregarded in respect of this work. It is likely however that those of an Irish nationalist persuasion would have little or no regard as to whether or not a Team GB football team existed or not. For the predominantly Unionist supporters of the Northern Ireland team however the idea of a UK team presents something of a constitutional dilemma.
Anderson (1983) in mind, this shows how sport adds to the ways in which different versions of Welshness are constructed through Welsh lived experiences (Fevre, 1999) and everyday social interactions (Thompson and Day, 1999). More generally, this reflects what Johnes (2000) has argued is a dual-identity that likes to be seen to be separate without ever going so far as to seek a more formal separation.

8.2.3 Scotland, Anti-Englishness and Team GB

For Scots, and for Scottish constructions of identity

there is little doubt that England is the Scottish ‘other’, in the sense that all forms of identity require there to be a sense of not being someone or some group else (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2009: 13).

In terms of sporting identity in particular, football has always defined itself against the English (Wagg, 1995). Scottish victories in matches against the ‘Auld Enemy’ have always been important in providing the materials by which particular types of Scottish identity are constructed, maintained and reproduced (Bairner, 1994). It is clear that anti-Englishness remains an important and consistent feature of the way that Scottish football is viewed, despite the fact that opportunities for actually locking horns with the England team are now strictly limited. For example, the Tartan Army retains its distinctiveness in part by defining itself collectively against its English counterparts (Finn and Giulianotti, 1998; Garland and Rowe, 2001), although it is important to recognise that there are also Scottish fans who are less antagonistic to the England football team and the idea of the Union, amongst them, those associated with Rangers FC (Finn and Giulianotti, 1998).
8.2.4 Anti-Englishness and the Team GB Debate

It is evident from the data that the anti-Englishness that has been manifest within the debate surrounding a Team GB football team for London in 2012 is not universally felt and is subject to criticism from certain posters: ‘This “I support Scotland and whoever plays England” bandwagon is so dated. They are rivals, yes, but we’re British too’ (Scottish Poster 77). Anti-Englishness is also expressed to differing degrees and frequencies:

I would also support the England football team if they were playing for the UK in the Olympics, even though as a Scot I don't support them usually (Scottish Poster 10), and it undeniably emanates predominantly from the Scots rather than the Northern Irish or Welsh. Interestingly, it is apparent that it takes various forms and it can be seen in both implicit and explicit forms, and, rather more pertinently, has been subject to challenge from English posters sensitive to the sentiments expressed and their implications: ‘some Scots, Welsh and Irish leaving messages on here are only opposed because of anti-English sentiments’ (English Poster 20).

Reactions from other English posters have been stronger and represent more of a riposte to the anti-English sentiments addressed to them: “If the scots don't like us that much then shut your mouth and don't help out like selfish children” (English Poster 7). These responses from some English posters show how this debate has been used to articulate the rivalries between the ‘nations’ of the UK. Additionally, it is also evident that some Scots, Northern Irish and Welsh fans who hold less antagonistic perspectives with regard to the English, or in the case of Scots, are simply tired of this aspect of contemporary Scottishness, are not afraid to make these feelings known: ‘Just as infuriating are my fellow Scots who base their hatred of the English on a Mel
Gibson film because they are too lazy to read a book’ (Scottish Poster 72). This reflects not only the fact that anti-Englishness is not universally held by Scots, but also that Scottish football culture does not itself present a unified and homogenous version of Scottish identity. Indeed, the predominant identity that Scottish football represents is one that is predicated and at times limited to that of working class men (Reid, 1998; Bairner, 2000, 2001; Kowalski, 2004), as well as being regionally exclusive (Bairner, 2001).

Looking firstly at the forms that anti-Englishness takes, it can be said with a degree of certainty that some Scottish football fans have a distinctive dislike for the England football team, and by association, any team with which it might be seen to be synonymous. Hence, there are a number of views and perspectives taken within the debate that are indicative of anti-Englishness. That some hold these views is most obviously apparent when they are expressed in a very open and explicit manner. The form that this can take varies and might simply reflect a fairly straightforward expression of the dislike for the England team: ‘I DEFINATELY couldn't cheer on a team with Wayne Rooney or John Terry involved. Eugh’ (Scottish Poster 79). Alternatively, it might instead reflect what might be regarded as the ‘classic’ behaviour often associated with Scottish football fans, namely supporting England’s opponents whoever they might be, and gaining enjoyment, excitement and gratification from watching the England team lose: ‘at least we'll have someone to support at the Olympic football tournament now! ABE \textsuperscript{86} anyone?’ (Scottish Poster 36). For many posters, the potential for an all-England XI to represent Team GB in 2012 provides ample opportunity to express these sentiments, though it is a combined

\textsuperscript{86} This stands for ‘Anyone but England’, a commonly held and expressed sentiment in Scottish football support that refers to whom many Scottish fans want to win in matches or tournaments involving England.
Team GB that rankles most and their dislike and distrust of the proposals are again articulated through open statements of anti-Englishness. This propensity to express anti-Englishness may also be another reason why an all-English team, rather than a fully combined Team GB football team, may be a desirable outcome for some Scottish fans.

This might also be related to the diverse nature of Scottish sporting society and reflect the fact that anti-Englishness when expressed through sport represents a rare glimpse of the Scots acting as something approaching a cohesive whole (Bairner, 2001). Certainly there appears to be an imperative for football to be maintained as an area where the distinctiveness and separateness of the non-English home nations is demonstrated, most specifically in Scotland being able to mark its distinctiveness from England (Moorhouse, 1996). That this is a position that may be particular to the game of football, and to a lesser extent rugby union, is worth looking at in further detail. It might thus be enlightening to consider why such levels of anti-Englishness are less apparent in attitudes and perceptions towards other sports within the UK.

8.2.5 Anti-Englishness, Team GB and English Cricket

The game of cricket and specifically the England cricket team are interesting cases in point. The team is predominantly comprised of English players, and a number of qualified players born overseas. At other times though, a number of prominent Scottish and Welsh players have played at international levels for England. One of the main reasons for this is that, whilst the team is called England, in reality any player who is deemed good enough from any part of the British Isles can be selected to play for England, and, must also accept this if they want to play at the highest level. This is
likely to remain the case whilst England remains the only team in the British Isles to play Test cricket. The reality of this is that the England team effectively operates as a *de facto* British Lions cricket team, and in the same way can also include Irishmen from both north and south of the border (Parry and Malcolm, 2004; Bairner and Malcolm, 2010). In the summer of 2010 for instance, Dubliner Eoin Morgan became the first Irishman born outside of the constitutional United Kingdom to represent England at Test Match level. Because of the inclusion of non-English players from the other nations of the United Kingdom in the England team from time to time, it makes it an interesting and illustrative example to consider in relation to attitudes to a Team GB football team.

One thing that is certain is that the levels of anti-Englishness that are associated with the England football team, and the England cricket team, are hardly comparable. Bairner and Malcolm (2010) have suggested that there is ‘less evidence of the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh supporting anyone who plays against England at cricket than would be the case in the context of football’ (10). Furthermore, there are also limited opportunities for the home nations to play against each other at cricket, and where these rare occasions do arise it is mainly in World Cup and World 20Twenty tournaments, as well as some irregular friendly ODIs. Thus, in this respect, competition between the home nations is relatively rare, and consequently so is the opportunity for meaningful cricketing contests (*ibid.*). The England cricket team is almost universally accepted to be on a different sporting level entirely to the other home nations, and whilst rare victories in ODIs and other events are welcomed and enjoyed, this rarely challenges or threatens England’s widely acknowledged cricketing superiority. In contrast, football is played throughout the UK and all the
home nations compete at the same level in major football competitions, and have often found themselves to be in the same groups in the qualifying or final stages of international tournaments, although opportunities to play against each other on an even more regular basis have been restricted since the Home International Championships ended in 1984.

A further feature that remains unchallenged is cricket’s place in England’s imagining. In no other nation of the UK does cricket have anywhere near the same level of social or cultural significance for those who play or watch the sport, and nor does it take on great meaning as a symbol of the nation. However, cricket plays an enormous, if declining role, in constructing images of Englishness and the English nation amongst the English themselves, but also in the ways that Englishness is defined by the non-English (Holt, 1989; Marqusee, 1994; Williams, 1999). That this is in part an imagined conception that is idealised, nostalgic and far from the reality of the England that is experienced by most of its inhabitants, is largely irrelevant. It remains a powerful vision nevertheless, and is significant because it does not clash to any great degree with the cricketing and sporting cultures of the other nations of the UK. Football is massively important to all the ‘nations’ of the UK in terms of culture and national identity in a way that cricket is not, and each nation attaches different meanings and priorities to the sport. Subsequently, the decision to set aside over 130 years of tradition which has decreed that the British do not play football together is something that is more problematic for and difficult to justify to Scottish football fans, and to a lesser extent, Welsh and Northern Irish supporters, than the sight of their own cricketers playing for England from time to time.

---

87 England and Wales can be currently found playing in the same qualifying group for the 2012 European Championships to be held in Poland/Ukraine.
Perhaps the most significant influence on the differing perceptions of a football team comprising of players from all four nations of the UK and a cricket team similarly comprised is that of social class. The sport of cricket has a far more middle class appeal than football, and it is fairly safe to say that this is the case in all four home nations, although it would also be true to say that in England cricket enjoys more cross-class support. For middle class cricket fans, cricket is a sport that is experienced and appreciated in ways that are different from football, traditionally lacking the same levels of aggressive masculinity and tribalism that are commonly associated with the latter.

Although there have been some shifts in the ways that cricket is appreciated and followed in recent years with the introduction of new innovations such as 20Twenty, this has been generally restricted to England and south Wales. These appeals for, amongst other things, a broader, and potentially more working class audience for live cricket matches have thus had little impact on the generally limited middle class support enjoyed by cricket in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. As a result, it might be argued that middle class British, but non-English, cricket fans might be better able to circumvent the bitter and often acrimonious exchanges that have been common to the debate surrounding a Team GB football team. Middle class fans are able to justify and rationalise their support and appreciation of the England cricket team in spite of its primary antecedents as a sport strongly associated with England and imagined concepts of Englishness.

That football has a predominantly working class following across the UK is of particular importance here, and the strong strand of tribalism and rivalry that is
emblematic of football support is undeniably implicated in the opposition that has found voice in relation to the debate surrounding football and Team GB. Any proposals therefore to engage with one’s sporting rivals in a meaningful way are likely to be met with a degree of trepidation at best, and outright opposition at worst, though this is likely to be of varying strength and fervour depending on the social context within which particular fans operate. This is clearly evident within the data and is demonstrated by these posts: ‘I do wish England the best but I will be rooting for the opposite team’ (Scottish Poster 78); ‘I'm happy to let them get on with it and will give them the same level of support, I give every other England national team, namesly bugger all’ (Northern Irish Poster 1). It is also significant that many of the fans who are in favour of a Team GB football team are less fans of football and more fans of the Olympic team more generally. This chimes with the experience of Olympic football offered by Tomlinson (2001), who noted the general lack of intensity, tribalism and aggressive masculinity in Olympic football when compared with other national competitions:

in no Olympic city or around any Olympic event will a set of sports fans capable of the excesses of this traditional rump of football culture be present (225).

8.2.6 Complexities of Anti-Englishness and Team GB

Some of those who are vehemently opposed to a Team GB football team are able to make this distinction for themselves, and a desire to support British athletes in other events is not precluded by their dislike and hostility to the very idea of a combined Team GB football team. This poster’s comments articulate the position well:

I have no problem supporting British runners, swimmers, rowers, cyclists etc but over 100 years of separate football identity means supporting a GB football team is a non-runner I'm afraid (Scottish Poster 75).
This reflects the possibility for posters to maintain separate, distinctive and coexistent sporting identities as demonstrated in multi-national states such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and noted by Allison (2004). This also clearly demonstrates the complexity of the issues raised by the debate, and indicates further the problematic nature of the relationship and linkages between different sporting preferences and wider political imperatives. Put simply, it is apparent that there is no straightforward correlation between one’s preference for or against a Team GB football team, and the desire to retain the UK as a political union, or to seek independence for a particular nation. Where this is clearer, though by no means unequivocal, is when the preference for no Team GB football team is extended to include a desire for no Team GB full stop. In these cases, it is rather easier to equate the desire for separate Olympic representation for the individual nations of the UK to be replicated in separate political arrangements, insofar as the sporting aspiration would question the legitimacy of the UK as a sovereign political state. However, what might be harder to tell is if this desire is based upon an incomplete understanding of the IOC’s regulations regarding qualification for separate Olympic status. If this simply extends to an aspiration for English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh Olympic teams based upon the example of football, where individual nations compete independently, then it is less easy to discern any concomitant desire for a change in the political status of the UK:

I think it's very sad that the 4 nations cannot be allowed to compete as 4 nations in the Olympics. There are many precedents for countries taking part who are not independent - i.e. Hong Kong, American Samoa, Puerto Rico etc (Scottish Poster 44).

Indeed, it may also be the case that such desires may not necessarily be founded upon any great degree of anti-Englishness, but might rather be part and parcel of the desire
to present particular nations as demonstrably different, distinct or culturally separate from the UK, or the other nations within it. Bairner (2001) identified that the British games that were imported into non-British nations were transformed so as to represent unique forms of sporting culture, and undeniably football amongst other sports, was also transformed and imbued with particular meanings and understandings in the nations within the UK. So whilst there may not be any real political imperative to the sentiments, they re-emphasize the significance and importance of culture within the construction of separate national identities, and in particular, the role that football and other sports may play in these processes in distinguishing between the nations of the UK. Any attempt to seek to play football together as one team would thus be impossible for many to even consider; hence the assertion that any Scot who plays alongside the English ‘is a traitor’ (Scottish Poster 69).

8.2.7 Anti-Englishness and Olympic Football

Setting aside the fact that Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and by extension, England, are extremely unlikely in the future to gain separate Olympic recognition without the formal break-up of the UK, it is certainly interesting to ponder on how such arrangements would unfold in terms of Olympic football. If, for example, as was suggested in the data, all four nations had competed against each other in order to determine which team would go on to represent Team GB in London, then a number of factors might have come into play. Firstly, the non-English nations would have been granted a gilt-edged opportunity to play and beat the English at football, and in so doing demonstrate both their superior football credentials to the world and their distinctiveness within and from the UK as a larger entity. Secondly, it would have allowed the ‘nations’ to demonstrate a particular version of their national identity that
would be different from their own nationality, as proposed in the submerged sporting nation thesis (Bairner, 2005). Finally, the Olympic football tournament itself might have assumed a far greater significance for British football fans if their own nation were suddenly competing in it, rather than being an entity that had to all intents and purposes been invented for the convenience of the BOA, IOC and the London games.

Given the paucity of British football’s triumphs over its long history, one cannot help but wonder whether the scant regard that British fans seemingly have for Olympic football, or what might be considered as one of the last vestiges of a British dimension in football, disappear overnight if the possibility of a gold medal for one of the home nations, independently or as part of a combined Team GB team, were to arise. Conversely, there might be a resultant further lack of interest if this was the case and an all-England team went on to compete at the Games, which is broadly what the plan is for London 2012, though under the guise of a Team GB. The opportunity for expressions of anti-Englishness here are also clearly ripe. What this does show quite clearly is that even anti-Englishness is a complex concept, not simply based on a binary opposition between Englishness and Scottishness, but rather something that is flexible and contingent.

8.2.8 Team GB, Anti-Englishness and Political Attitudes

Although much of the data provides an informative and at times insightful window through which to view contemporary ideas about national identity, often what is at least as significant is what is not being said. In this regard, aside from the restricted number of expressions of support for independent representation for the home nations in the Olympic Games, there is very little data that might be regarded as evidence of a
desire for political independence for either Scotland or Wales. The complexity of the issues at hand is such that it remains extremely difficult to equate these desires, where they are apparent, to a corresponding political imperative. Indeed, evidence is available that directly contradicts this perspective, and in so doing, again highlights the complexity of sporting nationalisms more generally, as well as those that can be applied in the particular case of the sporting United Kingdom. What this absence of an open and explicit drive for independence, through the abandonment of a Team GB football team for London 2012, suggests most strongly is that there is a propensity for the debate to reflect those forms of nationalism identified by Hargreaves (2000).

In his analysis of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games and its implications for Catalan national identity, Hargreaves identifies two forms of nationalism that can be adopted by submerged nations; exclusive and inclusive forms. In terms of the Barcelona Olympics, Hargreaves maintains that it was the latter and not the former that found greatest expression in the staging of the games in Catalonia. He argues that it represented

not only a clash between Catalan ethnic nationalist identity and a civic conception of nationality, but a division within the nationalist community, between separatists and those who want to remain part of Spain, or in other words, a clash between exclusive and inclusive nationalism (164).

Here, Catalan nationalism promoted and celebrated the nation, but firmly within the context of the broader Spanish state, which was seen to be under no explicit threat. In this regard, it may be that Scottish nationalism, as well as forms of nationalism evident in Northern Ireland and Wales, operates in a similar way in the debate about a Team GB football team for 2012. Anxieties about the future status of the home

In the past in Northern Ireland some smaller groupings, closer to the edges of Loyalism, have agitated for the province to become independent from both the UK and Republic of Ireland. Most Unionists in Northern Ireland though are more likely to want the close political and cultural relationship with Great Britain to remain.
nations teams are wrapped up in broader concerns about the future possibilities for the distinctiveness and separateness of the home nations. This it is hoped, by some posters, can continue to be demonstrated through the continued existence of the home nations’ football teams: ‘Most Scottish posters aren't against 'Team GB' because they are anti-english. It is the threat of a permanent UK team that concerns most’ (Scottish Poster 26). Within this conception lies an apparent truth. Given that the only way to actively secure an English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh team in perpetuity would be to seek formal independence and the subsequent break-up of the union, there has to be an inherent satisfaction, or at least a lack of dissatisfaction, with the current political arrangements within the UK. This also points to the inaccuracy of Tom Nairn’s prophecy (1977) regarding the inevitable break-up of Britain, which has so far failed to come to fruition.

If views were held by posters that did significantly reflect a desire to transform the current political and constitutional arrangements in the UK, then the debate surrounding a Team GB football team would have been an ideal space in which to articulate them. That this has scarcely happened, suggests, though suggestion is as far as this can be extended, that whilst the home nations’ football teams remain significant in the construction of national identity, this is often framed within an inclusive paradigm of nationalism that is concerned with the promotion of the nation, but within a context that does not threaten, or rather, can be accommodated within the existing status quo. This in part reflects the dualities that are possible within the UK, it being possible to be English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh at the same time as being British. That this is negotiable, flexible and contingent is significant, and the possibility to alter this balance depending on what perspective is being used to view
the dualities from, such as through particular sports, is also important. Hence, anti-Englishness may at times be employed within the context of football, but perhaps less virulently expressed through other sports, or indeed other channels more generally. It may also be expressed explicitly, or in some ways, more implicitly displayed.

8.2.9 English and Scottish Responses to Anti-Englishness

In terms of English responses to anti-Englishness, this was perhaps indicative of an increasing ability to recognise the distinctions between the nations of the UK far more than they have done so before, and may in part reflect recent research that argues that the English have become less British in recent years (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2009). Whilst this does not mean that English nationalism has increased *per se*, it does suggest that it is now possible for expressions of English nationalism to be openly made, and that this particular debate is one that is fruitful in providing opportunities for the distinctions and symbolic boundaries between ‘nations’, including England, to be articulated. This is reminiscent of Kumar (2003) who in considering the changing contexts of English nationalisms reflected that

> in whichever direction they look, the English find themselves called upon to reflect upon their identity, and to re-think their position in the world. The protective walls that shielded them from these questions are all coming down (16).

For their part, Scottish reactions to anti-Englishness, are suggestive of changing perspectives that see the possibilities in and limitations of the expression of Scottish identity within the context of football, and the Team GB debate in particular. We might also consider some of the reasons why anti-Englishness is so keenly felt by non-English posters. Many cite the arrogance of English posters in anticipating that a combined Team GB team would be dominated by English players as being prominent
in framing their responses to the Team GB debate. Indeed, this does appear to be of significance, and also reflects what has long been the case in footballing terms, namely the dominance of the England and the subordination of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales within the UK. This is reflected in the structures of British football that reproduce the dominance of England within the broader Union (Moorhouse, 1996).

Whilst trying to avoid providing an account that could be termed reductionist, there are elements of this debate that echo the theoretical perspectives of Hechter (1975) and Nairn (1977). Both focus on the unequal development of economic and power relationships between the ‘nations’ of the UK, and this is evidenced in the way that football was, and still is, organised in these islands. The undoubted and overpowering financial dominance of the Premier League and FA in England over their counterparts in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales sees the English adopting a position of dominance, whilst the non-English nations remain broadly subordinate. In the past, many non-English players from the other nations of the UK found themselves attracted to English club teams because the financial incentives on offer were more attractive and lucrative than those offered within their own national leagues. What has changed is that whilst players from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland still come to England to play their club football, they now have to compete with players from across the world who also come to Britain and Europe to ply their trade as patterns of labour migration in football have been transformed.

8.3 Team GB and the Conflation of England and Great Britain

In the previous section, the discussion considered anti-Englishness in its more explicit
forms. In this section, the focus will move on to consider anti-Englishness in its more implicit forms, and will centre specifically on issues surrounding the perceived conflation of England/Englishness and Great Britain/Britishness. The issue of conflation and its implications is fairly prominent throughout the data for those debating the possibility of a Team GB football team for the 2012 Olympic Games and as such, deserves further attention and consideration. To start, it would be useful to return to one of the potential solutions to the puzzle of a combined football team for Great Britain that was offered, namely an all-English team competing on behalf of Team GB.

**8.3.1 An All-English Team for London 2012**

Whilst having gained a degree of support from some quarters, the proposed inclusion of an all-English team has, as we have already seen, provoked some explicit anti-English sentiments from non-English posters. The support that has been shown for the proposal is fairly diverse in its nature. It is no surprise that some English fans have been supportive, and yet there is also relatively substantial support from non-English fans. The nature of this particular support, and its motivations are equally diverse. Clearly, there is an understanding that an all-England team would go some way to satisfying those who are concerned about the future security of the independent status of the home nations’ teams. For others though, the promotion of an all-England team offers different incentives. Many operate safely in the knowledge that with an all-English team, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh players would not have to come together to play football with the English. The nature of football rivalry being as it is, this may of course be the main reason for this view. In this regard, it is clear to see how difficult it is to ascertain whether or not a particular poster’s desire to see an all-
English football team compete in the London Games is evidence of a wider endorsement of the political status quo without any corresponding and equivalent expressed desire for their own team to be able to compete too.

For others, the imposition of an all-English team is something that will only increase the problems faced by the non-English nations in the United Kingdom. The main point that is made in this respect is that there is a regular and incorrect conflation, or at least an uncertainty, between what constitutes England or Englishness and Great Britain and Britishness:

a difficulty is presented … by a degree of ambiguity about being British, which is not present in being English, and in some ways the consensus on what constitutes the nation is more firmly rooted in the latter than the former conception (Hargreaves, 1986: 155).

For many, the participation of an all-English team will only add to this confusion in the minds of many English people who commonly see England as Britain, as well as among non-British people who often make the mistake of seeing Great Britain as being synonymous with England alone. According to Kumar (2003), this conflation serves for many non-English people as ‘a constant reminder of what they perceive to be … England’s hegemony over the rest of the British Isles’ (1). The negative responses of some non-English fans to the proposal for an all-English XI to represent Team GB can thus be regarded as an attempt to ensure that the distinctions and symbolic boundaries between what is considered to be English and what is considered to be British are reinforced and maintained. Once again this points to the significance of the home nations’ teams, in three main ways; in terms of representing the distinctiveness of the particular nations; in demonstrating the distinctions between the nations that constitute the UK; and in contrasting the nations with the concept of Great Britain as a whole. For others though, there is undoubtedly an anti-English
element that is comforting to those that could not bear to join with the English in any football team: ‘I'm Scottish and could never agree to a team of Scots/English together. Sorry’ (Scottish Poster 68).

8.3.2 The British and Irish Lions, Conflation and Team GB

One of the most regular ripostes to those who were generally opposed to a combined Team GB competing at London was that something very similar is achieved on a regular basis in rugby union with the British and Irish Lions, so why not with football: ‘GB’s national rugby teams have a fearsome pride for their sport but here they were putting it aside to show a UNITED front to the world’ (Welsh Poster 6). This is an interesting question and considering it may provide some illustrative answers, not least as to why the issue of conflation is less apparent and less easily discernible with reference to the Lions, a team to which the four British rugby teams contribute players, whereas ordinarily they compete separately89. We might also consider the history of the British and Irish Lions, who have been playing matches since 191090.

Also significant when comparing support for the British and Irish Lions with that for a combined Great Britain football team is the fact that, whilst there is a long history of the nations of Great Britain and Ireland playing together, there has never been a discernible, exclusively British dimension in rugby union (Holt and Mason, 2000). This in part may have been the result of the influence of players from the Republic of Ireland taking part even though they would ordinarily object to any form of British

89 To be good enough to play for one’s nation is a great accolade in its own right, but to be considered to be the best from four of the world’s premier rugby-playing ‘nations’ is something different entirely. As such, being selected to play for the Lions is considered to be a huge honour.

90 This was the first official tour, though combined British and Irish teams played regularly in the Southern Hemisphere from 1888 onwards.
identification, however small. In so doing, they effectively dilute or restrict the possibilities for a British identity to be invoked. Tuck (2001) has argued that the residual nature of British identity ensures that the nation remains a more primary source of identity. The players feel English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh either instead of or as well as British (117).

This strongly suggests that supporting the British and Irish Lions could be undertaken without posing a challenge to one’s own national identity in the way that a combined Great Britain football team might. Rugby union operates in a way that allows ‘national’ teams to complement a broader and historic British identity and this has been recognised in a number of ways most particularly in Scotland (Bairner, 2001; Gill, 2005) and Wales (Johnes, 2000; Andrews, 1999; Williams, 1991). Additionally, there is another factor that might help to explain why supporting the British and Irish Lions might not create quite as much of a quandary regarding one’s own national identity as a Great Britain football team for the Olympic Games, and may also overcome some of the issues associated with the conflation of England and Great Britain. As with the case of the England cricket team discussed above, we can again look to the issue of social class to provide some explanations.

Though it would be incorrect to state that rugby union only has only middle class appeal in the United Kingdom, it is quite clear that it is a sport that predominantly appeals far less to working class fans. In England for example, rugby union is a sport that has been historically associated with upper and middle class sensibilities (Tuck, 2003). In Scotland too, rugby union is also predominantly a sport of the middle classes (Holt, 1989; Holt and Mason, 2000). It is also a regionally exclusive sport in Scotland and aside from certain parts of Edinburgh and Glasgow, the sport is confined to the Borders areas where rugby is more democratic (Massie, 2000) but which is both
geographically and culturally close to England, reflecting the possibilities of ‘national’ as well as British forms of identity (Gill, 2005). Scottish rugby union has thus been characterised as a fiercely proud and patriotic sporting nationalism rather than any explicit or outright political nationalism (Bairner, 1996).

In the case of Northern Ireland, it is clear that the strongest support and preference for rugby union comes from the (Protestant) middle classes, and the sport is played in state grammar schools alongside other British games (Bairner, 2005b). Additionally, there is a degree of antipathy towards the Ireland rugby team from working class Ulster Loyalists (Hassan, 2005). By being situated for the most part away from the main areas of Northern Ireland’s troubles, rugby union’s broadly middle class appeal has been said to allow its proponents to successfully avoid the sectarian realities of life in the north of Ireland (Bairner, 2005b; Holt, 1989; Holt and Mason, 2000). This may also assist Northern Irish rugby union fans when contemplating the British dimension to their identity alongside their Irishness. Additionally, there is comfort for the Northern Irish in negotiating their relationship with their southern counterparts in rugby union in the fact that the game that is being played is British. Overall, the predominantly middle class support that rugby union enjoys in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland enables fans to move more freely and comfortably between particular sporting national identities. This is because, like cricket, rugby union is broadly free from the aggressive tribalism of football:

the majority of rugby fans wouldn't have strong views against team gb(footy) because there invariably support the lions, have less restricting and more intelligenent views (English Poster 22).

As such, the rugby playing ‘nations’ of the UK are more secure in their own status, and less emotionally attached to them.
The situation in Wales is slightly different. The middle classes certainly played a significant role in the development of rugby union in the principality (Andrews, 1991), but the sport has gone on to reflect a far more inclusive ethos than is the case in England and Scotland, and it is often contrasted with them in this regard (Holt, 1989). Welsh rugby union is also more secure in its status as the primary expression of Welsh sporting national identity, which cannot be said of rugby union in England, Northern Ireland or Scotland. The extent then to which the sport is associated with Welshness ensures that the existence of the British and Irish Lions does not significantly impinge upon Welsh identity, and offers what might be regarded as a form of insulation from the influence of a broader British identity.

Given that the nature of rugby union is that any British dimension is almost incidental, and that it is the nation that remains the primary source of identification, it is clear that the conflation of England and Great Britain is less significant within the context of the British and Irish Lions. In this respect, a number of things are apparent from the data whenever a comparison is drawn between a Great Britain Olympic football team and the British and Irish Lions. Firstly, this further recognises the complexity and contingency of sporting national identity in the United Kingdom:

Every other sport manages to sort these things out. Whinge all summer, guys. I'll be sitting down with a pint watching the British and Irish Lions. Yes - Irish - you can be a real country and still play with people born on other spotty lumps of land (Scottish Poster 81).

Secondly, there is a failure subsequently to acknowledge the implications for varying constructions of national identity through different representative sporting teams:

So what is your opinion on the British Lions Rugby Union team? Here we have a sport that is much loved at a 'Scottish' national level but also much loved when the home nations all play as one team (Scottish Poster 80).
8.3.3 Conflation, Football and the Symbols of the United Kingdom

Although the issue of conflation is seemingly less significant when viewed through rugby union, there remain a number of issues in football itself that actively contribute to this problem. A primary concern raised in the data is that the implementation of a Team GB football team in London 2012 makes conflation more likely. That there is very little to distinguish the England football team from a Great Britain football team is seen to be of great significance, albeit far less for fans of England. For them the symbolic journey between supporting the England football team and a Great Britain football team is far shorter than any equivalent journey that fans from Scotland, Wales and even Northern Ireland would have to make. Interestingly, it is the silence of English posters on this issue that is most telling, with very few, if any, acknowledging this or the common conflation that exists.

The explanation for this is that there are a number of major symbols in football that can be associated with both England and Great Britain teams. Firstly, and of most significance, is the use of the British national anthem, ‘God Save the Queen’, which is played before all England international football matches. This anthem has in the past been played before all home nations football matches, and today whilst Scottish and Welsh football teams now stand for ‘Flower of Scotland’ and ‘Hen Wad Fy Nhadau’ (Land of My Fathers) respectively, it remains the case that ‘God Save the Queen’ is still played before matches involving both England and Northern Ireland. The use of symbols of the nation has already been flagged up as being of enormous importance within sporting nationalisms. Hargreaves (2000) notes the ‘extraordinarily rich opportunity it [sport] affords for deploying symbols of the nation’ (55) and Polley (1998) suggests that the nation is ‘formally enshrined in sport, through the use of flags
and anthems in ceremonial aspects’ (35). Thus, the significance of the continued use of ‘God Save the Queen’, especially before England matches cannot be overstated.

For the England football team particularly\(^9\), the use of the national anthem of Great Britain to precede international matches reinforces and reproduces the conflation between the two entities, and makes it difficult to differentiate and distinguish between them:

- It would appear the English FA and BOA just don't share the concern (they don't care). The English FA don't have much to lose do they? They already sing the UK national anthem, fans wave the UK national flag at matches and fans sing the Scottish song "Rule Britannia." It will be hard to convince the FA that a GB team is not desirable (Scottish Poster 44).

The reception given to ‘God Save the Queen’ by Scottish fans, and to a lesser extent, those of Wales, has always provided an opportunity for those minded to express a degree of anti-Englishness. Hence, the anthem has often been greeted with choruses of boos from sections of the crowd whenever England has played matches in Cardiff and Glasgow. It would be wrong to suggest that these sentiments are universally felt, or indeed that the expression of such is suggestive of any wider political views. In addition, this practice may be indicative of something other than anti-Britishness given the similar reception that ‘God Save the Queen’ received before the friendly match between Scotland and Northern Ireland at Hampden Park in 2008 (“Scotland escape sanction”, 2008). The response to the playing of the national anthem of Lichtenstein, which shares the same tune as ‘God Save the Queen’, before the recent Euro 2012 qualifier again played at Hampden Park might also suggest this, although it should also be seen as a somewhat misguided attempt at terrace ‘humour’ (“Scottish

\(^9\) In the case of the Northern Ireland football team, who also stand to ‘God Save the Queen’ before their matches, there are obviously also issues around the use of this anthem that are problematic and uncomfortable for those fans that are of Nationalist or Republican persuasions. For Unionists and Loyalists though the association with Britain may be more welcome.
FA sorry after fans boo”, 2010), rather than evidence of an anti-Lichtenstein mood north of the border.

The fact remains though that the continued use of ‘God Save the Queen’ by the Football Association contributes greatly to the perceived close association between England and Great Britain, both in relation to the English themselves, and also to the other ‘nations’ of the United Kingdom, and to those from overseas. Additionally, England’s home matches are now all played in London, the UK’s capital and seat of government, and in the past the team has been associated with the Union Flag rather than the St George’s Cross. This means that for many posters the association between England and Great Britain, and the conflation of the two by the English and by others is unappealing: ‘if the team was solely english but called Great Britain then it would be like calling me english which i object to completely’ (Scottish Poster 45).

A Great Britain football team for the London Olympic Games would almost certainly play its games in London, under the Union Flag, and matches would be preceded, and ultimately superseded if a gold medal were to be won, by ‘God Save the Queen’. There is no part of this that recognises in full or in part the distinctions between both the historic and separate footballing ‘nations’ of the United Kingdom, and the conflation of England and Great Britain that commonly takes place. If the England football team were perhaps to have something more suitably and demonstrably English as their sporting anthem, such as ‘Jerusalem’, as at the Commonwealth Games, or alternatively ‘Land of Hope and Glory’, then this would allow future English teams to be much more easily distinguished from those of Great Britain. If the

---

92 There is a suggestion here that it is the often close association of the England football team and London and the south-east of England that is more problematic for some Scots than would be the case with some other regions of England.
Northern Irish football team were also to identify and adopt another anthem such as ‘The Londonderry Air’, as is again done for the Commonwealth Games, then it would be possible to reserve ‘God Save the Queen’ for those very few events, such as the Olympic Games, when the ‘nations’ of the UK come together to formally compete as one. Not to do so fails to adequately reflect the separate and distinctive sporting and football cultures of the United Kingdom, and makes the participation of a combined Team GB football team far less palatable for supporters of the non-English nations.

8.3.4 Summary: Conflation and Team GB

It is worth asking the question as to how deep these issues run and it is almost certain that if the 2012 Olympic Games had been awarded to Paris rather than London then the likelihood is that this debate would never have taken place. While it is true that previous discussions about the possibility of a combined Great Britain and Northern Ireland football team have in the past been raised, usually after one or all of the home nations has performed badly in international football tournaments, these have never had the stature and import of those that have attended the debate surrounding a football team for London 2012, mainly because they have previously only been hypothetical. The proposal for a Team GB football team for London 2012 means that the debate has taken on a very real importance. However, sporting nationalisms are renowned for their temporal and ephemeral nature (Cronin, 1999; Walker, 1994; Johnes, 2000), and the likelihood has to be that this issue and debate will quickly disappear as soon as the Olympic flame at the London Games is extinguished.

93 At the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, the anthems used for the home nations were ‘Jerusalem’ (England), ‘Londonderry Air’ (Northern Ireland), ‘Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau’ (Wales) and replacing ‘Scotland the Brave’ for the first time, ‘Flower of Scotland’ (Scotland).
Both the opposition to a Team GB football team and indeed support for it are suggestive of a degree of satisfaction with the sporting status quo in the United Kingdom. For many of those opposed to the proposals, the general lack of any explicit desire for separate Olympic representation points to the fact that the debate is predominantly a sporting one. Indeed, that many of those who do oppose a Team GB football team are willing to change their opinions should guarantees from FIFA regarding the future independent status of the home nations teams be forthcoming further strengthens this view:

If we were somehow to get an iron clad document from FIFA saying we could combine for the Olympics and this would never affect our individual FAs’ status from now until the end of time then I wouldn't mind so much (Scottish Poster 33).

This indicates that many people are still willing to accept that there is a British dimension to their sporting identity, and this echoes some of the recent findings from the work of Bechhofer and McCrone (2009) on Scottish national identity, that found that ‘most Scots have not ceased to think of themselves as British, although 35 per cent do say that they are more Scottish than British’94 (9). Whilst large numbers of Scots still admit to a degree of Britishness within their overall identity, it is far harder however to extend this viewpoint to reflect an equivalent commitment to the political constitution of the United Kingdom, although it certainly shows that there is a balance to be struck between how people construct their national identities when presented with the possibilities of a dual identity. As with a pair of scales, careful attention needs to be paid to ensure that the balance is not tipped between national and supra-national identities. The make-up of this balance will vary between different people and continue to reflect the flexibility and contingency of sporting national identity in the United Kingdom. The balance might be affected by a number of factors such as

94 Author’s Italics.
the threat to the separate status of the home nations’ football teams. As such, this may be enough to upset the balance between the two competing forms of identity. However, the different results of economic cutbacks are far more likely to prompt increased demands for further political change.

8.4 Concluding Thoughts on the Data

Much of what has been seen in the data is difficult to apply to the grand theories that have in the past been used to account for the emergence of nations and nationalisms in the modern era. Certainly, they are helpful in some limited ways in describing some of the processes by which nations have emerged or have come to be imagined. But they are less useful in describing the ways in which people’s everyday lives feature in the imagining of nations. In relation to this and the debate about Team GB, we must necessarily return to the ‘banal nationalism’ of Billig (1995). Billig’s understanding of nationalism is different, and refers to a phenomenon that occurs not only in open and explicit ways, but also in the ‘continual “flagging”, or reminding, of nationhood’ (1995: 8). The significant aspect of this is precisely the ‘banal’ nature of this form of nationalism. Here then is a conception of nationalism that

is not a flag that is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building’ (ibid.).

A variation of this function is performed by the home nations’ football teams. Although the matches that they play are fairly irregular in occurrence, and more demonstrable expressions of the nation are evidenced when this occurs, even when they are not playing the teams are still there, and their symbolic significance to the ‘nation’ is continually demonstrated. This is not always in obvious or discernible ways, but in the manner in which the teams perpetually occupy the hearts and minds
of their fans, and also in the presence that the teams retain in newspapers, on television and increasingly on the Internet through stories and narratives. Discussions are always being undertaken, to differing degrees, about the last match or the next match to be played, which players should or should not be selected for future fixtures, player injuries and retirements, and the performance of team managers and coaches. We might add the debate surrounding Team GB and the continuation of the home nations teams as individual and independent entities to this list. This constant and yet unconscious reminder of the nation is thus significant in that it functions in the ways that Billig identified: ‘so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding’ (ibid.). If the ultimate result of a Team GB team competing at the 2012 Olympic Games is the removal of the home nations’ teams, then this would be something that would render a powerful and implicit indicator of the ‘nation’ or ‘nations’ redundant.
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

In terms of the originality of this thesis and its contribution to existing knowledge, the scope of the research may be split into two main areas: its significance to football, nationalism and national identity in the UK, and its novel and innovative methodology. Firstly, the research has focused largely on British sporting nationalisms. Whilst there has been much previous work on the relationship between football and national identity in the UK, this has for the most part concentrated on the individual home nations teams rather than on a combined British Olympic football team. The distinct focus that this research takes then should be regarded as a first step on the long road to providing specific understandings about the relationship between football, sport and Britishness.

Additionally, given the nature and complexity of the composition of its different national representative sporting teams, the research identifies the often incoherent and inconsistent nature of sporting nationalisms in the UK. In relation to this, the thesis also acknowledges the contribution played by the Great Britain and Northern Ireland Olympic team to differing ideas and conceptions of nations and national identity in the UK. Once again, there has been little or no previous empirical work that has considered the British Olympic team and its significance for sporting nationalisms in the UK, and this research has begun the process of addressing this anomaly. Given that there are very few other opportunities for the nations of the UK to compete as one combined team aside from the summer and winter Olympic Games, this should be seen to be of particular importance. For these reasons, this research offers a distinctive, empirical contribution to contemporary understandings about football, sport and national identity in the UK.
The second main claim about the originality of the thesis and of its contribution to existing knowledge is that the methodological approach that is adopted is one that is not widely used at present. The use of the Internet for social interactions has grown enormously in the last ten to fifteen years and the social significance of online interaction has broadly followed suit. This research is innovative to the extent that it recognises this phenomenon and focuses on existing online resources where the issue of a combined Team GB football team for the London 2012 Olympic Games has already been under discussion. This provides both opportunities and challenges. The main opportunity was provided by the broadly democratic nature of these new media, in that they provide for such issues to be discussed by like-minded people in totally new and socially significant ways. This clearly has enormous value in sociological terms and is something that will undoubtedly become more prominent and of greater consequence in the coming years. The challenges that presented themselves originate in the novel nature of these new areas of social interaction. Research that focuses upon Internet-based social exchanges is clearly pre-paradigmatic. This has meant that the approach taken to the research has by implication had to be flexible and, to a considerable extent, it has been a case of learning as one goes along.

9.1 Methodological Reflections

As always with projects of this kind, there is a tendency to reflect at this stage and to think of how one might have approached the research problem differently given the benefit of hindsight. The original intention was to utilise focus groups and it would be true to say that to have done so would have made it easier to direct the inquiry and to probe deeper into particular areas of interest once they became apparent. Additionally, the provision of contextual details about respondents would be far easier with focus
groups, and this would have allowed factors such as gender and ethnicity to be incorporated more fully into the findings. However, there were a number of problems that meant that focus groups were ultimately deemed less viable for the purposes of the research. In the first instance, an enormous amount of time would have had to be invested in focus groups to make them work effectively. Recruitment of group members alone would have been problematic, and the logistical concerns that are apparent would have increased significantly given the regularity with which focus groups would have been expected to gather in order to be worthwhile. Additionally, given the sensitive and contentious nature of the debate for a number of people, the focus group interview format may have meant that some group members would be less comfortable, or more reluctant to discuss issues or express views that might be considered to be controversial or likely to cause offence or conflict. The potential reactions from group members to an English researcher were also thought to be potentially problematic. This was particularly so given the propensity of some fans from Scotland, and to a lesser extent also from Northern Ireland and Wales, to have anti-English attitudes where the England football team were concerned, alongside the nature of the debate itself which was perceived in many ways to be more palatable for the English fans.

On balance, the decision to reject focus groups in favour of adopting a virtual ethnographic approach was the correct one. The use of virtual ethnography was a far more suitable and appropriate methodology, and has achieved a number of positive outcomes that focus groups would not have done. In the first instance, data was generated and collected in a wide range of different online spaces. This has enabled a far wider and more diverse range of respondents to be included in the data than would
ordinarily be the case if the reliance were solely on focus groups. The asynchronous nature of the online exchanges was of particular significance in this respect, and allows for posters to be selective in what they choose to respond to, and also permits them to exercise careful thought and deliberation before their replies are submitted. Additionally, this asynchronicity reduces the need for posters to be proficient in the use of a keyboard to be able to contribute to online discussions, and which again potentially widens the field of respondents. Additionally, the anonymity afforded to respondents by the Internet may encourage more intimate and sensitive posts than might be expected from more face-to-face interactions.

Secondly, the lack of researcher influence on the field, which is a feature of this approach, was achieved through adopting a totally covert approach of lurking and harvesting. The effective removal of the effect of the researcher on the field is perhaps one of the primary advantages of virtual ethnographies, and is something that can rarely be said of other more ‘traditional’ ethnographic approaches or interview-based research methodologies. A further positive feature of virtual ethnographies, and another distinct advantage over other methods, is that the data is generated and collected in an easy and convenient manner. In so doing, this eliminates transcription bias because the data is captured in its entirety, and the researcher does not have to rely on field notes that have been written long after the researcher has left the field.

Overall, a virtual ethnographic approach represents a serious contribution to both the field of sport and national identity in the UK, and to the reshaping of the relationship between sociology and ethnography. This does not spell the end of traditional forms of ethnography, nor does this research envisage or call for this. Rather, it suggests
that the field has never been stronger, in that ethnography has been shown to be an approach to sociological research that is far more flexible, adaptable and contingent than has traditionally been thought. It is an approach that is not only moving into new and developing areas of social interest, but one that demonstrates that ethnographic research more generally retains its relevance in the contemporary social world.

In seeking to understand the extent to which the research findings may be generalised, it would be wise to exercise some caution. To regard them a being applicable to other sporting idioms, or indeed to other groups of football fans, would to be foolhardy for a number of reasons. Clearly the sport of football has a large following and it might rightly be considered the most popular and populous sport in the UK. It does not however possess a totally inclusive appeal and this is never more apparent than in relation to gender. The nature of the methods employed in this work makes the identification of a participant’s gender difficult and, whilst a very small number of females were revealed as more contextual information was forthcoming, it always felt as if these few and arguably isolated posters were probably in a small minority. Thus, to make any general claims that this work reflects and interrogates much more than simply the reflections, outlooks and opinions of anything other than a predominantly male cohort would be to labour under a rather large misapprehension. Furthermore, what can be said of gender applies equally to ‘race’ and ethnicity, in that once again it was difficult using the research methods selected to establish a person’s own antecedents.

Additionally, the predominant, though not exclusive, working class appeal of football across the ‘nations’ of the UK shows that any research that focuses on the game will
by definition be partial, and less sensitive to constructions of national identities that are aided by sports that appeal more readily to other social groups. It is important to say here that, just as it is difficult to establish a poster’s ethnicity or gender using these research methods, it is also hard to establish their social class. What can be said of football though is that it is embedded in particular understandings that are predominantly working class in origin. So whilst it is likely that not all posters contributing to Internet-based discussions about a Team GB are working class themselves, they do affect a working class habitus that reflects the working class traditions that have long colonised the game. This reflects the views of Sugden (2002), and of Back et al (2001) who in relation to England fans concluded that

for a significant proportion of fans the national team represents a means through which to associate with historically grounded notions of a particular white, working class English identity (250).

Sports that have a more middle class appeal such as rugby union, cricket and field hockey have proved useful in comparative terms and have helped to illuminate the different ways that issues such as anti-Englishness and the conflation of England and Great Britain are manifested within other sporting contexts, and the need for sensitivity to social class in explaining their fundamental appeals.

9.2 Recommendations for Further Research

As well as highlighting a number of wider areas where further research would be fruitful, it should also be made clear that there remain opportunities for work on the materialisation of a Team GB. Whilst the debate around whether a GB team should compete at all has all but ended, this is not the end of the story. An all-English team will be competing on behalf of Team GB in 2012 and it would certainly be interesting to follow-up this study by revisiting some of the websites during the tournament itself
to determine the reaction to what is being witnessed. Additionally, it would also be valuable to consider the next debate in the series, which will no doubt focus on the ramifications of what has transpired. In relation to this future work, a virtual ethnographic approach would no doubt prove eminently suitable once again.

In addition, further research needs to be undertaken, not only into the relationship between gender and national identity in the UK, but more specifically into the role that gender plays in sporting national identity in the UK. Without this, there remain significant gaps in our understanding of contemporary issues of national identities and nationalism. Also, there is room for more dedicated research that focuses on the nature of both national and supra-national identities for sports such as rugby union, hockey and cricket. And whilst this research has acknowledged the relevance of the Great Britain and Northern Ireland Olympic to sporting nationalisms, there remains a need for more specific research that focuses on the role that the British Olympic team has more generally in aiding constructions of national identities. This would lead to a far more substantial and nuanced understanding of British sporting identity reflecting the diversity of sporting cultures in the UK. In contemporary Britain this should also coalesce with research priorities that acknowledge and respect the role that diverse ethnic and religious groups play in the construction of national identities in relation to sport. In addition, further qualitative research on all the home nations’ football teams is needed to garner evidence of how and to what extent they and their fans contribute to ideas about the nation and how far this extends, if at all, into political identifications.
9.3 Nations, Nationalism and the Team GB Debate

These limitations notwithstanding, this research has uncovered the constructed and interpretative realities that the debate around a combined GB football team for London 2012 has helped to generate. The debate on whether a Team GB should compete in football at the London Games presented an ideal opportunity for fans to articulate their separatist, nationalist intentions and concomitant desires for fully independent statehood, and yet came and went without an enormous amount of incident. Having said that it was an opportunity to take a political stance, and while some posters undoubtedly did, the overwhelming sense one gets is that this was predominantly a sporting debate rather than a political one. In terms of imagining the ‘nation’ (Anderson, 1991), it is clear that independent ‘national’ football teams aid this conception. As Hobsbawm memorably claimed ‘the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people’ (Hobsbawm, 1992b: 143). In the case of a combined Team GB, this concept is thus unhelpful in terms of moving beyond the ‘nation’ to a larger, supra-national entity. A Great Britain football team would surely include some players who would be unknown to anyone other than fans from their own ‘nation’, and would be regarded as being the ‘other’ by some fans from the other nations. This would undoubtedly make it far harder for a fully imagined ‘nation’ to be realised in the hearts and minds of all fans.

There is an additional problem for a combined Great Britain football team insofar as there is very little meaningful symbolic material that would give a team any great resonance or connection with the people of the ‘nation’. The history of the team is sparse and its triumphs limited and very much confined to a different time and age. Thus a Team GB lacks much of what Maguire (1999) contends to be essential to the
relationship between sport and the nation:

shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs and disasters are recounted in compelling ways. It is these that give meaning to the notion of the nation and national identity (178).

That these essential components are missing in terms of a Team GB football team is telling, particularly because they do exist, all too readily, in the individual and distinct footballing histories of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is these components that give real and emotional meaning to sporting teams and of their relationships to nations, and this perhaps more than anything else explains why there is such reluctance among many fans to embrace a ‘national’ football team for London 2012.

Another significant aspect of this research is that the home nations’ football teams contribute to socially constructed ideas of the nation, or what Özkirimli argues is

an alternative conceptualization of nationalism, one that carries us beyond the objective/subjective and culture/politics dichotomies while at the same time enabling us to capture what is common to all nationalisms (2005: 162).

That this again borrows from Anderson (1991), in terms of the processes by which the nation is ‘imagined’ is undoubted, but another important aspect revolves around the ‘invented traditions’ thesis of Hobsbawm (1992a, 1992a, 1992b). That the home nations’ teams were ‘invented, constructed and formally instituted’ (Hobsbawm, 1992a, 1) is undeniable, and the depth of feeling and emotional attachment that they invoke and attract is clearly significant for many. The existence of the home nations’ teams has been and remains one of a limited number of instances whereby the ‘nations’ of the UK demonstrably exist as separate entities, as well as being one in which they are able to compete against each other in meaningful ways, even though this is less commonplace than used to be the case. One wonders then what would have happened had the original Football Association remained a UK-wide organisation.
What effect then does the continued existence of the home nations teams have in terms of nationalism if we can already say that they signify the distinctiveness of and differences between the individual home nations?

For this we return to the ‘banal nationalism’ of Billig (1995). Billig’s work is appropriate in that it is the ‘continual “flagging”, or reminding of nationhood’ (1995: 8) that is significant. It is an appreciation of nationalism that is not overtly or explicitly political, and one that fits well into the debate about Team GB. The debate is not always coherent, and it is often hard to discern where people stand more broadly, even if they take a particular stance on the issue of Team GB. The ‘banal nationalism’ thesis provides important insights into why, instead of simply seeking to explain the emergence of nations and nationalisms in the modern era, it must be demonstrated clearly how the nation is continually constructed and invoked in unconscious ways. The continued independent existence of the home nations’ football teams reflects and ‘flags’ the nation at various stages of visibility, more so during high-profile tournaments or matches, but also when matches are not being played, when the significance of the nation is no less important. It is merely invoked and demonstrated in different ways.

9.4 Final Thoughts: The Team GB Debate

By adopting and employing methods that are appropriate, innovative and emerging, it has been possible to demonstrate that the opportunity to express openly political desires within the debate about a Team GB Olympic football team has not been taken. The expectation was that the ideas expressed within the debate would broadly run parallel to the arguments that have been a feature of wider political and constitutional
debates for a number of years. The reality is that the association between the debates is less profound and less fervent than had been anticipated. Naturally, there is a degree of dissatisfaction in some quarters with the proposals for a Team GB football team to compete in the final stages of an Olympic football tournament for the first time since 1960. This is articulated predominantly in footballing terms rather than in those who instead seek political independence in order to secure the opportunity to enter the Olympic Games in their own right, rather than as part of Team GB. The organisational structures of football in the UK nowadays reflect the UK’s political structures far more closely than at any time before. This may if anything help to promote a degree of contentment with current political arrangements and a resistance to move back towards an all-British arrangement that would be contrary to the recent political devolution in the UK. Though the special status and privileges enjoyed by the home nations teams is unlikely to be formally challenged or changed whilst FIFA retains its statutes in their current format, it would be interesting to see what should happen if this were to change and a more explicit and real threat be revealed.

In sum, this research has taken an innovative and relatively new methodological approach to ask the question, what can be learnt about contemporary national identity and nationalism in the UK from the debate about a Team GB football competing at the Olympic Games in 2012. At a time when the UK remains a fairly fragile constitutional entity, the findings of this research may not have been those that one might have expected. But they do almost certainly offer an accurate picture of current attitudes toward sport and nationalism within the UK.
References


**Newspapers**


**Music**

‘Three Lions’, music by Ian Broudie, lyrics by Frank Skinner and David Baddiel, © Chrysalis Music Ltd.
Appendix

Online Discussion entitled: Fifa says Team GB ‘poses no risk’

#1 Scottish Poster 104

* 1st Team Squad Member
* Posts: 10,947
* Joined: 10-July 07

Posted 12 November 2008 - 12:11 PM

http://news.bbc.co.u...and/7723932.stm

Quote:

A British Olympic football team would not jeopardise the international status of the home nations, it is claimed.

Scottish Secretary Jim Murphy has gained assurances from Fifa that a one-off under-23 squad in 2012 would not impact on the home teams' standings.

The football governing bodies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all oppose a Great Britain team.

Mr Murphy said it was for football people to decide but the SFA said it still saw the idea as a threat.

The Scottish secretary told BBC Scotland he had been seeking assurances over the possibility of a GB international team taking part in the 2012 London Olympics.

He said: "I'm a football fan, I'm a Scotland fan, as well as being the secretary of state and I share the concerns that many people had about the impact it might have on the Scottish national team.

At some point, there is a real danger that a precedent of a Team GB will come back and threaten our status

SFA spokesman

"That's why I met Jerome Valcke, the general secretary of Fifa, yesterday and told him about my concerns and the concerns that many Scots have.

"He confirmed that Fifa, of course who regulate football, that the executive will agree that this one-off under-23 tournament could take place and it will not jeopardise the status of any of the home nations and I think that's very welcome news."

Concerns have been raised that a combined British team could affect the status of individual nations within football's governing body Fifa.

SNP MSP Stuart McMillan, a member of the Scottish Parliament's football team, raised comments made by Fifa president Sepp Blatter in March that a GB team would
put into question the privileges that the British associations have been given by the world body.

Mr McMillan said: "This is not a guarantee that the independence of the SFA and the other three national associations in the UK will not be threatened by a single UK football Olympic team.

"It is not in the gift of officials but all members of Fifa who could take away the SFA's independence."

Tournament call

An SFA spokesman also stressed that Fifa is an organisation made up of its members and it is their views which were important.

He added: "We await with interest the outcome of Fifa's deliberations next month but we must be clear on this.

"We will not do anything that we feel would jeopardise our status as a footballing nation in our own right. At this stage, we feel that a Team GB does just that.

"At some point, there is a real danger that a precedent of a Team GB will come back and threaten our status as a separate nation."

Prime Minister Gordon Brown supports the idea of a Team GB and last week Tory leader David Cameron suggested a 2012 London Olympics team could be decided by playing a home nations tournament.

#2 Scottish Poster 101

* Squad Member
* Posts: 1,590
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 12:22 PM

I know David Cameron's suggestion was made by many other people but as far as i'm concerned it's easily the best way forward.

#3 Scottish Poster 27

* Let's kick some arse!
* Posts: 11,160
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 12:25 PM
Anyone naive enough to trust an organisation run by Sepp Blatter deserves all they get.

#4 Scottish Poster 93

* I have a large
* Posts: 5,461
* Joined: 22-July 08

Posted 12 November 2008 - 12:36 PM

Iam very surprised that the Ugly Sisters and all who support them are not clamouring for a GB team to represent Britain in the 2012 Olympics.

If indeed there is a threat that FIFA would combine the home nations into one team would that not open the door for the Bigots to be involved in the English/British league where they believe they belong ????

#5 Scottish Poster 100

Posted 12 November 2008 - 12:53 PM

If its up to the members to decide then at ANY POINT they could vote against GB having individual teams, so we may as well go with it.

People are just worried that we wont get any players in it. Small minded bigots who cant see a bigger picture.

would be great exposure for some of the young lads in that team.

Go team GB!

#6 Scottish Poster 92

Posted 12 November 2008 - 12:59 PM

Has to be said, team GB is about the gayest name for a team ever. I'd be embarrassed to be associated with anything called team GB. :p

#7 Scottish Poster 96

* Chomp Chomp
* Posts: 4,597
* Joined: 27-September 07

Posted 12 November 2008 - 12:59 PM

Scotland down to 33rd in the new rankings just released.
1 Spain
2 Germany
3 Italy
4 Netherlands
5 Brazil
6 Argentina
7 Croatia
8 Russia
9 Czech Republic
10 Portugal

#8 Scottish Poster 104

* 1st Team Squad Member
* Posts: 10,947
* Joined: 10-July 07

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:06 PM

“JamboRobbo said:

Has to be said, team GB is about the gayest name for a team ever. I'd be embarrassed to be associated with anything called team GB. :p”

I agree. Team GB sounds so Americanised.

British football team, sound far more dignified.

#9 Scottish Poster 92

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:07 PM

“Scottish Poster 104 said:

I agree. Team GB sounds so Americanised.

British football team, sound far more dignified.
Pretty certain the term originated in Ireland.

Team Ireland was the first ever to use this name, now everyone else is following. :p

#10 Scottish Poster 91

* Squad Member
* Posts: 1,236
* Joined: 13-January 06
If a British football team in 2012 meant the death of the SFA then I'd vote for it

#11 Scottish Poster 98

* PipPipPipPipPipPip
* Posts: 7,772
* Joined: 17-January 06

Jeeze, when will they eventually put this idea in the bin where it belongs? 3 out of 4 nations aren't interested and have said so umpteen times. The fans aren't interested either if you go by the polls conducted by tv and radio stations.

How many ways do people have to say 'no'?

#12 Scottish Poster 46

* Season Ticket Holder
* Posts: 3,530
* Joined: 13-January 06

The Olympic football tournament is not worth ****ing on!

#13 Scottish Poster 20

* Squad Member
* Posts: 1,125
* Joined: 13-January 06

I've said this before, but the primary issue is nothing to do with separate teams being threatened. there is not, and never has been, any danger of an organisation which allows Andorra, San Marino etc to compete making the UK compete as aone team.

The big issue for FIFA is voting rights. The four home nations have a permanent seat (and in effect a blocking vote) on the FIFA executive committee, which many countries are unhappy about. If we were to compete as one, pressure would be put on them to lose this and lose their other privileges (granted for being founder members of FIFA).
Having said that, from my understanding of the constitution of FIFA, as long as we have the 4 votes of the home nations, it is impossible for them to do away with this anyway, but that might be wrong.

#14 Scottish Poster 104
* 1st Team Squad Member  
* Posts: 10,947  
* Joined: 10-July 07

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:15 PM

“Scottish Poster 92 said:
Pretty certain the term originated in Ireland.

Team Ireland was the first ever to use this name, now everyone else is following. :p”

I didn't comment on where it started.

#15 Scottish Poster 99
* Junior Member  
* Posts: 144  
* Joined: 14-November 07

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:32 PM

Just a thought, but if team GB goes ahead and if then FIFA vote that the SFA lose its independent status would the door be open for the OF to finally feck off to ingerland?

#16 Scottish Poster 94
* BANNED  
* PipPipPipPipPipPip  
* Posts: 2,960  
* Joined: 29-August 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:42 PM

It'll be interesting to see how all the Anti-Team GB bigots will try and justify their stance now.

The thing that annoys me about "Team GB" is that it should really be Team UK.
#17 Scottish Poster 104

* 1st Team Squad Member
* Posts: 10,947
* Joined: 10-July 07

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:44 PM

“Scottish Poster 94 said:
It'll be interesting to see how all the Anti-Team GB bigots will try and justify their stance now.

The thing that annoys me about "Team GB" is that it should really be Team UK.”

Olympic rules Ukraine has dibs on the UK;)
I have no interest in supporting a Scotland team. Should that not be allowed either? That's quite a bigoted thing to say, kiddo. :sad:

Thanks to Scottish Poster 104 for the info.

#20 Scottish Poster 20

* Squad Member
* Posts: 1,125
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:53 PM

“Scottish Poster 94 said:
I have no interest in supporting a Scotland team. Should that not be allowed either? That's quite a bigoted thing to say, kiddo. :sad:

Thanks to Scottish Poster 104 for the info.”

Not supporting it is allowed, since it exists.

I suppose you'd be all in favour of a team Edinburgh instead of Hearts and Hibs.

#21 Scottish Poster 94

* BANNED
* Posts: 2,960
* Joined: 29-August 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 01:55 PM

“Scottish Poster 20 said:
Not supporting it is allowed, since it exists.

I suppose you'd be all in favour of a team Edinburgh instead of Hearts and Hibs.”

But nothing new is allowed to be started unless it has your approval? Fair enough, I guess. I'll send you a PM before my next haircut.

No, of course I wouldn't. What a strange thing to say. You'd maybe have a point if I was saying that the planet earth should have its own team and play against Mars.

#22 Scottish Poster 98

* PipPipPipPipPipPip
Scottish Poster 94 said:
I have no interest in supporting a Scotland team. Should that not be allowed either? That's quite a bigoted thing to say, kiddo. :sad:

Thanks to Scottish Poster 104 for the info.”

20 posts or thereabout and the word 'bigot' has been mentioned 3 times, and twice by you. People might think you're trying to start a certain kind of argument Scottish Poster 94.

You don't have to be a bigot to be against the idea of Team GB.

#23 Scottish Poster 20

* Squad Member
* Posts: 1,125
* Joined: 13-January 06

Scottish Poster 94 said:
But nothing new is allowed to be started unless it has your approval? Fair enough, I guess. I'll send you a PM before my next haircut.

No, of course I wouldn't. What a strange thing to say. You'd maybe have a point if I was saying that the planet earth should have its own team and play against Mars.”

aye, that's what I said right enough. Scotland have a football team, which you are perfectly happy not to support, good luck to you. Great Britain doesn't have a team, and I don't want to support one. Did I say there shouldn't be one, nope. I said i wouldn't be supporting them, because I couldn't care less about it.

You're from Edinburgh and a Team Edinburgh would arguably be an improvement over two teams from the same area. It's the same argument to me.

#24 Scottish Poster 94

* BANNED
* PipPipPipPipPip
* Posts: 2,960
* Joined: 29-August 06
Scottish Poster 98 said:
20 posts or thereabout and the word 'bigot' has been mentioned 3 times, and twice by you. People might think you're trying to start a certain kind of argument Scottish Poster 94.

You don't have to be a bigot to be against the idea of Team GB.”

I have never tried to start an argument on ********, I'm not like that.

I don't see any particular other reason to be against it now that FIFA have made their stance clear. Why shouldn't football be brought in line with every other Olympic sport?

Edit to add : Bigot bigot bigot.

#25 Scottish Poster 97

* Season Ticket Holder
* Posts: 2,050
* Joined: 28-June 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 02:27 PM

Scottish Poster 98 said:
20 posts or thereabout and the word 'bigot' has been mentioned 3 times, and twice by you. People might think you're trying to start a certain kind of argument Scottish Poster 94.

You don't have to be a bigot to be against the idea of Team GB.”

As soon as I saw Scottish Poster 94's alias as last poster I knew this thread was going down a certain route. He has a rod, with a worm attached to the end. You do have a certain agenda Scottish Poster 94.

This post has been edited by Scottish Poster 97: 12 November 2008 - 02:31 PM

#26 Scottish Poster 85

* Season Ticket Holder
* Posts: 1,527
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 02:28 PM
Can we not just add this to the other thousands of threads on team gb and let our unionist brethren sailvate over having the longest thread in jkb history. As per the vast majority of football supporters in Scotland I have absolutely no interest in a team gb football team.

#27 Scottish Poster 98

* PipPipPipPipPipPipPipPip
* Posts: 7,772
* Joined: 17-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 02:32 PM

“Scottish Poster 94 said:
I have never tried to start an argument on *******, I'm not like that.

I don't see any particular other reason to be against it now that FIFA have made their stance clear. Why shouldn't football be brought in line with every other Olympic sport?

Edit to add : Bigot bigot bigot.”

Because each association has replied and said they'd rather not, and very few people are interested. That's why.

It's not a popular idea, does there need to be any other reason?

#28 Scottish Poster 82

* Enormous Member
* Posts: 1,151
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 02:35 PM

“Scottish Poster 94 said:
But nothing new is allowed to be started unless it has your approval? Fair enough, I guess. I'll send you a PM before my next haircut.

No, of course I wouldn't. What a strange thing to say. You'd maybe have a point if I was saying that the planet earth should have its own team and play against Mars.”

Your home planet?
I think Scottish Poster 94 that many people are against the idea of a GB football team at the Olympics because it opens the door the possibility of GB football team full stop. Once you get on that slide its difficult to prevent going down it.

I also think that given your views on all things regarding Britain and Britishness many people believe that you do indeed have an agenda where this particular debate is concerned.

Not having a go, just my perception of things.

**“Scottish Poster 85 said:**
Can we not just add this to the other thousands of threads on team gb and let our unionist brethren sailvate over having the longest thread in jkb history. As per the vast majority of football supporters in Scotland I have absolutely no interest in a team gb football team.”

In fact, the mods should just create a new "Unionist Drivel" topic, shunt all the Team GB / Tartan Army Biggots (sic) / James MhCcarthy / How Much I Hate The Tims crud in there, and let them get on with it. And leave the rest of us to talk about Hearts.

I for one have no objections to a team GB, as long as the SFA tell any selected Scots who choose to play in it that they can thereafter play for no other country.
#32 Scottish Poster 103

* Section N Original  
* Posts: 992  
* Joined: 06-May 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 02:56 PM

“Scottish Poster 97 said:
I think Scottish Poster 94 that many people are against the idea of a GB football team at the Olympics because it opens the door the possibility of GB football team full stop. Once you get on that slide its difficult to prevent going down it.”

I don't agree with that - I think the main reason that the idea of a Team GB footie team is because it would be seen as largely English and would more than likely be made up from English players and this is unaccepteable in the eyes of most Scots, Welsh and Irish. I don't see that as bigoted but just the way the average football fan feels.

And I also doubt the Home nations could ever be forced to become one and don't see it as a threat - for one thing, not one of the nations has ever expressed an interest in this happening and until then it is not an issue.

IMO, I don't support sending ANY team to the Olympics football because none of the players treat it with respect (i.e. don't get paid enough) so it's a joke.

#33 Guest Scottish Poster 92

Posted 12 November 2008 - 03:55 PM

“Scottish Poster 94 said:
I have never tried to start an argument on ********, I'm not like that.”

:rofl: aye right.

#34 Scottish Poster 97

* Season Ticket Holder  
* Posts: 2,050  
* Joined: 28-June 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 04:07 PM

“Scottish Poster 103 said:
I don't agree with that - I think the main reason that the idea of a Team GB footie team is because it would be seen as largely English and would more than likely be
made up from English players and this is unacceptable in the eyes of most Scots, Welsh and Irish.”

Aye there is that too, I was going to go back and edit that in but left it.

Tbh, I myself am neither here nor there with the idea of an olympic british football team, i couldnt care less. As long as FIFA stuck to their pledge of course.

#35 Scottish Poster 101
* Squad Member
* Posts: 1,590
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 04:08 PM

“Scottish Poster 94 said:
I have no interest in supporting a Scotland team.”

Are you Scottish though?

#36 Scottish Poster 86
* Reserve Team
* Posts: 3,469
* Joined: 21-October 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 04:25 PM

What exactly does this change?

Really, unless FIFA have asked every single nation in their group for their opinion this means nothing.

As pointed out earlier, the people who decide don't want it so it won't be happening. That's life sometimes.

#37 Scottish Poster 46
* Season Ticket Holder
* Posts: 3,530
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 05:00 PM
“Scottish Poster 103 said:
IMO, I don't support sending ANY team to the Olympics football because none of the players treat it with respect (i.e. don't get paid enough) so it's a joke.”

It's not just the players.

The rules of the competition allow you to select Under 23s plus 3 overage "guest stars"

The idea being that these will be "name" players that will help the Olympic city to market the tournament.

In actual fact many teams don't even bother using their entitlement to overage players.

The host nation not being represent at London 2012 might devalue the tournament but you get the impression that it would suit FIFA fine.

The modern Olympic football tournament is purposely flawed because FIFA don't want a competitor to the real World Cup and UEFA certainly aren't interested in a major tournament competing with it's own in leap years.

It's a second rate football tournament and by touring it around the host country keeping the competitors away from the Olympic village it's rendered a second rate Olympic competition as well.

It could be different.

The next two biggest international team sports with established World Cups are Cricket and Rugby Union.

Both are knocking on the door of the Olympics but both propose to stage an abbreviated version of the game: Seven a side Rugby and 20/20 cricket.

What FIFA should do is stage a global version of the Tennents Sixes and Play the entire tournament over a weekend. Free up space in the calendar so that the worlds best players will be available and the tournament can take briefly centre stage in World Football.

This wouldn't be a substitute for the World Cup but it would feature the best players from around the world competing for medals which is what the Olympics should be about.

#38 Scottish Poster 106

* Junior Member
* Posts: 865
* Joined: 13-January 06
“Scottish Poster 46 said:

This wouldn't be a substitute for the World Cup but it would feature the best players from around the world competing for medals which is what the Olympics should be about.”

This would also clash with the Expanded European Championships as well as being in the same year as the African Championships. A big ask for Players.

#39 Scottish Poster 83

* Does not like Macs.
  * Posts: 2,627
  * Joined: 05-November 06

Ah, a thread really isn't a thread unless Scottish Poster 94 is on with his wee sad face smilies and chucking the old word 'bigot' round with the odd 'didn't know I had to check with you kiddo' chatter.

At least he's consistent (sad face smiley right here).

All for the tournament, bit of footballing fun and the winner takes the spot at the Olympics. Anybody not backing that is a bigot. And you all know who you are (sad face right here again).

#40 Scottish Poster 105

* The voice of the right
  * Posts: 254
  * Joined: 23-July 06
  * Location: Scottish Poster 105 Towers, Old Blighty

Yes, I'm sure Chris Hoy is utterly embarrassed and wishes he could hand his medals back.....😊
Why can't the anti-TeamGB brigade just admit they're small-minded anti-English racists and be done with it? At least they'd be speaking the truth for once.

#41 Scottish Poster 95

* Season Ticket Holder
* Posts: 1,643
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 07:35 PM

“Scottish Poster 105 said:
Why can't the anti-TeamGB brigade just admit they're small-minded anti-English racists and be done with it? At least they'd be speaking the truth for once.”

What if the anti-Team GB brigade included English people, who would their prejudices be against?

#42 Scottish Poster 105

* The voice of the right
* Posts: 254
* Joined: 23-July 06
* Location: Scottish Poster 105 Towers, Old Blighty

Posted 12 November 2008 - 07:39 PM

“Scottish Poster 95 said:
What if the anti-Team GB brigade included English people, who would their prejudices be against?”

That's irrelevant as the English FA is quite happy with the concept. :rolleyes:

Personally, I don't think TeamGB is a threat to Scotland.

But if it turned out to be, I wouldn't shed any tears over the demise of the embarrassing shambles that is the Scottish international football team or the jobs-for-the-boys mutual appreciation society that is the SFA.

#43 Scottish Poster 94

* 1st Team Squad Member
* Posts: 14,644
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 07:44 PM
“Scottish Poster 105 said: 
Yes, I'm sure Chris Hoy is utterly embarrassed and wishes he could hand his medals back....:o

Why can't the anti-TeamGB brigade just admit they're small-minded anti-English racists and be done with it? At least they'd be speaking the truth for once.”

Would you want a 'Team Edinburgh' to play in some sort of British Cup?

Like it or not....

Many on here see the English Football Team as our rivals and we really have no interest in joining forces with them to play in any competition.

Much like I wouldn't have any interest in Hearts and Hibs joining forces to play in a competition.

#44 Scottish Poster 88

* CRAIG PATERSON LOVER 
* Posts: 9,539
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 07:45 PM

I wonder if Kris Boyd would play.

#45 Scottish Poster 46

* Season Ticket Holder 
* Posts: 3,531
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 07:47 PM

“Scottish Poster 106 said:
This would also clash with the Expanded European Championships as well as being in the same year as the African Championships. A big ask for Players.”

But it's only one weekend.

#46 Scottish Poster 105

* The voice of the right 
* Posts: 254
“Scottish Poster 87 said:
Would you want a 'Team Edinburgh' to play in some sort of British Cup?”

Yet more irrelevance. As you well know there is no current or proposed tournament that would require this.

On the other hand, at least you've had the guts to admit the naysayers are driven by anti-English feeling.

#47 English Poster 30

* It's only a messageboard!
* Posts: 25,103
* Joined: 08-February 06

“Scottish Poster 105 said:
That's irrelevant as the English FA is quite happy with the concept. :rolleyes:

Personally, I don't think TeamGB is a threat to Scotland.

But if it turned out to be, I wouldn't shed any tears over the demise of the embarrassing shambles that is the Scottish international football team or the jobs-for-the-boys mutual appreciation society that is the SFA.”

An admission which rather suggests you're motivated by anti-Scottish sentiment, Scottish Poster 105.

#48 Scottish Poster 105

* The voice of the right
* Posts: 254
* Joined: 23-July 06
* Location: Scottish Poster 105 Towers, Old Blighty

“English Poster 30 said:
An admission which rather suggests you're motivated by anti-Scottish sentiment, Therapist.”
Incorrect. I'm anti-SFA, not anti-Scottish.

You'd be better doing odd-jobs to save the money for our bet rather than wasting time posting on here.

#49 Scottish Poster 90

* Since 1984
* Posts: 3,467
* Joined: 28-June 08
* Location: Edinburgh

Posted 12 November 2008 - 08:28 PM

I don't think there any point in scotland joining up for a GB Team as most of our players wouldn't get a game.. Only player I could see getting a game would be craig gordon.. It would just be pointless so they should just forget about it..

#50 Scottish Poster 102

* Squad Member
* Posts: 3,673
* Joined: 07-September 07

Posted 12 November 2008 - 08:29 PM

“Scottish Poster 94 said:
...I don't see any particular other reason to be against it now that FIFA have made their stance clear....”

Quote
..."That's why I [Jim Murphy] met Jerome Valcke, the general secretary of Fifa, yesterday and told him about my concerns and the concerns that many Scots have.

"He confirmed that Fifa, of course who regulate football, that the executive will agree that this one-off under-23 tournament could take place and it will not jeopardise the status of any of the home nations and I think that's very welcome news."...

Quote
...MSP Stuart McMillan, a member of the Scottish Parliament's football team, raised comments made by Fifa president Sepp Blatter in March that a GB team would put into question the privileges that the British associations have been given by the world body.

Mr McMillan said: "This is not a guarantee that the independence of the SFA and the other three national associations in the UK will not be threatened by a single UK football Olympic team...
You think that FIFA have made their stance clear?

It's as clear as mud.

You've got a strange sense of clearness. Kiddo

#51 Scottish Poster 105

* The voice of the right
* Posts: 254
* Joined: 23-July 06
* Location: Scottish Poster 105 Towers, Old Blighty

Posted 12 November 2008 - 08:33 PM

“Scottish Poster 90 said:
I don't think there any point in scotland joining up for a GB Team as most of our players wouldn't get a game..

Precisely, but that's no reason for not participating. Personally, I'm not happy to settle for mediocrity. Perhaps if the SFA and young players had TeamGB and the Olympics to aim for, they might actually put some effort in to improving themselves.

The standard of football in Scotland right now is, quite frankly appalling.

#52 English Poster 30

* It's only a messageboard!
* Posts: 25,103
* Joined: 08-February 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 08:48 PM

“Scottish Poster 105 said:
Incorrect. I'm anti-SFA, not anti-Scottish.

You'd be better doing odd-jobs to save the money for our bet rather than wasting time posting on here.”

You're anti the Scottish national team actually - despite being a Scot yourself. Why?

#53 Republic of Ireland Poster

* Season Ticket Holder
* PipPipPip
* Posts: 81
* Joined: 31-January 06
Posted 12 November 2008 - 10:35 PM

“Scottish Poster 82 said:
In fact, the mods should just create a new "Unionist Drivel" topic, shunt all the Team GB / Tartan Army Biggots (sic) / James MhCcarthy / How Much I Hate The Tims crud in there, and let them get on with it. And leave the rest of us to talk about Hearts.”

The most sensible post I've read on here in ages.

#54 Scottish Poster 89

* Season Ticket Holder
* Posts: 2,534
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 12 November 2008 - 10:53 PM

It can all be flowered up, covered in cotton wool demials etc, but what a United Kingdom team does is demonstrates taht it can be done. It either demonstrates that as a united nation it is a success, or as a united nation we are still not good enough. Whatever it does it helps enhance future arguements for British football. While internationally this may not amter largely to many supporters the deeper situtaion needs to be considered. It WILL mean the END of Scottish Football and Scottish clubs getting into Europe.
Have a look at FIFA's record for clarity.

#55 Scottish Poster 107

* Junior Member
* PipPipPipPip
* Posts: 563
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 13 November 2008 - 12:01 AM

“Scottish Poster 89 said:
It can all be flowered up, covered in cotton wool demials etc, but what a United Kingdom team does is demonstrates taht it can be done. It either demonstrates that as a united nation it is a success, or as a united nation we are still not good enough. Whatever it does it helps enhance future arguements for British football. While internationally this may not amter largely to many supporters the deeper situtaion needs to be considered. It WILL mean the END of Scottish Football and Scottish clubs getting into Europe.”
Have a look at FIFA's record for clarity.

And both the British government and FIFA have a vested interest in this happening.
#56 Scottish Poster 84

* Season Ticket Holder
* Posts: 9,419
* Joined: 13-January 06

Posted 13 November 2008 - 01:04 AM

“Scottish Poster 105 said:
Yet more irrelevance. As you well know there is no current or proposed tournament that would require this.

On the other hand, at least you've had the guts to admit the naysayers are driven by anti-English feeling.”

Some may well be driven by anti-english feeling but not everyone. Does every sport have to have a team GB?

Personally I don't believe that football should be an Olympic sport and I don't trust FIFA.