



## Women's Football

Dear Football Association,

I am writing to share my dismay at your surprising decision to ban women's football at your grounds. It seems bizarre that in a world so recently torn apart by war, we are deciding to divide it further.

A lot has happened in the last few years. Of course, the Great War saw a conflict like no other and devastation few of us could have ever believed possible. Before that, the Archduke was killed in Sarajevo. Reality eventually set in, as the horrors of the trenches became clear and our loved ones failed to return to us.

It wasn't all doom and gloom. Despite the bitter fighting, I remember hearing stories of the men on the frontline, exchanging cigarettes and chocolate on Christmas Day 1914. They even played a few games of football. Isn't it amazing how the game can bring people together, even in the most unlikely of places?

At home, for at least a year, the Football League continued, as players around the nation helped to raise the morale of the people. Few could forget the FA Cup Final in 1915. A sea of military uniforms filled the ground. They later called it the 'Khaki' Cup Final as few other colours could be seen.

It was such a strange atmosphere that day. The players knew they would soon be called to France to fight the Germans. A few months later, the inevitable happened, and hundreds of players, managers and even referees joined up in Pals battalions. The Football Battalion was advertised. A new pitch was to be found for their weekly confrontations: the battlefield.

Football is ingrained in communities right across the country and it wasn't long before people started wondering how long it would be until we saw it again. Of course, in the munition factories (where I worked) we used to kick a ball about throughout our breaks. Apparently, it was a common occurrence in other places as well.

I remember the initial reaction of the men who saw us passing, volleying and even heading a hard leather ball. They laughed, they joked, and they mocked us, but we weren't perturbed. We were enjoying ourselves, and that's all that matters. Before long, some of the girls had decided to form a team and ask other munitionettes for a match to raise money for the war effort.

It sounded too good to be true. I remember as a child being so frustrated as my father and brother

Bill went to watch Preston at Deepdale. I was kept at home with my mother. It was alright of course, but what I would have given to hear the roar as Dicky Bond or Percy Smith crashed the ball into the net.

Unbelievably, it was Deepdale that was to be the venue for our first fixture. Against us were our friends from the Dick, Kerr & Co. Munitions factory. We were expecting a small crowd, but one ample enough to provide vital funds for the boys in France. To our surprise, 10,000 spectators paid their way to watch us perform. For Christmas Day, this was incredible!

We lost the game 4-0 but we weren't worried. We raised £600 that day and more than we could ever expect. The fans, who at first had made a few negative comments, applauded us off the field. Even the papers were complimentary. To their shock, we had played pretty well and their previous ways of thinking were being challenged. Within a few weeks, further fixtures had been arranged and women's teams everywhere were appearing.

By the time the Great War had reached its conclusion, the women's game had gone from strength to strength. We welcomed the men home with open arms and couldn't wait for the Football League to return. Outside of football, we were delighted to hear that women over 30 were being offered the chance to vote for the first time. It seemed that we were finally being recognised and our performances had propelled the cause even further.

It seemed like there was no stopping our game and by 1920 a record 53,000 supporters arrived at Everton's Goodison Park to watch the Dick, Kerr & Co Ladies play. They had become quite the team. With striker Lily Parr leading the line up front, they swept aside all before them. They became local celebrities, everyone wanted to see them in action. Women's football was booming!

Then, everything changed. Last week you decided to prohibit the women's game from your grounds. In the newspapers, you explained that your primary reason was due to a great deal of the money raised for war veterans, going into expenses for us players. This is simply not true! The match at Goodison Park last year raised £6000 with only a miniscule amount paying our way.

It all seems like an excuse to me. Since the Football League has returned, attendance has dropped and yet, here we are breaking records and seeing fanatical supporters each and every time we play. What are you so afraid of? Why can't we both play our games on an equal playing field?

Whether we are banned, or not, we will keep playing. Nothing will stop us from practising the game we love! I do hope you reconsider your decision.

Yours Faithfully,

Sarah Blythe

## VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Which of these words is a synonym of dismay?  
calmness      contentment      dread      pleasure
2. Can you define the word conflict in this context?
3. Find and copy the word in paragraph 6 shows that football was deeply rooted in many communities.
4. Find and copy the word in paragraph 12 which shows that women's football was having a period of great growth.
5. Which word shows that the female players were only paid a very small amount of money?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**E** Some writers use emotive language as a persuasive technique. Explain how and why the writer has used emotive language in the opening three paragraphs. (An effective answer will refer to the text)

**I** In which town do you think Sarah grew up and why do you think this?

**R** Who played up front for the Dick, Kerr & Co. ladies' team?

**E** Explain the effect of the rhetorical questions at the end of the text.

**P** What do you think the response from the Football Association would say?

Answers:

1. Dread
2. Conflict: A fight, a battle or war.
3. Ingrained
4. Booming
5. Miniscule

E: Answers should mention use of some of the following:

Dismay,

Torn apart by war,

Devastation

Horrors,

Answers should explain that the writer is trying to show how football is the opposite of all these terrible things.

I: Preston – because she went to watch Preston football club with her dad and brother as a child.

R: Lily Parr

E: The use of rhetorical questions makes the reader think about what has been said in the letter and by putting them at the end it makes the reader continue to think about these questions after they have finished reading it.

P: Answers should indicate a negative response with some reasons as to why they think this.