



## Football and Basque identity: *Real Sociedad* of San Sebastián, 1909-1932

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The current popularity of association football in the Basque Country of northern Spain, with three teams flourishing in the Spanish First Division at the time of writing, two others operating at the next level down and a strong infrastructure of smaller clubs, has deep roots which have hardly been explored by professional historians. Indeed, of the ten teams in the first division of the Spanish national league during its second season in 1929-30 five were from the Basque Country, which puts it on a par with England's Lancashire as a regional nursery of the game at its highest levels. But the work that has so far been done comes from journalists and enthusiasts whose concerns have been to collate and celebrate rather than to explain or assess significance. There is a need for serious, critical academic research on the self-evidently important phenomenon of the rise of professional football and the cultural meanings which are attached to it; but such a project is in its infancy in Spain, as in most of Europe. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán recently drew attention to football's importance as an emblem of local and provincial pride and sense of collectivity, using current developments in the international transfer market as an example of the power of international capitalism and the worship of the free market to corrode the attachments upon which the sport's growth was based, and perhaps to threaten its future; and the development of the relationship between football, local cultures and sense of place is a central theme of this paper, which deserves further development in Spain<sup>1</sup>. The greatest volume of

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<sup>1</sup> For an introductory overview and proposed periodization of the early history of football in Spain, J. POLO DEL BARRIO, 'El fútbol en España hasta la guerra civil', in *Revista de Occidente*, 1986, 62/3. Examples of work on football in the Basque Country before the Civil War are José R. MAN-  
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work on the social and cultural history of football has come from Britain, where the legitimacy of the subject was proposed by James Walvin's pioneering book as long ago as 1975 and established by Tony Mason's well-researched overview of the formative years of the modern sport in 1980<sup>2</sup>. It has since been confirmed by a sequence of impressive monographs which have dealt specifically with aspects of the game, its organisation and its spectators or placed it in wider contexts of sport and popular culture<sup>3</sup>. The considerable volume of existing research has now been pulled together, and enriched by new research in primary sources, in Dave Russell's well-written interim synthesis on the relationship between football and the English during

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DIOLA, *Casi un siglo de fútbol en Vizcaya*, Bilbao, Caja de Ahorros Vizcaína, 1979, a very useful contribution from a veteran journalist; JOSE-MARITARRA, *Txuri urdin: historia de la Real Sociedad de Fútbol* Bilbao, 1980; C. FERNANDEZ DE CASADEVANTE ROMANI, *Historia de la Real Unión Club de Irún*, San Sebastián, Sociedad Guipuzcoana de Ediciones y Publicaciones, 1991. A valuable introductory survey of the history of sport in the Basque Country during the 1930s (though sadly unfootnoted) is Santiago de PABLO, *Trabajo, diversion y vida cotidiana: el País Vasco en los años treinta*, Bilbao, 1995, pp. 125-138. See also, for example, G. COLOME, 'Il Barcelona e la societa catalana', in P. LANFRANCHI (ed.), *Il calcio e il suo pubblico*, Napoles, 1992, pp. 59-65. VÁZQUEZ MONTALBÁN's thought-provoking squib is headed 'Al monte', in *El País*, 16 November 1998, p.80. For Lancashire as the cradle of English professional football, see R.W. LEWIS, *The development of professional football in Lancashire 1870-1914*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> J. WALVIN, *The people's game*, London, Allen Lane, 1975; A. MASON, *Association football and English society 1863-1915*, Brighton, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> For example N. FISHWICK, *English football and society 1910-1950*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989; A.J. ARNOLD, *A game that would pay: a business history of football in Bradford*, London, Duckworth, 1988; W. VAMPLEW, *Pay up and play the game*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988; Charles KORR, *West Ham United: the making of a football club*, London, University of Illinois Press, 1986; and for the most recent developments in the long debate over the roots of football hooliganism, R.W. LEWIS, 'Football hooligans in England before 1914: a critique of the Dunning thesis', in *International Journal of the History of Sport* 13, 1996, pp. 310-339; Patrick MURPHY, Eric DUNNING and Joseph MAGUIRE, 'Football spectator violence before the First World War: a reply to R.W. Lewis', *Idem*, 15, 1998, pp. 141-162.

the past century and more<sup>4</sup>. Research institutes devoted to, or embracing, the history of football are proliferating in England, with two at adjacent academic institutions in Leicester and others at Liverpool and Preston. There is ample scope for similar initiatives in Spain, especially as ample primary sources are available even from early in the century, in the form not only of the local press but also of the extensive entertainment tax records in the provincial archives which (at least in the case of *Real Sociedad*, the San Sebastián club on which this article is focused) provide invaluable documentation on the development of football as a business and as a spectator sport.

This paper builds on an earlier reconstruction of the rise of association football in San Sebastián, which used the entertainment tax returns to compare its popularity with bullfighting, the Basque game of *pelota*, and other admission-charging sports and spectacles<sup>5</sup>. It extends that part of the argument which discussed the relationship between football and idealised representations of Basque identity, which were being articulated, romanticised, transmuted, invented and exploited by the developing local media in the context of the parallel rise (in generally uneasy and sometimes hostile relationship) of the tourist industry and the new Basque nationalisms<sup>6</sup>. In so doing it adds a distinctive case-study to an expanding literature on sport and national or regional identities: depending on your perspective, of course, the Basque Country could be regarded as generating or containing either or both of these<sup>7</sup>. It begins by looking at the reception of this

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<sup>4</sup> Dave RUSSELL, *Football and the English*, Preston, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> J.K. WALTON, 'Reconstructing crowds: the rise of association football as a spectator sport in San Sebastián, 1915-32', in *International Journal of the History of Sport* 15, 1998, pp. 27-53.

<sup>6</sup> J.K. WALTON, 'Tradition and tourism: representations of Basque identity in Guipúzcoa and San Sebastián, 1848-1936', in N. KIRK (ed.), *Northern identities* (Aldershot, forthcoming 1999).

<sup>7</sup> J. HILL and J. WILLIAMS (eds.), *Sport and identity in the north of England*, Keele, Keele University Press, 1996; D. RUSSELL, 'Sport and identity: the case of Yorkshire County Cricket Club, 1890-1939', in *Twentieth-century British History*, 7, 1996, pp. 206-30; Harvey TAYLOR, 'Sporting heroes', in R. COLLS and B. LANCASTER (eds.), *Geordies* Edinburgh, 1992, pp. 113-30; in *International Journal of the History of Sport* 15 (1), 1998, special issue on sport and Nordic identities.



English game in Basque society, and specifically that of San Sebastián, seeking to explain the sport's rapidly-growing popularity in terms of cultural compatibility both with established ideals of Basque manliness and with a tourist trade which invested eagerly in sporting attractions, and noting the reservations of those whose predominant concerns were the promotion of ideas of Basque separateness and distinctiveness in sport as in other cultural and political activities. It then proceeds to examine the trajectory of the sport's development, with the coming of large crowds, competitions and professionalism, and the worries that were generated among some commentators as these processes worked their way through the system. It concludes by attempting to characterise the distinctive features of San Sebastián's experience in comparative perspective, feeding it back into a wider comparative literature and assessing the contribution it makes to a broader understanding of the origins of the world-wide phenomenon and international business system that football has become and is becoming.

A few words on San Sebastián itself are necessary to set the argument in context. This paper emerges from a longer-term project on the trajectory, nature and significance of San Sebastián's unique development as Spain's largest and most successful seaside resort between the middle decades of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936. By the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when association football first appeared on the local scene, the town's dominant identity as a resort was already well-established. From 1887 onwards it was the summer resort of the royal family, and even when King Alfonso XIII's visits became shorter and more intermittent after his marriage in 1906, San Sebastián remained the summer capital, with politicians and foreign embassies joining Alfonso's mother, Queen María Cristina, and her court. During the First World War Spain's neutrality made San Sebastián a hotbed of diplomatic intrigue; and even after the loss of its roulette wheels in 1924, the death of María Cristina in 1929 and the coming of the Second Republic in 1931 it retained its status as effectively the summer seat of government. From the 1870s it had attracted large numbers of French visitors, especially to its summer bullfights, and alongside the fashionable display of its Madrid aristocrats, *haute bourgeoisie*, politicians and civil servants it drew increasingly on the



wealth of Spain's provinces and the urban middling classes, who scrimped through the year to afford modest accommodation from which to sally forth in pursuit of entertainment and sociability. These less-wealthy strata became more important in the 1920s, as the aristocratic season declined, but the town's economic well-being remained robust; and it was becoming increasingly attractive to foreign tourists, including the ubiquitous English. By the time of the 1930 census the resident population had grown to nearly 80,000, and alongside the highly-seasonal tourist trade San Sebastián was a commercial, military and administrative centre, with a high profile for banking and financial services, and the capital of the industrializing province of Guipúzcoa; and it had not lost an older identity as a port, with a locally-significant fishing industry. It had an enviable reputation for the quality of its local government and public order machinery, and for the amiability of its inhabitants, and among the priorities of the municipality was support for the tourist industry through (among other things) financial support for attractive sporting amenities<sup>8</sup>.

Its role as a tourist centre and its position close to the French frontier made San Sebastián a vector for the introduction of new ideas and fashions into the Basque Country, while alongside its cosmopolitan tourist and residential identity it retained a strongly Basque core, especially in the predominantly Basque-speaking Old Town close to the fishing harbour. There were tensions between these coexistent and sometimes contradictory identities, which leading groups in local government tried to resolve by emphasizing those aspects of Basqueness which were compatible with the tourist industry and marginalizing those (associated especially with the rise of Basque nationalism) which found it problematic, distasteful and alien. It was into this environment that association football made its first inroads at the turn of the century, gaining a strong foothold and developing from it while encountering enduring suspicions from Basque traditionalists and

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<sup>8</sup> J.K. WALTON and J. SMITH, 'The first century of beach tourism in Spain: San Sebastián and the *playas del norte*, from the 1830s to the 1930s', in M. BARKE et al. (eds.), *Tourism in Spain: critical perspectives* Wallingford, 1996, pp. 35-61; M. GARATE OJANGUREN and J. MARTIN RUDI, *Cien años de la vida económica de San Sebastián*, San Sebastián, Sociedad Guipuzcoana de Ediciones y Publicaciones, 1995.

(later) from opponents of commercialism and professionalism on a broader front<sup>9</sup>.

If Sr. Arana, the impresario who organised San Sebastián's bull-fights, had pursued a project he considered in 1892, football's origins in the town would have occurred under the most opportunistically commercial of auspices. At the beginning of the holiday season in July a local newspaper claimed to have heard from Madrid sources that Arana's plans included:

...a novel spectacle: English ball-games such as football, lawn tennis, cricket, croquet ('el croquet') and several others. To this end Arana is signing contracts with the best players in England and the best and most attractive female players in blonde Albion ('las mejores y mas bellas jugadoras que existan en la rubia Albióñ').

Perhaps fortunately, nothing came of this picturesque initiative, and football was left to find other routes into San Sebastián<sup>10</sup>. It arrived at the turn of the century, probably by way of Bilbao, the capital of the neighbouring Basque province of Vizcaya which adjoins Guipúzcoa to the west. This was an anglophile town, with extensive contacts with England through its rapidly-developing iron-mining and shipbuilding industries, and ample opportunities for football to be displayed and adopted directly from its country of origin. As early as 1872 the sea-bathing resort of Las Arenas, on the estuary of Bilbao's River Nervión, was advertising in English in the Madrid press, hoping to attract English expatriates with the promise that the establishment 'is conducted by persons speaking English, and accustomed to English tastes and habits', and the assurance that, 'Many highly distinguished English Engeneers (sic) and well known capitalists, who have come to the place on account of the iron mines, are willing to guarantee (sic) the accuracy of the above description'<sup>11</sup>. A Madrid newspaper correspondent claimed to have overheard enthusiastic praise for the resort in the Retiro gardens, with the novel attraction of croquet,

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<sup>9</sup> See above, note 6; and J.K. WALTON and J. SMITH, 'The rhetoric of community and the business of pleasure: the San Sebastián waiters' strike of 1920', in *International Review of Social History*, 39, 1994, pp. 1-31.

<sup>10</sup> *La Unión Vascongada*, 2 July 1892.

<sup>11</sup> *La Epoca*, 3 August 1872.

'the favourite diversion of English high society', being eagerly anticipated with cries of 'Bilbao for ever!'<sup>12</sup>. The fashion for English tastes and practices in Bilbao itself at the turn of the century extended to clothing, architecture and gentlemen's clubs, and the comfortable ambient in which football established itself at this time suggests that it took root by a middle-class route rather than through games played by English sailors or ironworkers. José Mandiola, who was born in 1898 and sports editor of the newspaper *El Pueblo Vasco* for fifty years from 1923, asserted that, 'The true seed of English football in Spain was sown by young men from Bilbao families, educated in the old Catholic schools of Scotland and England', who brought back not only the game but the right equipment, all 'made in England'<sup>13</sup>.

San Sebastián was likewise receptive to English as well as French (and other) fashions, as the architecture of Queen María Cristina's Miramar Palace (completed in 1894) bears witness<sup>14</sup>. And, like Bilbao, it proved to be hospitable to football, which entered the local sporting repertoire alongside more exclusive English imports such as lawn tennis, yachting (to which Alfonso XIII was passionately attached), show-jumping, horse-racing and golf, all of which were introduced in the early twentieth century. It soon outpaced them in its capacity to attract paying audiences, although it was not until after the end of the First World War that football finally, and rapidly, left the lawn tennis club (with its successful September international tournament) and the horse races (which had been introduced in 1916 un-

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 10 July 1872.

<sup>13</sup> José R. MANDIOLA, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-7; J.M. BEASCOECHEA GANGOITI, *Desarrollo urbano y urbanización en la ría de Bilbao: la conformación urbana de Getxo, 1860-1930*, doctoral thesis, Universidad del País Vasco, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> Miramar was allegedly designed by an English architect called Selden Wornum, of whom no trace can be found in England; but the Norman Shaw/'Queen Anne' style is unmistakable. For the more general trend to 'eclecticism' in San Sebastián's public architecture, however, see M. del Carmen RODRIGUEZ SORONDO, *Arquitectura pública en la ciudad de San Sebastián (1813-1922)*, San Sebastián, Sociedad Guipuzcoana de Ediciones y Publicaciones, 1985, and Y. GRANDIO, *Urbanismo y arquitectura ecléctica en San Sebastián 1890-1910*, San Sebastián, Sociedad Guipuzcoana de Ediciones y Publicaciones, 1987.



der the auspices of the *Gran Casino* to take advantage of the lack of wartime facilities elsewhere) trailing in its wake<sup>15</sup>. It was to be football that proved capable of attracting crowds several thousand strong and of extending its appeal beyond a fashionable elite and into (at least) a mainstream middle-class sporting public<sup>16</sup>.

The game comes into view in an organised way in 1903, when a San Sebastián team called Vasconia, apparently founded in the previous year, played Irún-Foot-Ball-Club from a nearby border town and railway centre, thereby inaugurating an enduring rivalry<sup>17</sup>. The match was played at a cycling arena at Ondarreta, in a maritime setting to the west of the town's main bathing beach which was becoming the site for various elite sports, including lawn tennis. In 1904 San Sebastián Recreation Club emerged, playing on the same site, and combining football with Basque sports (*juegos vascos*) and lawn tennis. A year later, after internal conflicts, the football section split off as San Sebastián Foot-ball Club, and this was the immediate ancestor of *Real Sociedad*, who quickly came to dominate the game in San Sebastián<sup>18</sup>.

The club developed rapidly from this point onwards. The existence of rivals in Irún, where early divisions and dissension were eventually resolved with the amalgamation of two sides to form *Real Unión* in 1915, provided an accessible 'other' against which loyalties could be crystallised, and in 1906 the first match against *Athletic Bilbao* was played, attracting a crowd of 'the most distinguished local families' and again inaugurating a rivalry (this time between the flagship clubs of the capitals of Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya provinces) which helped to sustain interest, commitment and attachment<sup>19</sup>. Seating was provided

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<sup>15</sup> A.F. CALVERT, *Summer in San Sebastián*, London, 1906, pp. 77-78, 134-136; Charles GRAVES, *Trip-tyque*, London, 1936, pp. 48-49; Archivo General de Gipuzkoa, Tolosa (hereafter AGG), records of impuesto sobre espectáculos in series JD IT.

<sup>16</sup> J. WALTON, 'Reconstructing crowds', pp. 37-41.

<sup>17</sup> JOSEMARITARRA, *op. cit.*, p. 12; C. FERNANDEZ DE CASADEVANTE ROMANI, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> JOSEMARITARRA, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14; C. FERNANDEZ DE CASADEVANTE ROMANI, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 56-57, 71.



for spectators, as it was when Barcelona visited for the first time in the same year, when the ground was enclosed and an admission charge of one peseta was levied. A year later the first foreign opposition arrived, in the form of a Bordeaux team. This was very swift progress from small beginnings<sup>20</sup>.

It was during 1909-10 that the identity of *Real Sociedad* became firmly established. In 1909 the club first played at the Atocha cycling stadium, on the unfashionable eastern side of town, close to the railway station and across the river Urumea from the planned resort area of the original *ensanche*. This site was to become the club's home ground for over eighty years, after a further interlude at Ondarreta. The cycling connexion explains the identity which the San Sebastián club borrowed in order to enter for the Spanish national championships, for which they needed to be a legally-recognized organisation; and as Club Ciclista de San Sebastián they won the competition. But in that same year the club was legally established in its own right, issuing a hundred shares of 25 pesetas each in the name of the *Sociedad de Fútbol de San Sebastián*. The close relationship between the town and Alfonso XIII ensured that royal patronage was soon granted, and in 1910 the club became *Real Sociedad*. In 1909 they had also adopted their blue-and-white strip (*txuri urdin*) which echoed the colours of the municipality. In little more than a year the club had acquired a local habitation, a name, a set of colours, a legal identity and a national championship<sup>21</sup>.

At this point the frenetic pace of development eased off for a while, although the relationship with Atocha was not placed on a firm footing until 1913 or perhaps 1922. It is time to take stock of the club's initial relationship with local and Basque identities. *Real Sociedad*'s roots lay in that sector of the middle class which took pride in the Basque language and customs, and the stories Basques told about their virtues and the antiquity of their origins, while looking outwards to embrace modern ideas and welcome imported sports along with other fashions from France, Britain, the Americas or Germany, and profiting cheerfully from the opportunities opened out by

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<sup>20</sup> JOSEMARITARRA, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 22-26.

the tourist industry. It was no coincidence that *El Pueblo Vasco*, founded in 1903 and the mouthpiece of just these sectors of San Sebastián society, should also become the local newspaper which expressed most enthusiasm for football, and gave it most column inches, while at the same time celebrating Basque sports and cultural activities. Felix Luengo characterised it as representing 'a modern and open-minded tendency within conservatism, directed at upper- and middle-class people with "advanced" and cultivated ideas'. This was precisely *Real Sociedad's* constituency<sup>22</sup>. Their openness extended to welcoming English players in the team, a common pattern in the early years of football on the European mainland<sup>23</sup>. The goalscorers against Stade Bordelais in early 1909 included Simmons and 'MacGuinness', and a third member of the side at this time was another Englishman, 'Were'<sup>24</sup>. The club was happy to pick up competent players wherever it could find them, as was *Athletic Bilbao*, which also had Englishmen in the team; and the English expatriates may have helped to set up the fixtures with English metropolitan clubs which began with two matches against 'London Nodmans', for which read 'Nomads', in 1910 and included, before the First World War, Civil Service (London), Plumstead and Clapton Orient<sup>25</sup>.

From an early stage the municipality identified with *Real Sociedad* and gave it practical support, most obviously by renting the Atocha ground very cheaply: a nominal two pesetas per annum for several years, followed by a rent which, as a socialist councillor was to put it in 1923, was 'infinitely less than the market rent for that area of land' ("infinitamente inferior a la que corresponde a esa extension de terreno")<sup>26</sup>. Financial support was also forthcoming from the provincial government, though only on special occasions and in relatively small amounts. In 1911 the club president, Adolfo Sáenz Alonso, sought help with the costs (which he assessed at more than 3000 pe-

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<sup>22</sup> J. WALTON, 'Tradition and tourism'; F. LUENGO TEIXIDOR, 'La prensa guipuzcoana en los años finales de la Restauración (1917-1923)', in *Historia Contemporánea* 2, 1989, pp. 235-237.

<sup>23</sup> P. LANFRANCHI (ed.), *op. cit.*, chapters by Christiane Eisenberg on Germany, Guido Panico on Italy and Gabriel Colome on Barcelona.

<sup>24</sup> JOSEMARITARRA, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 27.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 29, 35-6, 44-45.

<sup>26</sup> Sr. Torrijos, in *El Pueblo Vasco*, 17 May 1923.





setas) of taking part in the Spanish Association Football Championship in Bilbao, at which *Real Sociedad* were representing Guipúzcoa in a contest which also featured clubs from Cataluña, Madrid, Galicia and Vizcaya. Alongside this claim to be upholding the sporting honour of the province, Sáenz emphasized that '*Real Sociedad*, legally established with a purely sporting objective, with no concern for profit ('sin ánimo de lucro'), has organized football in a manner unsurpassed in Spain', with an ample and level pitch, two generously-proportioned stands with two new ones added, and a well-appointed clubhouse. It had organised an international tournament for the coming Easter, with financial aid from San Sebastián's *Gran Casino*, but all this activity had left the club in debt at the end of the financial year, and this was why they were seeking help from the provincial government. It was provided, but only to the tune of 500 pesetas, when the club had obviously been hoping for more, although two years later a much shorter and less circumstantial letter produced the same sum in support of a visit to Barcelona for the cup competition of the Spanish Union of Football Clubs. Already, then, the club was able to call on both civic and provincial pride in gaining financial support, and this was compatible with receiving funding from international capitalism in the form of the *Gran Casino*, which was the most cosmopolitan and controversial face of San Sebastián's tourist industry<sup>27</sup>. Its support of *Real Sociedad* ran alongside copious funding for other sports and festivals. This was not only part of a process of encouraging up-market sports and amenities to attract potential gamblers and consumers of the Casino's other attractions and services; it flowed also from a concern to overcome widespread disapproval of the corruption and immorality which Basque cultural and political nationalists and religious traditionalists identified with its alien presence in the town<sup>28</sup>. Under these conditions, *Real Sociedad* in its formative years was able to enjoy the best of all worlds; and this was because it managed to combine an identity as an up-market tourist

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<sup>27</sup> AGG, JD ITF 1526/8159, Adolfo Sáenz Alonso to Diputación, 31 March 1911.

<sup>28</sup> For some allusions to the conflicts over the role of the *Gran Casino* in the life of the town, J.M. SADA and T. HERNANDEZ, *Historia de los casinos de San Sebastián, siglos XIX y XX*, San Sebastián, 1987, pp. 95-104, 157-160; but the full story has yet to be pieced together from the wide range of archival and newspaper sources in existence.

attraction with development potential, with a successful claim to providing reinforcement for Basque masculine virtues of strength, virility, fairness and the open-air life.

These claims were made manifest by the club itself when it tried to gain exemption from the new provincial entertainment tax which was introduced in 1915. When the tax was being discussed in December 1914 *Real Sociedad's* president lobbied the provincial government for exemption on the grounds that the club was effectively a non-profit-making charitable organization, which spent heavily on its ground and amenities to promote the health and morals of the young and the physical development of the Basque race. If the tax were levied it would destroy the club, which almost single-handedly kept up enthusiasm through its 'brilliant matches', and thereby furthered 'this sport which admirably suits the character of the Basque race and produces such good effects among the young'. Football 'contributes to the improvement of the race and to sustaining all its virility and vigour'<sup>29</sup>. This argument did not succeed, but the provincial government took a hard line with all such efforts to evade the tax, and there is no doubt that one of the reasons for football's success in the Basque Country was its perceived compatibility with the characteristic virtues to which Basques laid claim. Even Serapio Múgica, archivist and historian of the province, admitted during the war years that 'the Basques show great aptitude' for this imported sport, which he clearly saw as much more acceptable than bull-fighting, another alien import (this time from Castile) whose popularity he was at pains to discount, ascribing the large summer attendances in San Sebastián to visitors from beyond the Basque Country<sup>30</sup>.

There were dissenting voices, however, and the Basque case against football was made eloquently in the pages of *El Pueblo Vasco* itself during the 1920s by Eugenio Noel, an impassioned supporter of *pelota* who feared that football would bring about its demise:

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<sup>29</sup> AGG, JD IT 3412, Adolfo Sáenz Alonso to Diputación, 29 December 1914.

<sup>30</sup> AGG, SM ISM SS 41-5, proof of Múgica's contribution to a geography of Guipúzcoa, pp. 34-36.

What concerns us is the melancholy vision of a whole generation of young men and boys driven crazy by the English ball, and therefore turning its back on the most elegant, noble and virile of sporting exercises... Between *pelota* and football they choose the latter, and the closed-down courts give way to the stadium...

and to a sequence of events leading to the dominance of football as big, corrupt business, played by professionals, which would bring an end to the sporting ethic of valiant effort for its own sake. He identified dangers in spectators identifying teams or individual sportsmen with the qualities, pride and identity of their city or country, preferring to exalt the simple, spontaneous playing of *pelota* in a village *frontón*, while at the same time appealing to Greek Olympic ideals. He concluded<sup>31</sup>:

Football wrecks and smashes up the sporting body; let us not speak of the soul: look carefully at the children... and decide if their obsession is not already madness... This game with the English ball is the essential basis of modern existence.

In some ways this was prescient, as we shall see, especially as *Real Sociedad* became the dominant San Sebastián team and the standard-bearer for city and province, while by the early 1920s its impressive stadium dwarfed the facilities available at the largest *pelota frontón* in the province. But it was a minority view, though an assertive one; and there were also ironies. Not the least was the familiar fact that *pelota* had been a commercially-organised spectator sport, not only in the Basque Country but all over Spain, for over half a century by the time of Noel's effusion<sup>32</sup>. It was also (unlike football) indelibly associated with betting, which rather detracted from Noel's idealistic picture; and in 1921 a contributor to *El Pueblo Vasco* commented that the additional revenue from betting was needed to pay

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, undated extract from Noel's article in *El Pueblo Vasco* which also mentions Mussolini, Walter Hagen, Bill Tilden, Suzanne Lenglen and Paavo Nurmi.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, I. SANCHEZ SANCHEZ, *Castilla La Mancha en la época contemporánea*, Toledo, Servicio de Bibliotecas de la Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, 1985, p. 175, Table 55, for commercial 'pelota' games in Cuenca and Guadalajara in 1867.



the inflated wages of the professional “pelotaris”: it was, in fact, essential to the finances of commercial *pelota*. The game’s importance to the tourist industry was also stressed<sup>33</sup>. Betting taxes were also levied on the bookmakers at the *regatas de traineras* (races for ocean-going rowing-boats) which were equally emblematic of ‘traditional’ Basque sporting culture<sup>34</sup>. Even without the betting, the provincial entertainment tax which was levied from 1915 to 1932 as a percentage of gate receipts saw *pelota* outscoring football in every year except 1924, and from 1926 onwards the tax receipts from *pelota* were more than double those from football in every year except 1928, when they came very close<sup>35</sup>. A further irony was that, as we shall see, a great new impetus to football’s popularity in San Sebastián, and indeed to its commercialisation, had come from Spain’s fine performance in the Antwerp Olympics of 1920, with five *Real Sociedad* players in the team<sup>36</sup>. Noel’s worries were about the rising generation rather than the current one, and they were part of a wider fear of international standardisation and loss of ethnic, regional and local identities; but within the extensive middle ranks of San Sebastián and the smaller towns of Guipúzcoa, football became fashionable and its star continued in the ascendant.

As *Real Sociedad* became the dominant force in San Sebastián football in the years around 1920, expanding its ground capacity while playing at the highest levels of Spanish football and taking on strong teams from other European countries (as well as playing Uruguay at Atocha in 1924), it contrived to take on the trappings of a Basque identity under suitable circumstances, while also being identified with the cosmopolitanism of a tourist industry which was increasingly seeking to attract foreign visitors<sup>37</sup>. *Real*’s rise to local pre-eminence was rapid and definitive. In 1919 five other San Sebastián teams were registered with the entertainment tax authorities, with apparently varying cultural affiliations: Club Deportivo Luchana,

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<sup>33</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 1, 8 and 16 January 1921; and for some interesting cases in 1901, AGG, JD IT 3365.

<sup>34</sup> AGG, JD IT 3368: tax was paid on wagers worth 63,810 pesetas on the two big racing days at San Sebastián in September 1935.

<sup>35</sup> J. WALTON, ‘Reconstructing crowds’, p. 48, Appendix 1.

<sup>36</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 2 January 1921, 3 May 1921.

<sup>37</sup> JOSEMARITARRA, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

with headquarters in a bar in the heart of the Basque-speaking Old Town; Old Boy's Club, in the cosmopolitan *ensanche* district of the late nineteenth century, and obviously trying to follow an English model; *Español*, on the eastern side of the river where (as the name suggests) migrants from the rest of Spain were particularly numerous; *Unión Deportiva*, whose address was illegible; and *Esperanza*, apparently the Corinthians of San Sebastián, who had no ground and no address but only a contact name<sup>38</sup>. Some of these clubs played other sports as well as football, as indeed did *Real Sociedad*, which had hockey and athletics teams; but none were able to flourish in *Real*'s shadow. Some of the resulting tensions were given an airing in the autumn of 1922, when a campaign among *Real* members to draw in municipal help with ground improvements for a planned international match drew opposition and complaints from the smaller clubs as well as from sceptics among the local councillors. The controversy reached *El Pueblo Vasco* when a long article by 'Tack' surveyed a recent past in which the lesser local clubs had joined together in the *Federación Atlética Donostiarra* (using the Basque name for San Sebastián) and its province-wide successor the *Federación Atlética Guipuzcoana* to oppose 'a mistaken policy of *Real Sociedad*', which 'was then a nest of little prejudices, in which a minority used to play football, closing Atocha to other clubs and sports'. But, said 'Tack', these attitudes were no longer appropriate, now that *Real* had become 'practically a model club' under new leadership and deserved to dominate the local scene. This was a live issue because *Real*'s lease of Atocha from the municipality was coming up for renewal and some were arguing that the provincial federation should administer it for the benefit of all; but the lesser clubs lacked ambition and resources. 'Handing Atocha over to twenty clubs, enemies of each other, will create phenomenal chaos': it would be like a Moroccan souk<sup>39</sup>. This argument did not go unchallenged, as letters to the paper urged the claims of the Federation and the smaller clubs, and a correspondent styling himself 'Ondarraiz', a name derived (perhaps significantly) from the Basque for 'sand' or 'beach', returned to an ideal of sport as being about health and enjoyment rather than business, although he admitted that there were 'ten or twelve clubs which

<sup>38</sup> AGG, JD IT 3356.

<sup>39</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 12 October 1922.

vegetate feebly in the cellars of as many bars'. Above all he feared that *Real*'s dominance would 'convert the sanctity of sport into an industrial business'<sup>40</sup>.

Many people assure us that *Real Sociedad* attracts many visitors to our city and that for this alone it deserves the developed Atocha ground. Well then, if this has to be a consideration let us set sport aside now that its performance is not sporting but commercial, when what this is all about is to bring benefits to our holiday season ('pues con ello lo que se trata es de favorecer a nuestra playa').

This correspondent's fears were well-founded, at least in so far as the renewed lease to *Real Sociedad* was accompanied by a decline in the playing fortunes and support of other local clubs, even though they were given access to Atocha from time to time and sometimes attracted crowds of a few hundred people. The most prominent, *CD Esperanza*, founded in 1908, was still arranging matches in Asturias and Bordeaux in 1921, and began the 1922 season with a 6-0 defeat against the powerful Racing in Santander; but it slipped steadily down the pecking order. In 1928 it had to obtain a ground in order to take part in the preliminary matches for the setting up of the new league structure, but the best it could offer was a field at Martutene, on the southern outskirts of the town, where the lesser teams had been playing before dwindling audiences for a few years. Like the other San Sebastián sides, who were playing the *Real* reserve team by the early 1920s, it was left out in the cold, and *Real*'s supremacy was confirmed<sup>41</sup>.

The really decisive steps had been taken at the beginning of the 1920s. The First World War had been a period of consolidation, with the introduction of a Basque championship in 1914-15 bringing more regular competitive games to make up for the loss of international friendlies; but one side-effect of this was a dispute over a championship play-off with *Athletic Bilbao*. *Real* were severely penalised for failing to take part, and no football was played at Atocha in the 1916-17 season until 8 April. This put a brake on growth, with entertain-

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<sup>40</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 15 and 20 October 1922.

<sup>41</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 15 January 1921, 23 September 1922, 15 May 1923, 26 August and 20 September 1928.



ment tax returns pegged at a very low level throughout 1916-18, before showing a tentative rise in 1919 and more than trebling in 1920 to a figure which was still only one-eighth of the *pelota* receipts. This was the point of transition, however: tax receipts rose from 789 pesetas in 1918, to 1.363 in 1919, 4.203 in 1920, 11.852 in 1921, 16.356 in 1922 and 30.967 in 1923. This latter figure was almost on a par with *pelota* (for the whole province); and although it arose from special circumstances and could not be sustained, the 1922 level remained a benchmark around which receipts fluctuated from 1925 until the entertainment tax was abandoned at the end of 1932. The low figure for 1919 was in spite of *Real* winning the provincial championship and going on to represent Guipúzcoa in the overall Spanish championship; and the breakthrough owed more to a sustained publicity campaign by the club, in conjunction with the local authority, which brought a string of well-advertised matches against foreign opposition to an expanded Atocha in the early 1920s<sup>42</sup>.

The early months of 1921 saw the first great strides in this remarkable transformation. Commercial *pelota* was in crisis, with the *frontón* company objecting to a new betting tax and threatening to give its premises over to dancing. While the *frontones* were closed to the sport, *Real* saw in the new year with two lively victories against Casa-Pia of Lisbon, and on the *día de Reyes* (6 January) they beat *Español* of Barcelona, with 'the local fans... present in extraordinary numbers'<sup>43</sup>. The first really big game came next, when a team drawn from Guipúzcoa province played Sparta Prague, who came with an immense reputation and had already beaten all attendance records in Bilbao: a reminder that developments in San Sebastián were part of a wider picture. The attendance at Guipúzcoa's 4-2 victory was described as huge, despite a wet afternoon. The ground was full and the covered stand was 'a milling throng ('una hormiguera', literally an anthill) of distinguished people'. Spectators came in from Irún, Tolosa and the capitals of the adjoining provinces, Pamplona and Bilbao<sup>44</sup>. Within a fortnight came the provincial championship de-

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<sup>42</sup> JOSEMARITARRA, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-2, 57-60; J. WALTON, 'Reconstructing crowds', p. 48, Appendix 1.

<sup>43</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 1, 2 and 7 January 1921.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, 8 and 11 January 1921.

cider, a local derby between *Real Sociedad* and the Irún side *Real Unión*. Despite recent extensions to the ground, the match was a sell-out and people were turned away. *El Pueblo Vasco* commented on the crowd in enthusiastic detail<sup>45</sup>:

The way in which football is advancing its popularity among us, and the great proportions in which the enthusiasts for this British sport are growing in numbers, may be attested by the thousands of spectators at Atocha on Sunday... The enthusiasm for football is growing with giant strides... the procession of innumerable carriages and motor-cars towards the Paseo de Atocha gave the spectacle an animated colouring which was comparable only to the festivals most favoured by the people. The recent work on extending the ground capacity on the popular side was well-conceived... Some spectators even found 'comfortable' seats in the branches of the trees... In the main stand we saw distinguished enthusiasts from Irún, Tolosa and Renteria, along with the pretty garland of feminine beauties who lend enchantment to these spectacles of virile sport...

After a short hiatus came a further burst of activity. At the beginning of May several thousand people watched two matches against the Belgian team *Union St Gilloise*, and the great highlight of the carefully-orchestrated and well-publicised international series came with the visit of Newcastle United at the end of the month. This provided a reason for explaining the English League, with its promotion and relegation systems, and when Newcastle won the first game in a canter the immense superiority of the English professionals was all too apparent. *El Pueblo Vasco* clearly feared that this might damage the game's progress in San Sebastián: *Real*'s publicity had been brilliant, with excellent posters and press releases, but the injury-weakened amateurs had been embarrassingly outplayed. The second game was used to recover the situation: Newcastle put out a weaker team, *Real* sought reinforcements from elsewhere, and a packed crowd savoured a face-saving goalless draw. A particular triumph lay in the strong hint that a bullfight programme had been cancelled due to competition from the game, which the bullfighters themselves attended; and the newspaper celebrated 'the defeat of the spectacle of bullfighting by that of football'. This was premature, but it was

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 25 January 1921.

during these months of 1921 that football burst through to a new level of popularity and became a potent vehicle for local and provincial pride, safeguarded though this had to be by the face-saving manipulations which lay behind the second Newcastle result<sup>46</sup>.

The club capitalised on these successes, and those of the following season, by expanding the ground facilities and renegotiating the lease by which it held Atocha from the municipality. This issue came to a head in the late summer and autumn of 1922, when *Real* was striving to play host to an international fixture between Spain and France in the following year, which would need heavy investment in the ground and its facilities. At the same time the municipality was reviewing alternative options for the Atocha site, which included the profitable possibility of selling it off for housing development and banishing football to the outskirts. The case for investment in the ground as a football stadium was made forcefully in *El Pueblo Vasco*<sup>47</sup>:

Given the way in which football is taking wing... we need to make Atocha into a sports ground worthy of San Sebastián. We must double its spectator capacity and improve the condition of the pitch, which is very bad at the moment... The management of *Real Sociedad*... believe that the problems are not based on finding the necessary money, but on the need for the municipality to guarantee that the concession of the ground should be genuine and lasting, to justify investing this capital.

There were supporting arguments. The club generated tax revenue in support of charities for the deserving poor, which would be increased if the investment went ahead. It was an actual, and still more a potential, generator of tourist revenue for the town. An improved Atocha as envisaged by the club, with good concrete stands, a well-prepared pitch and good accommodation for players, and room for 20,000 spectators, would be an investment in future generations, which would not work if sports enthusiasts were banished to the outskirts at Martutene or the Asilo Matia. Such considerations needed to

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, 18-27 May 1921.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, 30 August 1922.





be taken into account over and above the narrow financial calculations of municipal accountants and technocrats<sup>48</sup>.

At the end of September the continuing debate, which also embraced the question of whether *Real Sociedad's* status as the dominant local club and footballing emblem of civic pride should be recognised by giving it privileged access to Atocha, was given added urgency by a report that an inspection by the *Federación Española de Fútbol* had revealed a grassless pitch and inadequate accommodation for spectators, putting the forthcoming international match in jeopardy unless improvements were made very quickly<sup>49</sup>. This crisis precipitated renewed demands for a generous measure of municipal help, over and above the proposed long lease. At this point wider cultural arguments reappeared, in association with the Basque nationalist local councillor Olasagasti who had led the campaign for municipal support for the club. The columnist Gil Bare rehearsed this position<sup>50</sup>:

...if people wanted a good sports ground in San Sebastián, as the hard work of so many young people deserves; if parents, educators, men of religion want to create a healthy and vigorous race, let them demonstrate it.

When the question eventually came before a council meeting in mid-November, Olasagasti himself opened the discussion by emphasizing the role of sport as 'the principal element of the regeneration and salvation of the race'. This was reinforced by Elosegui's argument that 'the present lively state of the town in winter was due to the work of *Real* with the development of sport. *Real* has raised the name of San Sebastián to the heights, not only in Spain, but also in foreign lands'. Together, these positions justified municipal help for the club, which was granted a long lease of the ground at a low rent of 6000 pesetas per year, along with municipal assistance with the financing and organization of the necessary ground improvements. The vote was an impressive 19 to 3, although it may have been influenced at

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, 30 August and 2 September 1922.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, 28 September 1922.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, 29 September 1922.



the margins by the *Real Sociedad* members who filled 'all the seats in the public gallery' of the Town Hall<sup>51</sup>.

Not that the decision was made without comment or criticism. It came with conditions: *Real* was to give the proceeds of two matches per year to charity and to pay 10 per cent of the receipts of the international match. Councillor Arizmendi, who voted against the arrangement, emphasized that the municipality had already treated *Real* generously, and the requirement to play charity matches, which had first been introduced three years previously, had not been met. He also complained that the club now had nearly a thousand members who paid monthly subscriptions in lieu of paying match admission at the gate, which avoided payment of the entertainment tax and took money from the local welfare system. He alleged that the municipality would make serious financial losses from the deal in other ways; and although the details of his calculations were challenged, the principles were not denied. As an emblem of civic identity with a strong following among the local middle classes, who could also lay claim to football as an asset to tourism, *Real* was developing a cosy relationship with municipal government, as this vote demonstrates<sup>52</sup>.

Arizmendi apart, what most upset opponents and those who had reservations was the projected demolition, as part of the ground improvements, of a *pelota frontón* at which *rebote* was played<sup>53</sup>. This was a real dilemma for those nationalists who had embraced football, and Olasagasti himself admitted that he would prefer the wall for *rebote* to remain and the international match to be played elsewhere, had this been possible. His colleague Sr. Iceta set out the issues from this angle: 'He was also opposed to the demolition of the *frontón*, because Basque sport was superior to football; and very important matches had been played at this *pared de rebote* whose demolition was proposed. Consequently it has its history, which it is important to respect'<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 16 November 1922.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> For *rebote*, Rodney GALLOP, *A book of the Basques*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1970, pp. 237-8 (London, 1930).

<sup>54</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 16 November 1922.



But this was, significantly, a minority view; and the ground improvements went ahead. The international match was, as befitted its status, a celebration of Spanish rather than Basque identity, and the benefits of this great spectacle to tourism featured in the rhetoric of the celebratory banquet alongside affirmations of the positive relationships between sport, moral and physical health and international brotherhood. The architect won high praise for making the ground ready, against the clock, to receive 18,000 spectators in comfort, thereby sustaining San Sebastián's reputation for American efficiency in completing big public works projects; and the dominant values on display were modernizing and cosmopolitan rather than traditional or Basque<sup>55</sup>.

As *Real Sociedad* became more ambitious and assertive in its business ventures, its relationship with the municipality passed through a difficult phase. In May 1923 the club and the municipality collaborated in organising a four-team international tournament featuring *Union St Gilloise* of Brussels, a leading Belgian side, *Sampdoria* of Genoa, and *Sevilla* alongside *Real*. This was described in *El Pueblo Vasco*, with characteristic hyperbole, as 'a footballing event whose importance has no parallel, until now, in Spain or anywhere else'; but trouble came to the boil a few days before the tournament, when *Real* tried to exempt their members from paying at the gate and to make the municipality responsible for the payments that were to go to welfare organizations. This undermined the original agreement whereby the municipality, having paid 10,000 pesetas to the club to underpin the venture, was entitled to 50 per cent of the profits in exchange. There were now 1200 members, and the debate over the implications of the proposal highlighted the extent of the club's evasion of entertainment tax payments on ground admissions. The socialist councillor Torrijos was particularly outspoken and direct, pointing out that the municipality had treated the club favourably for years, emphasizing the special treatment the club had received through cheap ground rental and the large municipal subsidies for ground improvements. He also commented on the extent to which football had become a business: it was as expensive to bring in a top-flight football team as to pay for a bullfighter with his full array of

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 30 January 1923.



assistants. After a long, acrimonious and complex meeting, the town council voted 11-10 against a proposal that the members pay full admission charges, 12-9 against a motion that the municipality withdraw and the club should organise the tournament on its own account, and finally supported a proposal that unless members agreed to pay half price the municipality would withdraw its support. The club acceded to this proposal, but proudly expressed its intention of giving all its profits, if any, to the local welfare system, to show that its attitude was not about money but was based on the principle of not allowing the corporation to intervene in its internal affairs. The relationship between club, press and local government was strained but not broken, although *El Pueblo Vasco*, which had been generally so supportive of the club, was unable (lacking the necessary 'dual personality') to provide an eyewitness account of its members' meeting. Meanwhile, significantly, the newer of the town's two gambling casinos, the Gran Kursaal, donated the trophy, which was to have come from the corporation. This was an innovation, for the club had previously held aloof from such commercial and controversial patronage, which had been prominent in other local sporting and tourist initiatives. The closure of the gambling establishments by the Primo de Rivera government later in the year prevented this relationship, which would have sat very uneasily alongside claims to Basque virtue, from developing any further<sup>56</sup>. The related issue of payment for the improvements to the ground resurfaced at a council meeting at the end of September, when there was fierce debate on how much should be paid by the municipality and how much by the club, and again sceptical voices emphasized the club's generous treatment by its friends on the council<sup>57</sup>.

These tensions and conflicts cannot disguise the impressive transition that had taken place during the early 1920s. *Real Sociedad* now had a much-improved ground, with a full array of stands and other services and a capacity of nearly 20,000. In 1922-3 the club even imported a Hungarian manager, a former player for MTK of Budapest<sup>58</sup>. Crowds of several hundred had given way to regular atten-

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, 10-22 May 1923.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, 29 September 1923.

<sup>58</sup> JOSEMARITARRA, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

dances of several thousand within a decade; and although the momentum was not sustained through or beyond mid-decade, and the flood of attractive foreign visiting teams slowed to a trickle, the foundations had been laid for *Real* to cope (unobtrusively) with the transition to professionalism, and to occupy a prominent place in the first national League of 1929. Crowds were still predominantly middle-class, and football had what might be called a popular rather than a working-class or mass constituency; but the change in the scale of operations was still dramatic. Alongside the growing commercialism, the club continued to lay claim to a wider Basque identity as well as a civic one; and the two trends coexisted in unresolved tension right up to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936<sup>59</sup>.

Affirmations of a Basque identity for the club were made in several ways. The club's anthem, published in April 1923 as part of the great expansion of the club's activities during that spring, began by celebrating 'the glorious and mighty Basque race' and then homed in on the Basque version of the town's name, referring to the club's 'colossal donostiarran players', who went into the struggle 'knowing that Donosti was with them'. They were tireless, inexhaustible; and in any case the captain could always revive them by crying, in Basque, 'Come on, lads!' ('¡Aurrera mutil!') The second verse moved on to a more conventional celebration of the strength of the club itself and the fraternal feeling it engendered, but it ended by praising the colours of the players' kit and the club flag, which were the blue and white of Donosti. There were cross-currents: the language of the song was Spanish, the first verse ended with an appeal to the players' duty as gentlemen in a manner that sounded English but was perfectly compatible with similar-looking Basque ideals, and the chorus ended with an unambiguously English (although slightly altered) 'Hip, hip, hip, Hurra!!'<sup>60</sup>.

From time to time press reports might also appeal to a wider sense of Basque fraternity, as when *Real* played *Athletic Bilbao* in a cup semi-final in 1923 and *El Pueblo Vasco* argued that what mattered

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<sup>59</sup> J. WALTON, 'Reconstructing crowds...', pp. 37-40, 44.

<sup>60</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 27 April 1923. The full text of the song is in JOSE-MARITARRA, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

was not a *Real* victory, so much as a Basque team getting through to the final and perhaps winning. Comment was also passed on the large numbers of spectators who arrived from right across Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya provinces, looking not only for an exciting game but also 'the atmosphere of fraternal brotherhood (*sic*: 'fraternal hermandad') which characterised the great gathering at Atocha'<sup>61</sup>. This kind of footballing patriotism could also be expressed at a provincial level: in 1927 *Real Unión* of Irún won the Spanish championship, and a motorcade from the final match in Zaragoza attracted celebrating crowds to the roadside in Tolosa and San Sebastián, where *Real Sociedad* gave the victors a reception. The keynote here was a shared Guipuzcoan pride which transcended local loyalties<sup>62</sup>.

*Real Sociedad's* Basque identity was also displayed in the representation of footballing style and in important pieces of symbolism. A consensus about the nature of Basque football was displayed by Francisco Fernández of Sevilla when his team came to play in the 1923 tournament: 'More athletic, more virile, more physically demanding. The players from here are physically giants compared to ours... Our technique is different. Lacking in strength, we resort to skill'<sup>63</sup>. Similar regional stereotypes had been applied in 1921, when the play of the Portuguese team *Casa-Pia* was said to have a lot of Catalan characteristics: 'short passes and delicate ball control'<sup>64</sup>. Players were enjoined to display prescribed virtues. Patricio Arbolaza of *Real Unión* was held up as the ideal, on retiring from the game in 1923 to spend more time with his family: he was noble, manly, vigorous, virtuous, and 'in his breast was contained the vigorous spirit of the true sportsman'. He was also deeply suspicious of professionalism: it was easy money which corrupted the recipient<sup>65</sup>. In the same vein *El Pueblo Vasco* praised the hard but fair, amateur sporting spirit in which the two small-town teams of *Arenas de Guecho* and *Real Unión* contested the 1927 championship final, with *Real Unión's*

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<sup>61</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 24 April 1923.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, 17 May 1927; and for a similar instance, *Ibidem*, 1 May 1927.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, 19 May 1923.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, 4 January 1921.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 10 and 11 May 1923.



Gamborena deciding to play despite injury, for 'my people' and fortified by images of Irún<sup>66</sup>.

Some of this commentary praised Basque attributes which might equally have been English, though an odd compound of the northern professional and the gentleman amateur in Anglo-Saxon terms. There were also symbolic acts which were distinctively Basque in content. In 1928 *Real Sociedad* received a new flag, made by a group of female fans, at a ceremony where the club captain and the president's wife made speeches in the Basque language; in the late 1920s and early 1930s Basque athletic and cultural festivals were held at Atocha; and in 1931, after the fall of the monarchy, the club abandoned its royal associations and took the Basque name 'Donostia', although at first it merely dropped the 'Real' and otherwise kept its old name. This was more a matter of pride in Basqueness than of political nationalism, but it remained a central feature of the club's identity from the top down<sup>67</sup>.

Viewed from a traditionalist or puritanical nationalist perspective, however, the club was developing in disturbing ways during these decades, as some of the debates in the council chamber in 1923 bore witness (although the most eloquent and effective critic of the club's commercialisation was the socialist Torrijos). The movement towards professionalism generated unease. *Real Unión's* Arabolaza thought it was invading the Basque Country, covertly, by 1923, although it was much more developed in Cataluña and Asturias. The calendars of the provincial archive for Guipúzcoa promise files on the earnings of professional footballers as well as bullfighters and 'pelotaris' (whose professionalism was uncontroversial, though regretted by some) in the late 1920s; but although the last-named professions are well-documented, as are boxers, the footballers remain completely invisible<sup>68</sup>. But it seems clear that the club did embrace professionalism in about 1927, as proposals for a national league began to crystallise in earnest; and an interview in 1929 with one of the star players, 24-year-old Mariano Yurrita ('Shimy'), revealed that when in Barcelona for

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 18 May 1927.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 10 October 1928; AGG, JD IT 3408 and 3392.

<sup>68</sup> AGG, JD IT 3395, 3416.

other reasons he had had a professional contract with *Español* for two years. He remarked that *Español*, like other established professional teams, 'have a fully commercial concept of sport', and it seems likely that *Real* were paying him<sup>69</sup>. But this was still a relationship that hardly dared to speak its name, and the club's old guard were clearly unhappy about it<sup>70</sup>. A further straw in the wind was the use of *Real*'s programme as an advertising medium by the disreputable Colon concert-hall and 'variety theatre', a haunt of gambling and prostitution, for a while in 1932, although it soon gave way to the more utilitarian offerings of *El Fénix*, raincoat manufacturers<sup>71</sup>.

There were also repeated complaints about crowd behaviour, although such problems dated from the earliest years of football in the Basque Country, and usually involved nothing more than verbal abuse. In January 1920 the programme contained a formal warning against the use of intemperate language about referees' decisions, and threatened to expel offenders, while pitch invasions were fiercely forbidden<sup>72</sup>. At the turn of 1928-9 there was a very small riot, magnified by the outraged press treatment, when a match was called off at the behest of Barcelona, the visitors; but such behaviour tended to be deplored as ill-educated rather than specifically unBasque, and class rather than Basque identity may have been at issue here. But these issues will receive further treatment elsewhere<sup>73</sup>.

What we can see from this survey is the troubled nature of the negotiation between Basque ideals and the commercialization of sport in San Sebastián during *Real Sociedad*'s transitional years in the 1920s. The picture presented has been of *Real Sociedad* itself, viewed through lenses provided by the records of the provincial entertainment tax and by the local newspaper which was most interested in football. It depicts the response of a dominant bourgeois group in San Sebastián, proud to be Basque but falling far short of nationalist

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<sup>69</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 21 August 1927, 3 March 1929.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, 3 April 1932. The club history is vague to the point of evasiveness on the transition to professionalism.

<sup>71</sup> AGG, JD IT 3371.

<sup>72</sup> AGG, JD IT 3439.

<sup>73</sup> *El Pueblo Vasco*, 1-4 January 1929; J. WALTON, 'Reconstructing crowds...', p. 44.

commitment, cosmopolitan, open to new ideas and eager to promote the tourist industry, to the excitements, opportunities and seductions offered by this imported game. A study of the relationship between football and Basque nationalism, through nationalist sources, remains an interesting project for the future. Despite nationalist attachment to traditional Basque sports and suspicion of commercialism and cosmopolitanism, the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* was not above promoting a knock-out cup competition for the Basque Country in the mid-1930s, and attitudes to football while the game was growing (and when it seemed a real threat to *pelota* and other Basque sports in the 1920s, which was no longer the case by the mid-thirties), would be well worth investigating<sup>74</sup>. *Real Sociedad* succeeded in becoming the representative sporting identity for San Sebastián, as the team carried its prestige (and to some extent that of the province, although *Real Unión* of Irún complicated this picture into the 1930s) on to a wider stage in a way that other sports were unable to emulate. Within the broader Basque setting *Real* was able to pull together a Donostiaran identity to generate sporting rivalry against the standard-bearers of the other provincial capitals of the Basque Country, as *Alavés* of Vitoria and *Osasuna* of Pamplona emerged to join *Real Sociedad* and *Athletic Bilbao*. The club was also able to represent the town's pride against other identities within Spain, especially Cataluña and the capital, as well as against foreign sides; and there was no local rivalry for supremacy, as there was between Barcelona, emblem of Catalan pride, and *Español* in the Catalan capital. The negotiation between Basque and other identities, and between local, provincial and broader versions of Basqueness, was highly problematic, as we have seen: it was symbolised in many ways by the club's prefix 'Real', which identified it with Spain and its monarchy just as the town was a royal resort and summer capital as well as a centre of Basque culture. The club's rebaptising as *Donostia* in 1931 removed this ambiguity, but the relationship between football and tourism in a Basque environment remained problematic. This, above all, is what sets the case of San Sebastián apart in a comparative perspective on football, sport and identity; and this is why the whole issue is worthy of deeper analysis in the Basque context than this introductory and speculative paper can provide. In particular, we need further work on just how the

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<sup>74</sup> S. de PABLO, *op. cit.*, p. 130.





Basque Country differed from Cataluña in this respect, and on the extent to which football contributed to Basque identity as well as reacting to its various incarnations in the uneasy ways which are traced in this article<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> See especially colome, in P. LANFRANCHI (ed.), *op. cit.*