

Join together, fight together, die together: Scottish Sportsmen, the Great War and Enlistment

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Abstract

Significant numbers of amateur sportsmen in all sports enlisted, and their sacrifice had an effect on sporting engagement and sporting communities across Scotland for many years. The Pals Battalions of The Great War have been the subject of increasing research in recent years. Within this research into enlistment the Sportsmen's Battalions have been less of a focus, despite sport being an embedded social and cultural presence in Scottish communities. While the main focus in Scotland has been the professional footballers of McCrae's Battalion, few have examined the contribution of other sportsmen to the war effort. This paper explores the nature of enlistment and experiences from other sports such as athletics, rugby and shinty, as well as amateur football, through media representations by drawing on contemporary sources and archive material of various clubs. In addition to considering the narratives prevalent at the time regarding the contribution of sportsmen and enlistment, the paper also examines the competing discourses associated with social norms associated with signing up, and the wider need to preserve morale during a time of national crisis.

In the aftermath of the Great War of 1914–1918, the impact on all sections of Scottish society was clear to see. The toll on young men in particular was evident, and nowhere more so than at all levels of Scottish sport, since sport was where young males interacted and played together in their communities, and turned up in their thousands on weekends to watch their teams. It was the subsequent scale of loss in this young male demographic that led to an almost complete rebuilding of some community and professional sports clubs following the war. Many clubs disappeared entirely as there were not enough young men enrolled as members. This paper examines how young Scotsmen involved in sport were encouraged to join the war effort, and seeks to broaden the scope of existing literature, much of which is Anglo-centric and related to football.¹ By the early twentieth century, sport in Scotland was a broadly embedded cultural practice, both as an expression of community as well as of national pride, and participation in sport extended far beyond professional football. In drawing on newspaper accounts as well as existing research, the paper explores more fully the nuanced and complex narratives that influenced enlistment among Scottish sportsmen.

The universal call to arms in 1914 struck a chord with young men who had been brought up in a society where notions of duty, honour and patriotism were a cornerstone in their lives. Scotland's long-standing affiliation with the army reserves of the Volunteers and Territorials revealed much about a

¹ See for example Alexander Jackson, *Football's Great War: Association Football on the English Home Front, 1914–1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2022).

self-identity which carried inherent respect for the military way of life, a fact which made Scots natural recruits in the early years of the Great War.² These values were never more clearly exemplified than at local and fraternal levels. Recruitment patterns often emphasised the bonds – community, occupation, cultural attachments – that cemented these young men together. Recruitment to the so-called ‘Pals Battalions’ relied heavily on the view that if men lived, worked and played together, they would also fight better together. Friendships and connections would enhance morale, thus ensuring that orders were swiftly and efficiently carried out within a well-oiled military machine.

While trades and professions were often targeted for enlistment in the Pals Battalions, recruiters in Scotland also recognised the importance of community affiliations, as exemplified by participation in sport and by loyalty to local sports clubs. This particular Scottish variant of the martial tradition therefore brought different experiences of recruitment in support of the war effort.

The narratives most often associated with Scottish sport and enlistment involve association football – in particular, the well-documented enlistment of certain football clubs in the 16th (Service) Battalion, The Royal Scots, known variously as ‘McCrae’s Battalion’, ‘McCrae’s Own’ and the ‘Heart of Midlothian Battalion’. This battalion received significant recruitment from football clubs in the east of the country. Virtually the whole of Edinburgh’s Heart of Midlothian team joined up, as did many players from Raith Rovers FC of Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline Athletic FC, Falkirk FC and Hibernian FC. Significant numbers of former team members also enlisted, and it is estimated that at least five hundred Hearts supporters did so as well.

McCrae’s battalion saw action on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, where it lost almost three-quarters of its strength that day alone. Heart of Midlothian FC ultimately lost sixteen members, three of whom died that first day. While some members of the other four clubs joined different regiments apart from McCrae’s, various accounts estimate that Raith Rovers lost four of nine team members who had enlisted; Falkirk FC listed seven killed plus two wounded; Dunfermline Athletic FC lost three; and Hibernian FC lost nine former and current team members.

The circumstances surrounding McCrae’s battalion, their combat record and their loss and sacrifice has understandably focused research in this area on the enlistment of Scotland’s professional football players in the Pals Battalions. In addition to stories of the famous Christmas truce, in which football matches were played between the opposing armies, the wartime narratives involving Scottish football have influenced our understanding and contemporary views of those events.³ Then as now, the media played a key role in shaping the public mood, primarily by focusing on the response of the professional football teams and their supporters, and advancing a narrative of non-enlisted, high profile sportsmen as cowards, at least in the early days of the war. Their reporting has influenced much of the subsequent research on the contribution of sportsmen to the war effort.

² For further development of the influence of the Volunteer movement see Matthew L. McDowell, *A Cultural History of Association Football in Scotland 1865–1902: Understanding Sport as a way of Understanding Society* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013).

³ See James Walvin, *The People’s Game. The History of Football Revisited* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1994), 118; also John Bailey, *Not Just on Christmas Day: An Overview of Association Football in the First World War* (Upminster: 3-2 Books, 1999).

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Importantly, the power dynamics at play between sports clubs and their governing bodies, their players, participants and their clubs at the outbreak of war significantly influenced public opinion regarding what was both patriotic and morally decent, and generated debate concerning what would be deemed socially acceptable and appropriate in the national interest. So, while initial recruitment strategies involving sport focused on the more visible national game of football at the professional level, those early efforts also aimed to reach amateur players and supporters. As recruitment efforts widened from late 1914 until 1916, the role and place of sport became of increasing importance not only in recruiting men but also in providing a visible example of patriotic duty to the general public.⁴ Indeed, the growing popularity of sport was crucially important as a focus for early recruitment efforts.

Scotland's socio-martial tradition

By the turn of the twentieth century, industrial central Scotland had a strong and reliable reputation as a fertile recruiting ground, based mainly on recruitment to the British army for the Boer and South African Wars in addition to other military requirements for the rapid expansion of colonial interests. Many in Scotland had answered the call of Empire, including Sir George McCrae, who had fought in those colonial outposts from South Africa and Sudan to Crimea.⁵ A newspaper article of 21 November 1914, referring to a forthcoming address by McCrae at the Synod Hall organised by the Highland Societies of Edinburgh, appealed to the importance of the Scottish Imperial tradition in military recruitment. It suggested companies be 'localised' and referred directly to the importance of sport: 'Thousands of men have a common bond of comradeship at Tynecastle. Under the auspices of the Heart of Mid-Lothian Club half a battalion of excellent soldiers could be raised with ease ...'.⁶ Many who would serve in the Great War thus already had some military experience. A number of sportsmen were amongst them.

Recruitment to the armed forces through fraternal bonds was never more fertile than in Scotland in 1914 and 1915. In both the industrial heartlands of the central belt as well as the more remote rural areas, communities were often structured around mutual help and support that exemplified their civic and community pride. It was these close ties that enabled recruiters to enlist men, often in significant numbers. The rate of recruitment for the new battalions in Scotland at the outbreak of the war thus exceeded that of the rest of the UK.⁷ Elaine McFarland writes that

Although the martial race ideology was hardly unique in 1914, the Scottish variant was particularly effective not only as a practical junction point between local patriotism, national identity and imperial destiny, but also as a bond between the

⁴ National Registration Act 1915 <https://derbyscheme.wordpress.com/>. On 15 July 1915 the National Registration Act 1915 was passed, requiring that all men and women aged 15 – 65 register at their residential location by 15 August 1915. The registration was to be undertaken in a similar way to a census. However, unlike a census each person would complete their own form. Some twenty-nine million forms were issued across England, Scotland and Wales.

⁵ Jack Alexander, *McCrae's Battalion: The Story of the 16th Royal Scots* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2003), 48–50.

⁶ 'Sir G. McCrae Raises the Flag', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 21 November 1914, 4.

⁷ Lord Rosebery speech, 'The Spectre of Conscription', *Edinburgh Evening News*, January 11, 1915, 2.

various disparate components of a rapidly expanding military establishment. In Scotland it was more about civic rather than Pals identity.⁸

In the early stages of the war, much of the enlistment effort was driven by the need to recruit quickly and effectively. To this end, the War Office put considerable resources into the recruitment of young men from affiliated groups, since they saw such affiliations as creating the possibility of enlisting large numbers in an efficient manner.⁹ In Scotland, they were able to build upon the history of the Volunteer movement and its traditional linkages with sport.

Formed in 1859, the Volunteer Forces appealed to young men at a time when media accounts were full of the exploits of soldiers in far-flung outposts of the Empire. Michael Paris has described how ‘men from all social classes eagerly donned the often outlandishly flamboyant uniforms...of the Volunteers and basked in the reflected glory of Victoria’s heroes with none of the discomfort or danger of the professional soldier’.¹⁰ Eventually reorganised as the Territorial Force in 1908, the Volunteers – essentially what today we would call the army reserves – were often celebrated in local news reports, with the activities of Volunteer groups and individual Volunteers becoming widely known.

As members of these reserve forces, young men not only gained a proto-social military experience by serving King and country, but also increased their standing in their communities and thus their ability to get on in life. Association with the Volunteer movement (as, later, with the Territorial Force) was not only a social marker in its own right, but also facilitated social networking, opening doors to advancement both socially and occupationally for many young men, especially in the more remote areas of Scotland. The Volunteers operated, in effect, as a fraternal organisation, with all the status markers that went with it. Consequently, when war broke out, the ‘spirit of the Volunteers’ had so shaped the identity of many young men that they readily responded to Sir George McCrae’s message: ‘The Empire has responded splendidly to the call ... It is up to the men of the martial city to defend what they have builded (sic) – the Imperial edifice broad based on freedom’.

Part of the success of the Volunteer movement was undoubtedly due to its involvement of sporting activity in its training regimen. Sport was embedded in many local forces, and not only provided a means of getting young men fit for service through shared endeavour, but also for boosting morale and nurturing a sense of belonging among recruits. Indeed, some of the earliest football clubs emerged from the Volunteer movement. The Third Edinburgh Rifle Volunteers, established by the temperance campaigner John Hope in 1874, eventually became the first association football club in Edinburgh; the Third Lanark Rifle Volunteers, founded two years earlier in Glasgow, was one of the Scottish

⁸ Elaine McFarland, ‘The Great War’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History 1500–2000*, eds. Tom Devine and Jenny Wormald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 557.

⁹ The justification for this view has, however, been challenged by Vamplew, who questions the influence of middle class ideologies of athleticism by rightly pointing out that most working-class men came from schools where few such notions would have featured in their experience of elementary education. See Wray Vamplew, ‘Exploding the Myths of Sport and the Great War: A First Salvo,’ *International Journal of the History of Sport* 31/18 (April 2014): 2297–2312.

¹⁰ Michael Paris, ‘The Pleasures of War: War and Popular Culture in the Age of Victoria,’ in *Unrespectable Recreations*, ed. Martin Hewitt. Leeds Working Papers in Victorian Studies 4: Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies (2001): 130.

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Football League's founding members.¹¹ For the Volunteers, sports days became a core part of their activities, with the result that sport, militarism and nationalism had already fostered a heady mix of emotions and affiliations prior to the outbreak of the Great War. When the call to arms came, the fact that many sportsmen were already experienced reservists may explain the eagerness with which a large proportion of Pals Battalions were formed.

Beyond the visible involvement of national league clubs, the power of sport also proved crucial in encouraging enlistment at the local level by emphasising the importance of 'doing one's duty'. The efforts to recruit sportsmen in late 1914 and early 1915 re-cast the existing public perception of sports authorities, clubs and sportsmen, and the eventual enlistment of a range of sportsmen helped to nurture a sense of patriotic commitment among the populace at large – commitment which became increasingly vital as the nation sought to build a fighting force able to stand up to the German Army.

Various authors have explored the reasons why military recruitment was so successful in Scotland. In considering the outsize role Scots played as soldiers of the Empire, Thomas Devine described how 'Enlightenment' values celebrating legend and clanship became associated with British military service in Scotland.¹² Mason and Reidi considered the importance of sport, reminding us that military ideology reflected the ideals of 'sportsmanlike' behaviour not just in its recruitment methods but also in how it expected soldiers, once enrolled, to conduct themselves.¹³ What is not in doubt was the response in Scotland at the outbreak of war. Partly guided by the view that 'it would be over by Christmas', enlistment was initially substantial as men signed up for what they probably considered the latest 'adventure' of the Empire. What they could not know, of course, was that over the next four years they would witness – and participate in – devastation on an industrial scale.

The Role of Sports Authorities and Clubs in recruitment

While sport in Scotland was becoming an increasingly important part of community identity, different sports were perceived differently by the public. As it gained in popularity, professional football was viewed as particularly lucrative and essential to community display; but to suggest that the game's governing authorities were benign stewards of such growth is to overstate their role, as in most cases they were reactive at best to the structural strains that arose. By contrast, the governance of amateur sports such as rugby union and harriers was better organised and more effective, with clubs' ability to act independently giving clearer direction to the decision-making of their respective governing bodies.¹⁴ When it came to recruitment rates, the differences between amateur and professional or team and individual sports became apparent, with patterns often reflective of class, occupation, and type of sport.

The organisational structure and methods of governance of the amateur and semi-professional football clubs as well as other non-professional sports were, by today's standards, quintessentially

¹¹ J. D. Campbell, 'Training for sport is training for war: Sport and the transformation of the British Army (1860–1914),' *International Journal of History of Sport* 17/4 (December 2000): 27.

¹² T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire 1600-1815* (London: Penguin, 2004), 290–319.

¹³ Tony Mason and Eliza Reidi, *Sport and the Military. The British Armed Forces 1880–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80–111.

¹⁴ See for example John Coltman, *First Hundred: The Teviotdale Harriers Centenary (1889–1989)* (Hawick: Teviotdale Harriers, 1988), 51.

local, reflecting the embryonic nature of transport links, the need for players to meet the demands of employment, and the nature of local ties. As we have noted, the homosocial nature of the male sports club fostered a strong attachment to place and locale, with local culture, work and recreation likely more influential in binding young men together than loyalty to a particular professional club.¹⁵

When the football authorities decided to encourage professional league play in late 1914 and into 1915, they did so in the belief that the competitions would boost the nation's morale. This turned out to be a serious public relations miscalculation on their part, as the decision failed to acknowledge the suspension of local games and even training owing to players and supporters deciding to enlist. While professional football authorities considered their position and sought guidance from government, sharply declining gate revenues had forced many junior clubs to suspend their activities by early December 1914.¹⁶ Other sports were likewise affected. Athletics authorities quickly decided that athletic meetings and cross-country running should be suspended; and the governing bodies of shinty and Scottish rugby also effectively suspended fixtures as whole teams chose to enlist.

The inherent confusion of this situation – with sporting bodies deciding one thing and government directives saying another – meant that the portrayal of sportsmen as defenders of the nation was not a straightforward matter, especially given the initial reluctance of the football authorities to suspend league play. Between the outbreak of war and late 1915, the Scottish Football Association in collaboration with the (English) Football Association sought official clarification from the War Office as to whether football should continue. Government appears to have delayed providing such clarification out of the belief that the war would soon be over, and that it was important to keep up morale at home.¹⁷ The confusion meant, however, that many sportsmen had to make their own decision about joining up, with little guidance from their clubs or from sports' governing bodies. Unfortunately, the confusion also led to a widespread perception of professional sportsmen as selfish, as shirking their duty – a view well illustrated by the examples of sportsmen being handed a white feather in the street.¹⁸

The focus on professional football in existing scholarly literature has led to a particular view of recruitment that masked wider trends. In fact, many of those playing at lower levels had already enlisted, and once the authorities had decided to suspend league competitions, players and supporters provided a steady flow of largely enthusiastic and confident recruits. Military recruiters tended to favour

¹⁵ Deborah Baldwin and Hamish Telfer, 'Urban Sport and Rural Consumption: Paradoxical Pleasures? A case study of the growth of cross country running in nineteenth century Scotland.' *International Sports Studies* 33/2 (December 2011): 15–25; and Hamish Telfer, 'Ludism, Laughter and Liquor: Homosocial Behaviour in Late-Victorian Harriers Clubs' in *Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play*, eds. Mike Huggins and J. A. Mangan (London: Routledge, 2004), 185–203.

¹⁶ 'International and Cup Matches Abandoned', *Northern Chronicle and General Advertiser for the North of Scotland*, 23 December 1914, 5. Local matches tended to continue, but at a meeting of the Scottish Football Association in Glasgow on Tuesday 22 December 1914 it was decided to abandon all international and cup competitions.

¹⁷ 'Patriotic Concert in Edinburgh,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, May 6, 1915, 2.

¹⁸ Alexander, *McCrae's Battalion*, 72.

candidates involved in those sports that they viewed as most useful in getting young men fit.¹⁹ Both football and cross-country running met those criteria, with football, as a team sport, providing the added benefit of fostering attachment and loyalty – qualities that reinforced morale, and that were nurtured in the military context through the inter-regimental matches played in training camps.²⁰ Eventually, all sorts of sportsmen – athletes, amateur footballers, boxers, cricket players, golfers, rugby players, shinty players, wrestlers – responded to the unprecedented recruiting drive, while supporters participated wholeheartedly in community fund-raising efforts – the Prince’s Fund was a popular beneficiary – and in preparations to assist in the effort on the home front.²¹

Depiction of war in the press and popular culture

Throughout the Victorian era, press reports represented warfare as heroic, allowing readers to feel safe in the knowledge that the fields of conflicts were usually far from British shores. Michael Paris has described this vicarious enjoyment as a ‘pleasure culture of war’ which had long ‘provided popular and enthralling entertainment for the Victorians’. By the end of the nineteenth century the public had developed a strong appetite for such stories, and war correspondents obliged them, producing even more exciting rhetoric in reports of the Boer and South African wars.²² Whether in European battles or imperial engagements, nineteenth-century press reports painted the actions of British troops as heroic, especially when they faced considerable odds. Even in defeat there was triumph of a sort which elevated the British soldier to the position of hero. Notably, when sportsmen were involved in such actions the press were quick to draw an explicit link between sport and heroism – as in the case of Andrew ‘Trader’ Dick at the hands of Masai warriors in 1895. A member of Clydesdale Harriers and Rangers FC, Dick was reported to have killed between seven and 100 tribesmen in defending himself.²³

This ‘pleasure culture’ largely still existed by the outbreak of the Great War, and was part of a broader expansion of literacy and popular culture that included the embryonic cinema industry, which enthralled audiences with short narrative films bearing titles such as ‘The Sneaky Boer’ and ‘The Attack on the Red Cross Tent’.²⁴ Visual and highly engaging, cinema became widely popular in the early years of the twentieth century, attracting large audiences and helping to instil images of patriotism and duty in the minds of young men. Paris correctly observes that ‘August 1914 was simply the fulfilment of the expectation of war; it was what young men had been prepared for and they rejoiced in the opportunity to take part in the ‘great adventure.’²⁵

¹⁹ F.A.M. Webster, ‘War and the Sports of the Nations,’ *The Badminton Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* 42 (1915): 71.

²⁰ These were widely reported and in particular McCrae’s battalion with its recruits drawn from at least four professional clubs was particularly strong.

²¹ Fundraising efforts were a particular focus for sporting engagement such as athletics meetings and friendly local football fixtures after formal fixtures were to a great extent abandoned. Proceeds invariably went hardship funds for dependents and other charitable sources.

²² Paris, ‘The Pleasures of War’, 131.

²³ Hamish Telfer, Trader Dick. Rangers Football Club and Clydesdale Harriers. Unpublished article. See also ‘Andrew Dick’, Anent Scottish Running, <http://www.anentscottishrunning.com/andrew-dick/>.

²⁴ Paris, ‘The Pleasures of War’, 129–131.

²⁵ Paris, ‘The Pleasures of War’, 140.

The press were, of course, duty bound to report the war in a patriotic manner. In the early years of the conflict, newspaper proprietors themselves and the War Propaganda Bureau essentially controlled content and drove output. The relative lack of immediacy of reports (often with up to three days before the report appeared) further enabled control of the flow of information to the public. Soon enough, however, the War Propaganda Bureau was established to counter German mis-information and propaganda, and newspapers became subject to official control in the form of Regulation 27 of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) 1914, which mandated that the press ensure that reporting did not prejudice recruitment efforts. With press self-censorship strengthened by the implementation of other direct government controls, the press now had to act at all times in the national interest. Thus it came about that, by depicting warfare as heroic, exciting and romantic, and British troops as gallant and honourable, the media of the day shaped the expectations of people at home, for whom information about how British troops were faring on the battlefields of Europe was filtered through a rose-coloured lens.

It is little wonder then that the relationship between sport and its ‘manly’ muscular Christian virtues of courage, selflessness and duty – all essential requirements of the soldier – caused recruiters to see sport as fertile ground for recruitment. It is worth noting, however, that during the early years of the twentieth century, sport was still widely viewed ‘as an unruly recreation’. Football in particular was seen as a working-class ‘evil’ and a ‘problem’ for ‘right thinking middle-class legislators.’²⁶ Sections of the press decried football as a useless and detrimental pastime for the working classes, and reflected an attendant belief that only rational gentlemanly pursuits such as shooting, golf and rugby union were socially desirable, thus establishing in the public mind the perceived social division within certain sports and social groups.

Press owners and the governing classes had an inherent distrust of the working classes and their organisations, especially those that were starting to express an embryonic working-class identity and associated political ideologies. Socialist journals were marked out for scrutiny and opprobrium, as were the newspapers popular with the working classes. The Anti-German Union (later the British Empire Union), formed in 1915, and the Fight for Right Movement, both of which were anti-socialist, reflected the brand of traditional patriotism favoured by the middle and upper classes.²⁷ Consequently, working class responses to the war effort were required to fit a particular mould in order to be seen as acceptable. The Edinburgh Trades Council’s support of recruitment efforts was an important step in making service and ‘doing one’s duty’ acceptable to the conscience of the socialist working class.²⁸

Within the notion of acceptability, however, there also existed notions of identity, one of which viewed militarism as an expression of ‘Scottishness’. This idea became evident in recruitment in the Highlands, where shinty players enlisted in considerable numbers not only in proportion to the

²⁶ Callum G. Brown, ‘Sport and the Scottish Office in the twentieth-century: The control of a social problem’ in *Sport in Europe; Politics, Class, Gender, European Sport History Review*, vol.1, ed. J. A. Mangan (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 165.

²⁷ John Foster, ‘Red Clyde, Red Scotland’ in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, eds. Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 116–117.

²⁸ ‘The New Edinburgh Regiment – Still they Come’, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 30 November 1914, 3. McCrae sought recruits from four trade companies for his new Edinburgh Battalion.

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population but also in relation to the sport, since they were regarded as ‘sons of a fighting race, imbued with the spirit of loyalty and patriotism.’²⁹ (In the event, shinty was to suffer considerable losses, with estimates that the equivalent of nearly fifteen teams were killed. Skye and Tighnabruaich lost the strength of two teams each, and took years to recover.)

Even so, the general public’s view of sportsmen, footballers in particular, as unpatriotic shirkers persisted widely throughout the autumn and winter of 1914. In the Edinburgh press, daily reporting of recruitment was often framed to identify those accused of tardiness in signing up to serve. In the absence of a decision by the football authorities about whether to continue playing, frequent press reports described the Heart of Midlothian club’s attempts to form a complete company from amongst their players, members and supporters, reporting that the club was promising a free season ticket to the grandstand and ground at the end of the war.³⁰ The importance of visible examples of the enlistment of popular sportsmen was therefore elevated when subjected to press scrutiny.

Apart from accounts involving Heart of Midlothian FC, much of the literature relating to enlistment of Scotland’s professional footballers relates to the ‘Old Firm’ of Rangers and Celtic football clubs.³¹ While the issue of ethno-religious affiliations in relation to Scottish football is now accepted as being more complex and nuanced than much of the earlier literature suggests, there was a strong public interest in the responses of the major clubs of the day. The example of Celtic FC forward James Quinn provides a flavour of the press response in 1915 to a professional player who had yet to enlist. The *Edinburgh Evening News* opined that

At a time when an endeavour is being made to bring the big fish of football into the military net in the hopes they might attract millions of little fishes, in this James Quinn is a catch. Whatever military instinct Quinn may have once possessed has been choked by the cares of football and other business and by the deceitfulness of popular favour. But popular favour is short lived.³²

However, what the media saw as a black and white issue – a simple choice between cowardice and ‘doing one’s duty’ – for the professional sportsman was his livelihood. Because breaking a club contract was not an option, professional players sought clarification from the clubs and authorities as to their position before they enlisted. Throughout late 1914 and early 1915, professional sportsmen were caught between the increasingly negative view of their perceived inaction, and the lack of clarity, support and leadership from governing bodies.

It is worth considering the view of those already serving at the front regarding the continuance of sport. In a letter home to Robert Mercer, a Heart of Midlothian player, a friend serving with the Royal Scots made his feelings, and those of his fellow soldiers, clear. The letter was printed in the *Edinburgh Evening News* in January 1915:

²⁹ *Constitution and the rules of play. (1935–1936): Roll of honour of players killed in the Great War*, Inverness: Camanachd Association, 1936, 33.

³⁰ ‘Sir George McCrae’s Battalion,’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 1 December 1914, 3.

³¹ See Bill Murray, *The Old Firm. Sectarianism, Sport and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2000).

³² ‘The Idol of Parkhead,’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 February 1915, 8.

I want to tell you all how disappointed the boys out here are, that the cup-ties are abandoned. Football comes before the war out here. When a paper is received the shouts go up of what's the results of so and so, or how did they get on? When they are satisfied they then ask what the Russians are doing. If there is any protest being made, you can make what you like of this.³³

Meanwhile, establishment religious and cultural commentators were focused on promoting a working-class response to the problem of 'shirkers'. The Rev. William Grieve, writing in the *Edinburgh Evening News*, called upon the working class to make an equal sacrifice:

The titled and landed classes have responded magnificently. The wealthier professions and business people have also done well, and so it is up to us, the tradesmen and the working class, to show that if the upper classes can do without fishing, hunting, golf, shooting, polo and rugby, we too can sacrifice the interest and pleasure we have been accustomed to get from football.³⁴

The public outcry, led by the press, that would have shamed all sportsmen into enlisting ignored the reality that many sportsmen had already answered the call. While the press focus may have been on those clubs and followers at the most visible end of the sport, evidence suggests that amongst those clubs and members at a more local level the response had been generous and sustained. The most visible part of the sport did not represent sport more generally; and in any case, the explanation of why professional sportsmen may have appeared slow to enlist were more nuanced than readers were led to believe.

But whatever popular ideas may have encouraged young sportsmen to enlist, and whatever constraints restricted press reporting about the reality of war, eventually some of that reality began to seep out. Letters sent home in late 1914 began to include accounts from sportsmen, and these did not always accord with patriotic sentiment. Patrick Crossan, a soldier in McCrae's Battalion, mentioned in letters home that rats were a daily hazard;³⁵ and Jim Carroll, a lightweight wrestler from Bo'ness in Midlothian, was quoted in the *Daily Record*, saying that 'We have had some heavy casualties and our company has lost nearly all its officers'.³⁶

Recruitment of Sportsmen: Football and the professional and amateur game

The fact that 'doing your duty' had now become a focus of public attitudes about the war effort undoubtedly helped the government increase troop strength. By encouraging people to sign up with friends and as part of a particular organisation, recruiters saw the Pals battalions begin to take shape, one recruit then encouraging his friends, workmates and social contacts to enlist. Sporting clubs and associations provided an obvious starting point for such efforts.

If one person can be credited with encouraging mass recruitment in central Scotland at this time it would be Sir George McCrae, a hero of past Empire campaigns and a local man. McCrae played a crucial

³³ 'A Royal Scots Protest. Letter to Robert Mercer,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, January 8, 1915, 3.

³⁴ Rev. William Grieve, 'Stop Football' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 7 December 1914, 4.

³⁵ Alexander, *McCrae's Battalion*, 123.

³⁶ 'Scottish Wrestler's Opinion of the Germans', *Daily Record*, 13 November 1914, 2.

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role in building momentum and persuading men to enlist, and his Edinburgh recruits thought of themselves as ‘a cut above’ the rest of the British Army.³⁷ Skilled at using the press, McCrae sought to tap into men’s pride in their local identity to fuel what could almost be called ‘competitive patriotism’. By regularly updating the press, McCrae supported a running tally of enlistment figures in the print media. But in addition to publicising the number of recruits, McCrae extolled their fitness, with his unwavering emphasis on physical preparation feeding the battalion’s confidence. Indeed, press reports recognised the men’s athleticism and physicality, with one doctor reverently observing, ‘I have never seen anything like these men. They are beautiful men, well developed and fit to stand any strain.’³⁸ Many of McCrae’s men had sporting links, including players drawn from senior football clubs across Scotland’s central belt – notably thirteen Heart of Midlothian FC players and staff. Consequently, the battalion’s football team was considered as good as any international side, and the army inter-regimental football cup became a focus not just for the trainee recruits themselves but also, through press reports, for the wider public.³⁹

One of McCrae’s recruits is worth special mention, as he not only exemplified the values McCrae sought to instil in his men, but managed to avoid the awkward situation in which professional footballers found themselves at this time. Annan Ness, a Heart of Midlothian player, was already an army reservist prior to the outbreak of war. A trainee mining engineer from Kirkcaldy, he had served three years in the Royal Army Medical Corps when, at the age of twenty-two, he joined McCrae’s battalion in August 1914.⁴⁰ Ness came from a working-class background, and was a relatively minor professional footballer, but his prior service as an army reservist placed him in a position where the obvious step was to enlist, and he was one of the first professional football players to do so – perhaps because, unlike many of the others, he was not solely dependent upon football for his livelihood, as his training as a mining engineer testified. Although he was a natural leader, Ness refused a commission early in the war in order to remain with his friends in the ranks. During the war, however, his leadership qualities were recognised by successive promotions within the regiment. Having distinguished himself as the battalion’s regimental sergeant-major during the spring 1918 offensive at Ypres, he was rewarded with a battlefield promotion to lieutenant.⁴¹ As one of his colleagues wrote, ‘He was the sort of chap you’d want to follow for the sake of not letting him down’.⁴² Twice wounded in action, he survived the war.

But as we have noted, it was not just the professional sportsmen who signed up. Recruiters in Edinburgh and Midlothian enjoyed remarkable success among junior (amateur) football clubs, with some clubs providing up to eighty percent of their members; and the attendant numbers of club supporters who also enlisted swelled the ranks considerably. By the end of 1914, reports in the

³⁷ Alexander, *McCrae’s Battalion*, 35.

³⁸ ‘Footballers’ Meeting, Sir George’s ‘Beautiful Men’, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 December 1914, 5.

³⁹ Tom Gracie, a Hearts player feted as ‘an exemplar of football’s sacrifice’ had a valid reason not to enlist, yet did so with others from his club. Tragically, he died of leukaemia – a condition which had been kept secret from others at the club – before he joined the Army. See ‘Death of Tom Gracie,’ *Coatbridge Leader*, 30 October 1915, 4.

⁴⁰ Alexander, *McCrae’s Battalion*, 73.

⁴¹ McCrae’s Battalion Trust: Remembering Scotland’s Sporting Battalion. <http://www.mccraesbattaliontrust.org.uk/aftermath/>.

⁴² Alfred Briggs, letter home, in Alexander, *McCrae’s Battalion*, 98.

Edinburgh Evening News were suggesting that, due to the high numbers enlisting, the army was running short of uniforms and kit for new recruits.⁴³

In the west of Scotland, recruitment from professional football clubs was initially less visible, and some sections of the press regarded professional players as less willing to enlist than their counterparts in the east of the country. The enlistment rate among junior footballers, however, was robust, even if was under-reported in the press. Because amateur players were not financially dependent upon their clubs it was, as we have noted, a more straightforward matter for them to enlist, as they did not need to break an employment contract to do so; and junior clubs in the west of Scotland even offered financial inducements to their players to enlist.⁴⁴ One amateur club, Queen's Park FC, contributed some 227 of their members, players and former members to the war effort; thirty-four of them did not survive.⁴⁵

One aspect of 'competitive patriotism', however, complicated the challenge of recruitment among Scotland's football players. Many writers have noted how conflicting loyalties – religious, cultural, ethnic – resulted in unfortunate rivalries. The complexities and nuances of this mixture relate in particular to rivalries still seen today between Celtic and Rangers in Glasgow, Hibernian and Heart of Midlothian in Edinburgh, and the Dundee clubs today represented by Dundee United and Dundee FC, in all of which the dual identities of the Irish in Scotland have been a factor. To some extent the discourses surrounding sectarianism have overshadowed the broader debates regarding 'Scottishness', patriotism, and identity, especially in relation to enlistment in the Great War – tensions that have been well documented.⁴⁶ Gerry Finn has described the struggles of the Irish Scots in forming and developing their own sports clubs in response to social prejudice and the long-running political debate about Irish Home Rule.⁴⁷ With regard to enlistment, Joseph Bradley has pointed out that significant numbers of Irish in Scotland did sign up – many of them, perhaps, in order not to be seen as 'the other' – and many were killed in the conflict.⁴⁸ The conundrum facing Scots of Irish descent – seeking assimilation while maintaining a sense of a cultural identity in the face of socio-religious hostility – was exacerbated by the advent of war, which required them to negotiate a difficult path among conflicting claims on their loyalty. If Unionism can be described as 'the special brand of nationalism/patriotism that was obviously a dominant motivator among the likes of Hearts, Rangers, Dundee, and any football club which the man

⁴³ 'Recruiting for Edinburgh Territorials, The Number Short,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 30 November 1914, 3.

⁴⁴ 'The Footballers in the West,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 12 December 1914, 8.

⁴⁵ *Queen's Park and the Great War 1914 to 1918. 2018 Project Report. The 227 Men who Enlisted and the 34 who Died* (Glasgow: The Club, 2018). The project was recognised by Early Day Motion (EDM) No. 1812, tabled 6 November 2018 in the House of Commons.

⁴⁶ See Ian McCallum, *The Celtic, the Glasgow Irish and the Great War. The Storm Breaks* (Glasgow: Ian McCallum, 2014); also Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan, & Paul Rouse, *The GAA. A People's History* (Cork: Collins, 2017).

⁴⁷ Gerry PT Finn, (1994). 'Faith, hope and bigotry: Case studies of anti-Catholic prejudice in Scottish soccer and society,' in *Scottish Sport in the Making of the Nation. Ninety Minute Patriots?* eds. Grant Jarvie and Graham Walker (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), 91-112.

⁴⁸ Joseph Bradley, *Sport, Culture, Politics and Scottish Society*. (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998).

on the street typically refers to as “Protestant”,⁴⁹ then players, members and supporters of Celtic, Hibernian, and Irish-dominated clubs in Dundee had to find a different justification for signing up.⁵⁰

Recruitment of Sportsmen: The response of other amateur sports

While football was considered a working-class game, the enlistment of sportsmen from sports other than football often relied on the image of the ‘gentleman amateur’. In many cases, these individuals were products of the rigid, amateur-determined environment of the public school, where education emphasised the cultivation of manly virtues including physical vigour and leadership qualities. As recruits, gentlemen-sportsmen were viewed not only as potential candidates for military leadership roles, but as role-models for all social classes in the enlistment effort.

Rugby union

The image of the gentleman amateur found a ready response among rugby union players, who began to join up early in autumn 1914. Nearly 500 men, the majority from clubs in the west of Scotland, had enlisted by October, and many others from teams across central Scotland and the Borders had signed up by the end of the year.⁵¹ Glasgow Academicals alone contributed nearly 100 members in the first four weeks of the war.⁵²

Unfortunately, attrition among these young men was high. Six out of the first team of Edinburgh Academicals were killed, with a further four wounded; and Glasgow Academicals fared no better, with eight of their first team killed and six wounded. Overall, thirty-one Scottish international rugby union players lost their lives in the war, more than any other union.

Harriers

Harriers’ clubs also encouraged their members to sign up for the war effort. By August 1915, Clydesdale Harriers had enlisted seventy of its members, sixty of whom were listed as ‘other ranks’; and eventually the club saw over 200 men from its substantial membership join different Army regiments.⁵³ From Edinburgh Northern Harriers, some fifty-one members – half of its membership – signed up; and a joint run between Waverley Harriers and Heriots Cross-Country Club in early December 1914 had to be abandoned as only one member turned up, others having decided to enlist.⁵⁴ At a meeting held in March 1915, the Scottish Borders Amateur Athletic Association suspended its

⁴⁹ Passage quoted from comments on this article shared by an anonymous reviewer.

⁵⁰ For a more detailed consideration of Catholicism and specifically the Irish Catholics and the historical religious tensions and identities see Irene Maver, ‘The Catholic Community,’ in *Scotland in the 20th Century*, eds. T.M Devine and R.J. Finlay, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996); also John Kelly, ‘Sectarianism’ and Scottish Football: Critical reflections on dominant discourse and press commentary,’ *International Journal for the Sociology of Sport* 46/4 (December 2011): 418–435.

⁵¹ C.D.S., ‘Scotland’s Little Lot,’ *The Scottish Referee*, 11 September 1914, 3. Some 470 Rugby Union players from Scotland were already enlisted by January 1915. Of these, 294 (62.5 percent) were from the west of Scotland, 85 (18 percent) were from the Borders and 91 (19.5 percent) were from east of Scotland.

⁵² A report in *The Scottish Referee* included the names and regiments of men from ten of the clubs in the west of Scotland, noting that 296 men enlisted in the first four weeks of hostilities. *The Scottish Referee*, 11 September 1914, 4.

⁵³ ‘On Active Service. Clydesdale Harriers Club,’ *Evening Times*, 21 August 1915, 6.

⁵⁴ J. T. Wright, ‘The Harriers,’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 7 December 1914, 4.

affairs, recording that between 500–600 members of affiliated clubs had joined up – some eighty-five percent of active members and fully half of total membership.⁵⁵ Press reports supported such actions, and the clubs' decisions were also supported by athletes, club members and supporters as they enlisted.⁵⁶

Like rugby union, harriers' clubs paid a heavy price in the war. On 19 September 1914, the West of Scotland Harriers suspended all organised running during the crisis.⁵⁷ According to its records, the club eventually saw ninety-seven men enlist – almost half of its total membership of 212; sixty three of them were listed as 'other ranks'.⁵⁸ Of these ninety-seven, sixteen men were killed and a further fifteen wounded, almost one third of those who had signed up.⁵⁹ Of the ten athletes on the Scottish athletics team who had competed against Ireland in 1913, eight had enlisted by early 1915. Private James Duffy of the 16th Battalion Canadians, runner-up in two Scottish cross country championships, died of wounds in April 1915 – the fifth Scottish International athlete to do so.⁶⁰

While sports meetings continued throughout most of the war, they generally had the central aim and function of raising funds for organisations such as military dependents and the Red Cross.⁶¹ Shettleston Harriers, for example, travelled to the racecourse at Bogside, Ayr, for a race for military personnel organised by the National Cross Country Union; the event was intended as an effort to keep their membership involved, boost morale and support the war effort. In another example, a programme for the Great Athletics and Military Gala held at Cappielow Park, home of Greenock Morton FC, on 31 July 1915, featured a Roll of Honour containing the names of all seventy-seven members of Greenock Glenpark Harriers who had enlisted. The Gala featured events with a military theme, including a Military Marathon that involved thirteen twelve-man teams racing over a ten-mile course in military equipment. All proceeds from the Gala went to a Dependents of the Fallen fund.

In addition to the amateur harriers clubs in central Scotland, however, athletics also supported small numbers of professional athletes, especially in the sprints and in the Highland Games circuits. As in the case of professional football, these athletes faced pressure to suspend activities and do their duty. Despite occupying a much lower profile than football, professional athletics drew significant crowds, thereby attracting the attention – and criticism – of the press. An *Edinburgh Evening News* report of racing on New Years Day, 1915, at Powderhall quoted comments from Scottish Conservative politician and judge Lord Kingsburgh :

‘There were many tall, strong young men who frequented the Powderhall crowd for the racing so I asked how it was at this juncture in our affairs all these fellows were

⁵⁵ Coltman, *First Hundred*, 16.

⁵⁶ See John Cairney, *One hundred years of Shettleston Harriers. An East End Odyssey* (Glasgow: Shettleston Harriers, 2004), 26-32 and Colin Shields, *Runs will take place whatever the weather: The centenary history of the Scottish Cross Country Union 1890-1990* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cross Country Union, 1990), 46.

⁵⁷ *West of Scotland Harriers Club Handbook* (1914-15) The author. 9.

⁵⁸ Archives of the West of Scotland Harriers, The author.

⁵⁹ *West of Scotland Harriers Club Ledger*. The author. 27.

⁶⁰ Anonymous, ‘Scoto-Canadian Athlete Dead,’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, April 30, 1915, 4.

⁶¹ One athletics meeting at Tynecastle, home of Heart of Midlothian FC, raised £270 from 11,000 spectators for the Red Cross in 1915.

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able to go down to the races and enjoy them, thinking nothing of their country. These were the people they wanted to stir up.’⁶²

Other significant responses

The recruitment of sportsmen in Scotland differed significantly depending on the particular sport and its status. Public pressure on amateur sportsmen to ‘do their bit’, particularly those participating in individual competition in lower-profile sports, was minimal compared to that facing professionals, as it was recognised that enlistment was indeed strong among them. But while the continued lack of guidance from sports authorities allowed individual sportsmen in many sports to decide for themselves, players in team sports faced greater pressure to enlist, as the numbers of men involved could significantly reward recruitment efforts.

Shinty responded significantly to the call, with the Cameron Highlanders, Seaforth Highlanders and Gordon Highlanders recruiting many players to their ranks. Some 126 shinty players enlisted, and many clubs suffered significant losses. Twenty-five men from the Beaully Club died; Kyles Athletic lost twenty of the forty-nine who enlisted from the local area; and Skye Camanachd lost eighteen members. Of the sixty men from the Kingussie area who enlisted, the Kingussie Club lost five, with a further two wounded and another gassed.⁶³

Other lower-profile sportsmen were also ready to join up. The cricket club associated with Edinburgh Academicals saw some seventy-five percent of its members joining Edinburgh regiments. Boxing and golf provided notable recruits, including amateur and professional champions such as Ralph Erskine. A superb all-round athlete, Erskine was world amateur fly weight boxing champion as well as a silver medallist at the Scottish Amateur Athletic Championships over 880 yds. He died in an air crash in 1918.⁶⁴ Competitive marksmanship and shooting, skills of obvious value to the war effort, brought some of the earliest recruits. The death of one of marksman, well-known Bisley shot Lt Kerr Gulland of the London Scots club, was reverently reported in the *Edinburgh Evening News* at the end of November 1914.⁶⁵

The attachments and bonds of sport

Due to the perceived importance of the Sportsmen’s battalions, it is useful to consider what constituted a ‘sportsman’ within such battalions. While many were clearly the star players of their generation, other members of the same battalions would have been club staff or supporters, men perhaps motivated to enlist out of a vicarious identification with the players, drawn by the chance to belong to an elite group and bask in its reflected glory – or perhaps just motivated to preserve the sense of fellowship that their club affiliations had already given them. Press reports left no doubt regarding the importance of sport in forging a sense of comradeship and solidarity as men fought together at the front, as shown in the following from the *Glasgow Herald* of 19 November 1914:⁶⁶

⁶² ‘Famous Royal Scots. Rosebery Recruiting Campaign. Criticism of the Powderhall Crowd,’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 January 1915, 2.

⁶³ *Constitution and the rules of play. (1935-1936). Roll of honour of players killed in the Great War.* (Inverness: Camanachd Association, 1935), 34-40.

⁶⁴ Brian McAusland, email message to authors, 19 November 2024.

⁶⁵ ‘Well-Known Bisley Shot Killed,’ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 November 1914, 3.

⁶⁶ ‘Report from the Front,’ *Glasgow Herald*, 19 November 1914, 10.

Those who condemn football would not say a word against the game if they had seen and heard what I have in passing to and from the trenches and firing line...when the Black Watch were ordered to charge in an engagement, they commenced to shout 'On the ball, Highlanders' and 'Mark your men!'. They continued yelling to one another until they had driven the Germans back.

The concept of the 'muscular Christian' sportsman as epitomising selflessness and courage is evidenced in the number of gallantry awards made to Scottish sportsmen. Of the seventy-four Scots awarded the Victoria Cross in the Great War, it is known that at least four had direct links with football clubs: Lance Corporal William Angus (1st Lancashire Fusiliers) and Sergeant Robert Downie (Royal Dublin Fusiliers) both of Celtic FC; Sapper Adam Archibald (Royal Engineers) of St Bernards FC; and Cpl David Hunter (HLI) associated with Dunfermline Athletic FC.⁶⁷ Amongst the members of the West of Scotland Harriers there were awards of two Military Crosses, one Military Medal, three Distinguished Service Orders and one Distinguished Conduct Medal.⁶⁸

The need for conscription had been anticipated with the passage of the National Registration Act 1915, and while identity was a central element to recruitment practices in the first eighteen months of war, an element of compulsion became necessary from early 1916. By that stage in the conflict not even patriotic sportsmen could encourage people to enlist, and those who had avoided the recruiters up to then could no longer do so.

Conclusion

At the onset of war, the enormous task of matching Germany's armed forces man-for-man fell to policymakers and military men like Sir George McCrae and Lord Kitchener, whose efforts were loyally supported by the press. Many of their early recruitment initiatives have become part of the lore of the British experience of the First World War. Recruitment posters provide some of the most familiar images of domestic propaganda: the famous one of Lord Kitchener with his magnificent moustache and his pointing finger ('Your country needs you!') not only encapsulated the nation's consciousness at the time, but has remained iconic ever since. As an element of these initiatives, sport-focused mass enlistment efforts saw significant results across Britain, particularly in late 1914 and early 1915.

While the enlistment of workmates and sporting comrades in the Pals battalions was crucial to this process across Britain, recruitment practices in Scotland also acknowledged the importance of men's loyalties to place and community. The composition of McCrae's battalion vividly illustrates the importance of both principles, with 'A' Company made up of students, teachers, solicitors, bankers, civil servants and clerks; 'B' Company recruited from the Edinburgh artisans and trades, including printing & publishing; 'C' Company composed of thirty professional football players, more than sixty top-class junior footballers, and around 170 Hearts supporters (other supporters being widely distributed among the other battalions); and 'D' Company made up of Dunfermline and

⁶⁷ Graham Fraser, 'Scotland's Heroes: The 74 Victoria Cross winners from World War One,' BBC Scotland, 9 November 2014. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-29951136>.

⁶⁸ *West Of Scotland Harriers, Club Ledger*, 27–29.

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Penicuik men, mainly coal miners, linen workers and printers.⁶⁹ As casualties took their toll, however, the integrity of these units began to suffer. The Pals battalions were often amalgamated with other battalions with the aim of preserving the Pals and Sportsmen's battalion ethos; but by the time conscription was introduced in early 1916, the common identity and shared purpose that had bound members of the Pals and Sportsmen's battalions together had largely dissolved as ties to certain locales or workplace organisations had been diluted.

By targeting men based on their affiliations and other markers of identity, recruiters succeeded in enlisting enough fighting men, at least initially, to meet the challenge facing Britain. We now recognise, however, that while the Pals battalions drew strength from the men's shared sense of comradeship and commitment, the flaw in the system was revealed when friends who had enlisted together, and had fought together, so often died together. Indeed, as the scale of human destruction was revealed, it became clear that many rural communities across Britain now faced an existential challenge. Some rural communities in central Scotland lost so many of their local men that their future was put in doubt. The village of Spott in Midlothian, for example, had no young men left between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, as they had all enlisted. Tranent, a mining village in East Lothian, saw more than 450 men enlist out of a total population of two thousand; 120 names are listed on war memorials in the village, of whom the most noted casualty was Lt Burt of the Royal Scots.⁷⁰

The recruitment of sportsmen as a discrete group provided a highly visible and useful example of war propaganda. While much research has focused on the response of professional football players and the often negative coverage of their response in the press, the success of such recruitment among junior and amateur footballers and those involved in other sports – success largely unreported in the newspapers – has received much less scrutiny. Once the authorities governing professional football recognised the will of the nation, suspended league play, and released players from their contractual obligations, men who had been labelled cowards for failing to enlist became heroes when they were free to do so.

The contribution of junior and amateur football organisations has certainly been underestimated. Many Midlothian clubs, for example, saw revenues drop severely when they were unable to complete their fixtures owing to the mass enlistment of players. When some clubs proactively chose to suspend activities, their decisions to do so went largely unreported in the press, or were mentioned only as a footnote. What further complicates the picture is that sources do not agree about how many men enlisted from the junior ranks of football. In early 1915, some commentators suggested that as many as 100,000 men affiliated with junior football clubs had enlisted from central Scotland. On balance, the figure is more likely to have been around 50,000. Yet this is still a significant figure given that the total number of professional footballers in the whole of Scotland was around 300.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Alexander, *McCrae's Battalion*, 92.

⁷⁰ 'Tranent Officer Killed,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 22 December 1914, 5; see also John Gray Centre: Tranent World War One Memorials. <https://www.johngraycentre.org/east-lothian-subjects/war-battles-military/war-memorials/tranent-world-war-one-memorials/>.

⁷¹ See 'Scottish Footballers and the War,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 April 1915, 8; also 'Football 'Roll of Honour. The Lothian Juniors,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, 20 March 1915, 8.

Reporting was inevitably partial as it focused on those professional sportsmen who were well known to the public, a fact that may explain why press coverage of leading figures in amateur sports such as rugby, athletics, cricket and golf was far less than that devoted to professional football players. But contractual obligations meant that professional sportsmen, unlike amateur players, faced a difficult situation unless their clubs agreed to release them from their contracts. The fact that the press chose to target (and often shame) the players rather than their clubs meant that a relatively small number of professional sportsmen received greater attention in the press than their actual importance warranted.

Sports authorities, government and the press influenced the public perception of professional sportsmen by conflating, deliberately or otherwise, issues arising from the notion of professionalism in sports. The ‘professional’ sportsman was seen at this time as a journeyman, whereas the status of the amateur sportsman was still high, and reflected an ideology – embedded deep within most sports organisations – that valued the amateur as a more moral character. So while press coverage of the enlistment of amateur sportsmen was scanty, that devoted to professional players focused on what came to be seen as their moral failings in not joining up.

The recruitment efforts in central Scotland succeeded in many instances because individual sportsmen and clubs defied the inaction of sports governing bodies and enlisted in large numbers. Many of these men, like Annan Ness, were already reservists. While Pals battalions were drawn from a wide variety of affiliations across society (and they were more prevalent in Wales and England), it was the recruitment of sportsmen that captured the public’s imagination in Scotland. Allied with notions of Scottish identity, the recruiters’ focus on sportsmen – especially the renowned McCrae’s Battalion – not only encouraged enlistment, but also enabled people more readily to identify with those serving at the Front. As soldiers, Scottish sportsmen gave the press engaging subjects for news stories about individuals with whom the public were already familiar. The experiences and impact of the First World War on different sports, individual sportsmen, supporters, clubs and governing bodies illustrates the full complexity of the social and cultural situation in Scotland. In the stories we tell ourselves about our cultural experiences, Scottish sport makes a significant contribution to our socio-political landscape.

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