

# AMATEURS AND PROFESSIONALS IN POST-WAR BRITISH SPORT

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Editors

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AMATEURS AND PROFESSIONALS  
IN POST-WAR BRITISH SPORT

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# Introduction

DILWYN PORTER and ADRIAN SMITH

Historians, even social historians, were once inclined to consign any consideration of sport to the margins. A few, like Asa Briggs, did grasp the extent to which it preoccupied the British public and empathised accordingly. 'To many Englishmen', Briggs observed in the mid-1950s, 'football is not an element in national culture but life itself.'<sup>1</sup> But, in general, historians have only recently begun to acknowledge the important part that sport often played in people's lives, not to mention its wider economic, social and political significance. A.J.P. Taylor's *English History 1914–1945*, published in 1965, though it incorporated a chapter promisingly entitled 'Half Time', devoted only one of its 650 or so pages to sport, squeezed in alongside the cinema and the *palais de danse* as one of the popular entertainments of the period. Kenneth Morgan's *The People's Peace*, covering the period from 1945 to 1989, published a quarter of a century later, was similarly reticent on the subject.<sup>2</sup> In works such as these, the inquisitive lay reader, seeking enlightenment from these magisterial sources, finds an account of the recent past that barely acknowledges a world in which it is not uncommon to read the back page of a newspaper first. It is now something of a shock to open Arthur Marwick's contribution to the *Pelican Social History of Britain* series, first published in 1982, and to discover just one paragraph concerned with sport.<sup>3</sup> This is, in itself, an indication of the extent to which historians have come to embrace this aspect of past experience over the last 20 years.

Ross McKibbin's *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951*, with its chapter on 'The Sporting Life' acknowledging sport as 'one of the most powerful of England's civil cultures', is indicative of the way in which attitudes have changed.<sup>4</sup> In part this developing trend reflects the



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emergence of the History of Sport as a significant sub-division of academic labour. Encouraged by ground-breaking work in Australia and the US, pioneers such as Tony Mason, J.A. Mangan, Richard Holt and Wray Vamplew set up a base from which a small army of graduate researchers has advanced into territory that historians were once content to leave to the gentlemanly chronicler of past sporting triumphs and the anoraked statistician. Their work in the 1970s and 1980s helped to establish the History of Sport as a 'vibrant and productive subject for scholarly research', meriting the serious attention of graduate researchers and undergraduate students.<sup>5</sup> But, in a wider sense their most important contribution to historiography, as Martin Polley has suggested, has been to embed sport in an appropriate economic, social and political context. This has enabled historians to make connections and to nail once and for all the idea that sport 'has nothing to do with anything else'.<sup>6</sup> 'The point,' as one historian of English football has observed, '... is not to describe football matches but to study what football meant and why it mattered.'<sup>7</sup>

The essays in this collection, focusing on various aspects of amateurism and professionalism in British sport since 1945, reflect this tendency. Definitions of 'amateur' and 'professional', though legalistic in form, were rooted in lived experience, contingent on class and status, and subject to change over time. An amateur was expected to participate for the love of the game, whereas a professional received some form of remuneration, but in practice it was rather more complicated. Definitions were often blurred and there was variation from one sport to another. Referring in 1960 to the contentious issue of the payment of travelling and subsistence expenses to amateurs, the Wolfenden Committee noted a lack of uniformity, acknowledging that each governing body might 'draw its arbitrary line where it believes that the best interests of its sport require that it should be drawn'. This led to confusion, as Tony Pawson, distinguished amateur cricketer, footballer and fly-fisherman, argued a few years later. 'Amateur rules', it seemed, varied like detergents, 'from the whiter than white of fencing to the Brand X of tennis, with its registered players – or paid amateurs'.<sup>8</sup> Neither was it easy to distinguish between an amateur and a professional by the manner in which they competed. As David Miller of *The Daily Telegraph*, observed recently: 'Many of the most sportsmanlike competitors I have known have been professionals, and some of the worst have been amateurs.'<sup>9</sup> National Hunt jockey John

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Francome's refusal to ride once he had equalled the number of winners ridden by the injured Peter Scudamore in 1982, thus denying himself the professional jockeys' championship, comes to mind here.

Definitions of amateur and professional status generally dated from the nineteenth century when gentlemen with the leisure, money and inclination to pursue their sporting interests were confronted by a challenge from below. The Amateur Athletic Club, predecessor of the Amateur Athletic Association, found it necessary in 1866 to deny membership to 'mechanics', 'artisans' and 'labourers'. Such measures, later matched, for example, in rowing, helped to ensure that opportunities for overturning the existing social order in sporting competition were limited. The subsequent development of sport as business, however, in which the achievement of success was a commercial necessity, made it increasingly difficult to sustain social exclusion in this form. It encouraged entrepreneurs who sought profit and prestige from sport to tap reserves of working-class talent, raising the possibility that the apparently effortless superiority of the gentleman might evaporate as mechanics, artisans and labourers, selected for their proficiency at sport and paid accordingly, applied themselves to their work. From the perspective of the late twentieth century, the source of an athlete's income might seem of little importance: 'If a competitor is preparing full time to compete in the Olympic Games, it is irrelevant...whether he or she is supported by wealthy parents, self-interested college, government grant or commercial sponsorship.'<sup>10</sup> But, in the nineteenth century, and on into the mid-twentieth, such distinctions remained crucial in that they helped to maintain a pre-existing set of social relations. Regulation separating the amateur from the professional, evidenced in its most extreme form after rugby's great schism in 1895, often served to preclude or circumscribe class competition in sport. And, where invidious comparison with the artisan professional remained a possibility, the prestige of the gentleman amateur was shored up by snobbery and social convention. When 'Plum' Warner of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) remarked that Jack Hobbs, Surrey and England professional, played cricket 'like an amateur', it was no doubt intended as a compliment.

'Sport,' as Martin Polley has argued, 'is not passive; it co-exists with its society, and, for post-war Britain, it is an important component of

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that society.’<sup>11</sup> Changes in society have impacted on sport and those who participate in it as competitors, administrators and spectators. During the period under consideration here the apparatus of regulation and convention sustaining the distinction between amateur and professional began to crumble. The status attached to amateurism, derived from deeply-rooted ideas relating to the innate superiority of those who could afford, if they chose, to play the game for its own sake, was subjected increasingly to critical scrutiny. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, as ‘the Establishment’ came under attack from those who sought to modernise Britain and its institutions, the idea that the gentlemanly amateur should outrank the paid professional, one of the most conspicuous buttresses of an outmoded class system, became unfashionable. The non-specialist ‘amateur’, whether a Foreign Office mandarin, a captain of industry or the leader of an under-performing side in cricket’s County Championship, was deemed to be a factor in Britain’s fall from Great Power status. There was, in short, a reaction against being officered ‘by birth and breeding’ and recognition that ‘modern professional management’ was an essential prerequisite of sustainable economic growth.<sup>12</sup> In these circumstances regulations and conventions relating to amateurism and professionalism in sport dating from the nineteenth century were drawn into political discourse. Where they could no longer be sustained their abandonment, as Harold Wilson grasped, was symbolic of the kind of change that was necessary if Britain was going to match the performance of its more dynamic competitors. ‘In a country...which has now begun to take cricket seriously enough for even the MCC to abolish the distinction between Gentlemen and Players, we are still prepared to allow too much of British industry, on which alone we depend to prevent this country becoming a second-class power, to be officered from the pages of *Debrett*.’<sup>13</sup> By the end of the 1960s there were some clear indications that attitudes had changed. Informed by a triumphant executive that his commercial television company had secured the rights to cover the 1968 Olympics, Lew Grade is said to have responded: ‘That’s amateurs, isn’t it? We don’t want amateurs. Get professionals.’<sup>14</sup>

The first two essays in this collection examine the resilience of the amateur ideal as it came under pressure in the post-war period. In association football, the most commercialised of British sports, the technical supremacy of the professional had been established by the

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start of the twentieth century. Though there was nothing to prevent an amateur competing alongside and against professionals few were capable of making the grade at the highest level.<sup>15</sup> Competition, with the notable exception of the Football Association (FA) Challenge Cup, was organised on different levels, with amateurs and professionals playing in segregated leagues. Dilwyn Porter examines the meteoric rise and fall of Pegasus Football Club, a true-blue amateur team drawing its playing strength from the old universities, in its period context. Pegasus was more than an exotic throwback to an earlier period when the gentleman amateur had predominated, to the days when C.B. Fry and other Corinthian heroes had been able to take on the professionals and win. For the club's founder and principal moving spirit, Harold Thompson, as well as for Stanley Rous at the FA, Pegasus represented an attempt to counter what were perceived to be negative images emanating from an over-commercialised professional game and the cynical 'shamateurism' then prevailing in the senior amateur leagues. Despite achieving spectacular and unexpected success in the early 1950s the Pegasus project was abandoned in 1963, by which time even Thompson had come to realise that it was neither practical nor desirable to maintain the nineteenth century distinction between amateur and professional.

Stephen Wagg's essay examines the tradition of amateur captaincy in English county cricket in the 20 years or so before the distinction between gentlemen and players was cast aside in 1963. What emerges here is the tenacity with which those who ran the first class game clung to the idea that there were officers and gentlemen to be found who were equipped to lead teams comprising mainly professionals, whatever their own sometimes embarrassingly manifest technical deficiencies with bat and ball. There is, it seems, a danger in assuming that progress towards the happy day in 1963 when Lords embraced modernisation was either steady or inevitable. Significant milestones along the way, such as Leicestershire's appointment of a professional captain in 1935, transpire, on close examination, to have been dictated by expediency rather than any heartfelt desire to ride with the tide of social change. County clubs that appeared to be in the vanguard of modernisation, like Warwickshire, having appointed a professional, Tom Dollery, to lead the side in 1948, later retreated from this position, appointing an amateur, M.J.K. Smith, to the captaincy in 1957. Where professionals led it was often by default. 'It would be a mistake,' as one

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left-wing newspaper observed in 1953, 'to underestimate the Old School Tie.' Traditionalists had not taken kindly to Len Hutton, the first professional to lead England, and the test selectors still retained 'the power to ruin everything by appointing an amateur as captain'.<sup>16</sup> Reform, when it came, was prompted by an intense crisis as the game hovered on the edge of a financial abyss from which it was subsequently rescued by commercial sponsorship. In the meantime a good deal of port and Stilton was consumed by the commissioned officers of the county game in the comfort of their well-appointed dressing rooms.

It is evident that changes in British society generally modified the nature of amateurism in both soccer and cricket. By the 1950s, for example, many amateur captains were receiving salaries from county clubs for services rendered in various administrative capacities. Thus the form, if not the substance, was preserved. Professionalism was similarly subject to modification, as Ray Physick and Richard Holt demonstrate in their account of relations between the tournament golfer and the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) between 1945 and 1975. As tournament golf became more commercialised, sustaining a new generation of star players who could earn a good living without enduring a lifetime of subservience to an established club and its committee, the PGA, founded in 1901 to represent the interests of the run-of-the-mill club pro, was found wanting. Tournament golfers, such as Henry Cotton and Dai Rees, became increasingly critical of the PGA from the mid-1950s, in effect distancing themselves and their colleagues from the idea of the professional golfer as a skilled artisan employed to provide a specialist service to club members. Thereafter, as the flow of money derived from media coverage and commercial sponsorship of tournaments increased year by year, the pressures on the PGA multiplied. The Association survived but in a drastically modified form, its two 'divisions' after 1976 representing an explicit acknowledgement of the way in which the structure of the profession had changed over the previous 20 years or so.

Martin Polley traces the changing face of post-war British athletics. Here again is an ageing group of well-intentioned if misguided middle- and upper-class volunteers endeavouring to defend a set of obsolescent values. Such values, however laudable in their day, were embodied in a set of rules and regulations which increasingly lacked

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credibility, and generated great resentment whenever the authorities attempted to enforce them. It is hard to feel sympathy for the senior officials of the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) when as a body they were largely self-selecting and shamelessly enjoyed the perks and privileges of their position. Athletes like Gordon Pirie and Derek Ibbotson were sporting meritocrats, eager to exploit their natural talent to achieve success on the track and secure recognition off it. They took their sport seriously – witness the severity of their training schedules. ‘Varsity runners’ like Roger Bannister, Chris Chataway and Chris Brasher shared a similar determination to break records and win medals. They trained hard, witness their outstanding achievements between 1954 and 1956. Nevertheless, that very success was seen as justifying the amateur/public school assumption that guts and ‘character’ were the secret of successful middle-distance running. Bannister, Chataway and Brasher were establishment heroes, for all the latter’s subsequent railings at the reluctance of the AAA to reform. Denied privileged upbringings, Pirie and Ibbotson demonstrated an ambition and lack of deference which within a generation would be taken for granted. Yet in the late 1950s and early 1960s such behaviour was still seen as presumptuous and as an unashamedly working-class challenge to what within the closed world of British athletics constituted the established order. Polley demonstrates how the first athletes familiar to a television audience laid the foundation for Alan Pascoe, David Hemery, Lynn Davies and other Olympians to challenge the authority of the sport’s ruling bodies. The 1970s witnessed significant shifts in attitude, not least with reference to the status and position of women athletes in Britain, but the key changes were invariably a response to global developments, most notably the 1981 acceptance of payment for performance. The arrival of professional athletics coincided with another golden era in British middle-distance running: Steve Ovett, Seb Coe and Steve Cram readily acknowledged their debt to the single-minded pioneers of an earlier generation.

As Ross McKibbin argued in relation to the period before 1950, horse-racing was a sport that ‘successfully and consciously bridged England’s rural past and its urban-industrial present’.<sup>17</sup> Wray Vamplew’s study of the contemporary professional jockey suggests that this bridge remains in place, even in a largely post-industrial, suburban era. Some aspects of the occupational culture which professional jockeys inhabit are clearly long established and dictated by the technical requirements of the sport. The flat-racing jockey of the late

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twentieth century may not resort to the crude purgative prescribed for Fred Archer a hundred years earlier but he remains tied to a regime which ensures that weight is maintained at an unnaturally low level. This means that eating disorders remain a significant occupational hazard, not to mention the still considerable risk of being injured during a race. Professional jockeys, Vamplew concludes, are 'extraordinary sportspersons' yet, in their relationship with both the owners of racehorses and those who administer the sport, they have only recently gained the respect that is their due. It remains surprising, even shocking, to discover that the likes of Willie Carson and Eddie Hide were addressed by their surnames and required to stand to attention by the stewards at York as recently as 1982. Yet the occupational culture of the professional jockey has been significantly modified, partly through the collective efforts of jockeys themselves, partly through the emergence of millionaire superstars such as Frankie Dettori.

In 1995 rugby union upstaged the centenary celebrations of rugby league by declaring the game open. In the southern hemisphere Australia, New Zealand and South Africa took the Murdoch dollar and effortlessly entered the professional era. At all levels of the game the demands of the national squad were seen as paramount, with leading players centrally contracted. In Europe the old order prevailed, and current internationals were still expected to honour their club contracts. This tension was most evident in England, a nation desperate for World Cup success but handicapped by fundamental differences between the senior sides and the governing body. The Rugby Football Union (RFU) was itself deeply split between corporate modernisers and the guardians of the grassroots – amateur – game. Twickenham's critics saw the RFU's moratorium on professionalism as the root cause of British rugby's five-year failure to secure success both on and off the pitch: the vacuum created during the 1995–96 season was speedily filled by entrepreneurs, not all of whom had the capital and/or knowledge of the game to ensure the long-term survival of their chosen team. The top English clubs' eagerness to maximise television revenue and corporate sponsorship put added pressure upon the RFU to break with the other Home Nations and negotiate a separate television deal with Sky. The resulting mayhem did little to enhance club rugby's chances of becoming a mass spectator sport. The professional game may boast faster, fitter and more skilful players, but

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off the field commercial viability remains as elusive as ever. In the final essay Adrian Smith traces the bemusing and turbulent history of English rugby union in the 1990s. This long and complex story ends with the disappointment of Wales 1999, when once again a southern hemisphere team lifted the World Cup. Yet, despite the England team failing to progress beyond the quarter-final, the RFU and the elite clubs entered the twenty-first century still showing no sign of agreement on the future structure and direction of the game.

The sight of English rugby selling its soul for £87.5 million was one of the less edifying examples of post-war British sport warmly embracing television. The first three decades of mass TV audiences witnessed an exponential growth in the coverage of sport, but the arrival of satellite television and a further two terrestrial channels offered even the most esoteric of athletic pursuits its 15 minutes of fame. Throughout much of the twentieth century broadcasters, sponsors and advertisers enjoyed varying degrees of influence over genuinely global sports, most especially football, but in the 1990s they began seriously calling the shots. The speed with which rugby union embraced professionalism – in Britain at appalling cost in terms of the game's image and reputation – highlighted the degree to which major sports had become dependent upon sponsorship and the sale of broadcasting rights. Only at the end of the decade did sports executives begin to appreciate just how much satellite television needed premium events in order to recruit fresh subscribers, let alone retain high-spending advertisers. The ITV stations and Channel 4 were similarly dependent on advertising revenue, while a beleaguered post-Birt BBC boosted its sports budget in order to justify retention of the licence fee. At the same time a growing number of governing bodies recognised that unilateral multi-million pound deals with Sky offered only short-term advantage if their sport no longer enjoyed maximum exposure. Thus, both cricket and rugby union looked to terrestrial television as the most effective means of reviving their appeal among non-specialist sports fans.

The symbiotic relationship between sport and television has become a key element of life in Britain at the start of the twentieth-first century, which no social commentator would be so short-sighted as to ignore. Just as elsewhere in the world, sport has become a powerful and all-pervasive force – witness the eagerness with which politicians in the 1990s discovered the Premiership. The football phenomenon is unprecedented, but Premier League players are by no means unique in discovering that



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global recognition and super salaries have their price. For the professional sports person forever in the public eye, one regrettable incident and a reputation can be destroyed or severely damaged: the rewards can be enormous, both financially and in terms of personal satisfaction and achievement, but the pressures have never been greater.

### NOTES

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2. A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (Oxford: OUP, 1965), p.313; Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History 1945–1989* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), pp.257–8. There are other fleeting references to sport in Morgan's book but only where it impinges on politics.
3. Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p.156.
4. Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp.332–85.
5. Matthew Taylor, 'Football archives and the historian', *Business Archives*, Vol.78 (November 1978), p.1.
6. See Martin Polley, *Moving the Goalposts: a History of Sport and Society Since 1945* (London: Routledge: 1998), pp.4–5.
7. Nicholas Fishwick, *English Football and Society, 1910–1950* (Manchester: MUP, 1989), pp.xi–xii.
8. *Sport and the Community: The Report of the Wolfenden Committee on Sport* (London: Central Council of Physical Recreation, 1960), pp.66–7; Tony Pawson, 'Sweeping under the carpet', *The Observer*, 8 Dec. 1963.
9. David Miller, 'Professionalism and the Olympic Ideal', in David Welch (ed.), *The Daily Telegraph Century of Sport* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp.130–31.
10. Miller, 'Professionalism'.
11. Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*, p.6.
12. John Vaizey, 'The Public Schools', in Hugh Thomas (ed.), *The Establishment* (London: Anthony Blond, 1959), p.21; *Attitudes in British Management: A PEP Report* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 60–62. See also the analysis of 'the amateur ideal' in Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), pp.631–2. Jeremy Paxman has remarked on 'the mountains of literature chronicling the decline of Britain in the twentieth century [which] deal with the inadequacies of the amateur British civil service'; Jeremy Paxman, *Friends in High Places: Who Runs Britain?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), p.133.
13. Speech at the Royal Albert Hall, 5 Apr. 1964, in *The New Britain: Labour's Plan outlined by Harold Wilson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), pp.131–2.
14. Philip Purser, obituary for Bill Ward, *The Guardian*, 26 Oct. 1999.
15. For the recollections of an amateur who played First Division football for Charlton Athletic see Tony Pawson, 'All-rounder who has done it all', *The Observer*, 19 Dec. 1999.
16. *The Daily Worker*, 1 Jan, 1953.
17. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.353.

# Amateur Football in England, 1948–63: The Pegasus Phenomenon

DILWYN PORTER

As a soccer romance the story of Pegasus FC takes some beating. Founded in May 1948, and taking the field for the first time in December, the combined Oxford and Cambridge Universities side rapidly established itself as a major power in English amateur football. Only three years after it had been formed Pegasus were playing at Wembley in the final of the Football Association's [FA] Amateur Cup in front of 100,000 people, an attendance record for an amateur football match. Winners of the Amateur Cup in 1951, and again in 1953, they were widely admired for their intelligent application of the fluent 'push and run' style favoured by Arthur Rowe's successful Tottenham Hotspur side of the same era. Though the peaks of achievement scaled between 1948 and 1953 were not reached again there is no doubt that Pegasus left a significant mark. For Geoffrey Green, football correspondent of *The Times*, Pegasus was one of the outstanding clubs of the 1950s, as important in its own sphere as Real Madrid or Manchester United in theirs.<sup>1</sup>

Yet it was not simply a matter of how well Pegasus played the game. The club also attracted support and goodwill on account of its true-blue amateurism, its successes warming the hearts of those who had mourned the passing of the famous Corinthians and the 'spirit' with which they had been associated. Pegasus, as Green recalled, was seen as the heir to this tradition and its players 'were openly spoken of as the new Corinthians'. It is not easy to discern exactly what contemporary references to the Corinthian spirit implied beyond playing the game for its own sake in a manner which reflected

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creditably on gentlemen who had enjoyed the benefits of a good school and one or other of the ancient universities. But it is clear that a degree of aristocratic swagger was expected, with an emphasis on attack rather than defence. Writing of R.E. ('Tip') Foster, a celebrated Corinthian of the early 1900s, C.B. Fry observed that 'his feet had, as it were, the Oxford accent'.<sup>2</sup> This touch of class, it seemed, was what had distinguished the Corinthians from their professional counterparts. Edward Grayson, the most sympathetic twentieth-century chronicler of the old Corinthians, noted the 'intelligent nonchalance' of their football. 'In their tailored shirts and well-cut shorts,' he added, 'they brought a quality and culture to the game which, since their leisure and talents were dimmed by the First World War, Pegasus alone have recaptured.'<sup>3</sup>

It would be an injustice, however, to regard Pegasus as simply a late flowering of the Corinthian spirit, a throwback to an era of elite amateurism when sport 'had not only to be played in good spirit, it had to be played with style'.<sup>4</sup> Interviews with former players, along with Ken Shearwood's intimate history of the club, leave the impression that they simply sought enjoyment from playing in congenial company at the highest level of the amateur game, giving little thought to the glory that was Corinth.<sup>5</sup> Though H.W. ('Tommy') Thompson of St John's College, Oxford, the club's founder, was not uninfluenced by such considerations, Pegasus is best understood in its more immediate historical setting as a phenomenon of the 1940s and 1950s. 'Comparisons between Pegasus and the Corinthians are rather too obvious and might be misleading,' Roland Allen observed in *The Sunday Times* after their first Amateur Cup triumph. 'Pegasus have to create their own history in a different sort of football world.'<sup>6</sup> In raising the profile of the game at the old universities, where it had lived long in the shadow of rugby union, Pegasus struck an important blow against the anti-soccer prejudice that had come to prevail amongst England's middle classes. Soccer was 'a gentleman's game played by hooligans': thus ran the conventional wisdom. By promoting amateurism in its traditional form, Pegasus supplied an antidote to those aspects of professionalism that were said to be bringing soccer into disrepute. Any success it achieved sent out the message that soccer was a game at which both Oxbridge undergraduates and working-class heroes could excel. All this carried weight with the FA's secretary, Stanley Rous, who had had been obliged to switch to rugby while

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teaching at Watford Grammar School in the 1920s. In short, Pegasus was assigned an educational role. It was expected to lead by example, stiffening the resolve of those schools that had hitherto resisted the drift to rugby. And if, along the way, Pegasus was able to achieve a moral victory or two in the FA's long-running campaign against 'shamateurism', so much the better. The intention here is to set Corinthian rhetoric aside and locate this account of Pegasus, its rise to prominence and its subsequent decline, in an appropriate mid twentieth-century context.

#### **Beginnings**

Though Oxford and Cambridge were inclined to disagree as to when and where the idea of a joint universities side had first been floated it seems clear that Thompson was canvassing support in the spring of 1948. A number of Oxford-based Pegasus players remembered a journey with the university team to Birmingham as being of particular significance: 'The suggestion [was] ... made by Dr H.W. Thompson as our train left Banbury and discussed by the players thoroughly.'<sup>7</sup> Contact with Cambridge was established and a meeting 'to discuss the formation of a joint Oxford and Cambridge Universities Association Football Club' was held in London in May 1948. This meeting, attended by Thompson, John Tanner and Denis Saunders from Oxford, by Douglas Insole and G.H.G. Doggart from Cambridge, and by three representatives from the Corinthian-Casuals club, appears to have achieved everything for which Thompson could have hoped. Insole proposed that a joint club be formed and it was agreed that membership was open to all members of both Oxford University (OUAFC) and Cambridge University (CUAFC) clubs on payment of 2/6d (12½p). The suggestion that the new club should be named 'Pegasus', the winged horse of Greek mythology representing an amalgam of the 'Centaur's' (Oxford) and the 'Falcons' (Cambridge), was carried unanimously and a constitution, previously drafted by Thompson, was 'provisionally accepted'. This included the so-called 'one year rule', designed primarily to protect the interests of Corinthian-Casuals, the anticipated final destination of most Oxford and Cambridge players. The intended effect of the rule was to restrict the pool from which Pegasus could select to players at university and those in their first year after university. Thompson agreed to act as

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honorary secretary and treasurer until such time as officers were formally elected.<sup>8</sup>

There seems no doubt as to who was in the driving-seat at this stage. Thompson, an Oxford blue in 1928–29 and the Oxford University representative on the FA's Council, was setting the pace. By the start of July arrangements were in hand for the first formal meeting of the new club to take place in London in October. With this achieved Thompson set about organising support for a bid to secure entry on favourable terms into the high-profile Amateur Cup competition in 1948–49. This required the approval of the FA's Amateur Cup Committee, due to meet at the end of May, and the full FA Council five weeks later. Thompson anticipated 'a lot of opposition' at this stage and nothing could be taken for granted. It was necessary, therefore, to articulate in some detail the reasons why Pegasus had come into existence and what its promoters hoped to achieve. This was set out in a memorandum sent out to all members of the Amateur Cup Committee early in May and elaborated in subsequent correspondence.<sup>9</sup>

In making the case for Pegasus Thompson had to tread carefully. He was seeking entry to the competition for a club which, at the time of application, did not exist. It was thus necessary to acknowledge that 'special sanction of the Committee would be required'. This posed less of a problem than the idea that Pegasus should be exempt from the qualifying stages of the competition. With a team mainly comprising undergraduate students Pegasus would not be in a position to play any matches before the start of term in October, thus precluding participation in the early qualifying rounds. This, however, was not the only complication. Both OUAFC and CUAFC were anxious to keep their squads together for the varsity match, traditionally played in the first week of December. Thus they were unwilling to release players to assist Pegasus in the fourth and final qualifying round due to be completed in late November. In these circumstances Thompson had little option but to ask 'for as much exemption as possible, i.e. until the first round proper in January'. As one member of the committee pointed out, this raised an awkward question because it breached the principle 'that exemption should be looked upon primarily as a reward for meritorious performance in the Amateur Cup in the previous season'.<sup>10</sup> It soon became clear that it would not be possible to meet Thompson's requirements in full without bruising a few toes.

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In this situation it made sense to have a 'least-worst' option in reserve. Prompted by Andrew Ralston, secretary of the Isthmian League, who argued that opposition would be minimised by a strategic concession, Thompson indicated that he was open to the 'less satisfactory possibility' of exemption to the fourth qualifying round. This was on the understanding that Pegasus would be permitted to postpone its cup debut until after the Oxford–Cambridge match. It was not likely, he argued, that opponents would object 'since without being presumptuous, it is felt that the first match played in the Competition by the new Club would prove a definite attraction'.<sup>11</sup> Writing to Rous before the meeting Thompson predicted a clear majority in favour of allowing Pegasus to enter but observed that opinion on the committee was equally divided as to exemption, 'with a few members inclined to favour some exemption if certain conditions were fulfilled'. The final outcome – exemption to the fourth qualifying round with permission to postpone the tie – was probably as much as Thompson had come to expect. Even so it caused 'a certain amount of murmuring' in senior amateur circles.<sup>12</sup>

Thompson had lobbied resourcefully to achieve this result, deploying arguments that would be sympathetically received at FA headquarters. In his memorandum he reminded committee members of the debt which the modern game owed to pioneers at Oxford and Cambridge and to their Corinthian successors. Noting that 'the revival of the Corinthian F.C. in its old form is the ardent wish often expressed by many people of widely different connection', Thompson admitted that such a possibility 'has obviously been in the minds of the members of the new Club'. He elaborated this point in reply to a correspondent who had written to him lamenting the demise of the old Corinthians, the club having merged with the less illustrious Casuals in 1939. 'Of course our ultimate object is just what you say, namely the revival of the Corinthians, but we shall have to step very slowly and carefully, and I do not yet know how well it will go.' Implicit in this line of thought was the idea that the Corinthian-Casuals, bottom of the Isthmian League in 1947–48, had proved less than satisfactory as standard-bearers of the old tradition. 'I am glad that you have raised the point that the Corinthian-Casuals Club has disgraced itself,' he wrote privately to Harry Huband of the London Football Association, 'for with that we frankly agree.' But he recognised the importance of retaining goodwill and the advantage of being able to assure potential