EXTENDED ESSAY

SUBJECT:
English B cat: 2b

TOPIC:
'The changing perceptions of women's football in Great Britain.'

RESEARCH QUESTION:
How has the perception of women's football changed from the 1890's to the present day in Great Britain?

SUPERVISOR'S NAME:

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE:

NUMBER OF WORDS:
3,996

CANDIDATE'S NAME:
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1) **Introduction**

Women had to fight for their right to participate in sport, which was the division between specific sport disciplines and some of them were perceived like unsuitable for girls. Football was one of those sports assigned solely for men. This may be very difficult now to believe how many obstacles females have had to overcome to play football. At the early beginning all society opposed the idea of ladies playing football considering it as unnatural and inappropriate for women. The history of women’s football started when British Ladies Football Club was founded by Nettie Honeyball and Lady Florence Dixie. Despite all the efforts they made, the attempt to introduce women to the world of football failed. But with the passage of time and the social changes caused by the World War I, people started to accept ladies footballers. Later the perception about women footballers had a lot of turning points, and have them even now, but hopefully more and more people now accept ladies footballers and have a lot of positive feelings about them. This is very interesting how through all of that time people perceived ladies in football, and what factors affected it. That is why during this investigation a question: **how has the perception of women’s football changed from 1890’s to the present day in Great Britain**, will be analyzed to show the struggle which women need to undertake to finally gain support and acceptance.

It is highly relevant to analyze the early efforts of ladies to participate in football. To see whether were they accepted or not by society, government and media, if this situation have changed through all those years, and in what ways. This is also very important to analyze the feelings of ladies footballers about their participation in football, while this will provide the first hand insight into the investigation. One more matter worth examining matter is the number of spectators on ladies football games, how it was changing and what were the reasons. All of these aspects mentioned above will be examined to provide as precise answer as it is possible.
2) First steps of the Lady Footballers- Why should girls not play football?

To find the precise answer for a research question this is very important to study the first attempts of ladies footballers to participate in football, in order to grasp a deep understanding of the history of women football, as it will provide the chance to compare how the people perception about girls in football have changed through all these years.

From the early beginning, people perceived football as the only game for men. The first attempts to form ladies teams were crushed by a rising opposition. Nettie Honeyball with Lady Florence Dixie did manage to create British Ladies Football Club. As Nettie believed that there were some girls in Britain who would like to play soccer, she decided to put all her efforts to make this possible and her dreams became reality in 1894, when she formed British Ladies Football Club (BLFC). She was a founder and the secretary in BLFC, and Lady Florence Dixie was its president, she helped Honeyball to promote the club. Club contained up to 30 players from all over London and suburbs. The first official women’s football game, was the match played at Crouch End on 23 March 1895, the game was between The North and South. The press emphasized all the negative features for example the newspaper Sketch ‘it must be clear to everybody that girls are totally unfitted for the rough work of the football-field. As a means of exercise in a back garden it is not to be condemned; as a public entertainment it is to be deplored’.

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1 J. F. Lee, (2008), The Lady Footballers: Struggling to Play in Victorian Britain, p.18
2 Ibid, p.38
3 Ibid, p.56
4 Ibid, p.65
BLFC did manage a tour of England and Scotland, competing with both female and male teams. But Football Association in 1902, forbade member clubs playing against women’s teams. And there is question why? Because that was harmful for their health? Because of the class issue, as middle-class women played the game which was associated with a working-class? Probably not. The only visible issue was that men wanted football to be only theirs. And they were afraid of the increasing popularity of women’s football. Honeyball with Dixie faced too many obstacles to fulfill their dreams. Even an unremarkable issue as clothes made many difficulties, while wearing football shorts by women was not tolerated by society, it was just unacceptable and unthinkable. BLFC had also numerous obstacles regarding class and gender concerns, while football was associated with working-class and BFLC players were from the middle-class it caused outrage. Also the press did not help, but even worsened the situation, as ladies footballers were presented in a very negative way, and what is more, the opinion that women should not even start their adventure with football was widespread. From the medical point of view, football was inappropriate for ladies, while the game was presented as unnatural for girls, and the opinion that it may affect child-bearing was disseminated all over the country. Despite all the arguments presented by the opposition, the match in 1895 attracted 5,000 spectators. But unfortunately, all of that lies helped to stop the development of women’s football, while BFLC was destroyed in 1902.

Women’s football had to fight against opposition. Admittedly, people’s perception would be different if they were not be encouraged to believe that football could

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5 ibid, p.105
influence child-bearing, and health in general. Even if that first attempt was not successful, it built some foundations.

The next chance for ladies to play appeared during the World War I, when men were sent to fight and women replaced them in factories. It brought an enormous increase in women workers, and drastically changed the role of women in the society. It was a tradition for men to play football during lunch breaks, and women continued this habit. Alfred Frankland⁶, the owner of Dick, Kerr factory in Preston, saw the potential in women playing football and introduced the idea that women should make their teams to play games and spend profits for charitable purposes. Dick Kerr Ladies team was formed, and from the early beginning was hugely popular and attracted a large audience, as on one game in 1930 on Boxing Day where the number of spectators was about 53,000. As Miss Alice Kell, who was a captain of Dick, Kerr Ladies said during interview: 'Many were dead against the idea of ladies playing football at the start, but they came, saw, and were conquered'⁷

The increasing abilities of women footballers and their growing popularity, finally led Football Association to ban women's football. In fact, women's football games were seen as a great sport events, people came to matches to cheer female players. Ladies footballers were perceived by the society very favorably and the opinion that girls should not play football was not present in their minds. But in fact, the increasing popularity of women's football led to the situation in which women were deprived of

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⁶ A film about a football team that was born out of the First World War and was banned by the English Football Association because they felt threatened by the women's game, Dick, Kerr Ladies Football Team, 2008 (video file), Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWJ6PEAFD7o> [24.05.2013]

⁷ Newspaper article Available from: <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/472244710895987230/> [03.10.2013]
the opportunity to play. And why? Simply because men were overwhelmed by women players and wanted football to be theirs, only.

3) **Ladies football banned!**

The times when ladies football was banned, changed completely the situation of ladies footballers. It destroyed the sympathies of viewers which was gained before. Building a picture of incompetent women again. Football Association ban to the great extent influenced the perception of women footballers, and that is why this subject will also be examined while answering the question about the changes in perception of women’s footballers.

The Dick, Kerr Ladies were the most successful of all the 150 teams which had existed in England since 1921. Ladies who started to play football during the lunch or dinner breaks at work became famous, professional players. The golden age of women’s football which started in the early 1920’s while Dick Kerr Ladies were at the pick of popularity, all was interrupted on 5th of December 1921, by Football Association (FA) ban. The only, and in addition an inexplicable reason for this ban was a constant increase of popularity of women’s football. All the games were treated rather like charity performances than the sport ones, but after some time both, the charity and the sport side of the events were treated equally. A match between Dick, Kerr Ladies and The St Helen’s Ladies held at Goodison Park at a Boxing Day in 1920 was an enormous event, this match drew around 50,000 people, the Guardian reported it at

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8 A. Flintoff, S. Scraton, (2002), *Gender and Sport: A Reader*, p. 69

45,000, while Newsham indicated it had been 53,000\footnote{J. F. Lee, (2008), The Lady Footballers: Struggling to Play in Victorian Britain, p.118}, in general attendance at women’s games surpassed the attendance on men’s games from that time. It was easily seen that it was gaining popularity very fast, and for the first time was not overshadowed by the men’s game. In view of the fact that football earlier was perceived as the only game for men, males were threatened with the increasing popularity of women’s football. The only visible reason why women’s football was banned was that men wanted to keep it for themselves, to divest ladies footballers and to show them that the only role for them is to stand on the sidelines, watch and applaud \footnote{G. Newsham, DICK, KERR LADIES FC 1917-1965 Women’s Football History, <http://www.dickkerradies.com/page7.htm> [1.06.2013]}. Officially, the main reason for the ban, was that football was not a proper game for women, but also FA pointed out that women’s games purpose had been to get money for charity, and there were allegations that the funds raised were spent on non-charitable purposes.\footnote{Ibid, The FA ban:}

In 1971, when the FA Council lifted the ban, 35 countries had their national leagues and international competition was in its bloom.\footnote{Women in Soccer, <http://www.historyofsoccer.info/women_soccer.html> [2.06.2013]} With such a rapid growth in popularity of women football, Great Britain could become an insurmountable empire, but that...
was just destroyed by jealousy and discrimination. For the period of 50 years women in Great Britain were not allowed to play football, therefore what would it look like now if the ban had never been introduced? How would it change the history of women’s football, if only women’s football had been allowed to prosper and grow at the same pace as their male counterparts? Dick, Kerr Ladies on their way met a strong wave of opposition, but they continued to fight for their strong desire, and in fact, they won the struggle, and continued to play on non-FA grounds, they made a tour of the United States, where they competed with men’s teams in nine matches, and their record was: three wins, three draws and three defeats.

4) Numbers do not lie

It is very important to examine the number of spectators on ladies football matches, while this will give us a possibility to analyze how the crowd have changed through all that years. It will be helpful to determine how the perception of women’s football have changed. I will try to chose the most important games, to give the approximate number of spectator and to check what influenced the number of viewers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event:</th>
<th>Number of spectators:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23rd March, 1895 a game North vs. South</td>
<td>10,000 (^{16})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd May 1895 a game North vs. South</td>
<td>6,000 (^{17})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917 Christmas Day game between Ulverston Munitions Girls and another group of local women</td>
<td>10,000 (^{18})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{15}\) J. F. Lee, (2008), The Lady Footballers: Struggling to Play in Victorian Britain, p.121

\(^{16}\) Ibid, p.77

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p.77

\(^{18}\) Ibid, p.118
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September, 1919 Dick, Kerr Ladies vs. Newcastle United Ladies</th>
<th>35,000&lt;sup&gt;19&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920 Boxing Day Dick, Kerr Ladies vs. St Helens Ladies</td>
<td>53,000&lt;sup&gt;20&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920 Dick, Kerr Ladies vs. French representative team</td>
<td>25,000&lt;sup&gt;21&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February, 1921 Dick, Kerr Ladies vs. Best of Britain</td>
<td>25,000&lt;sup&gt;22&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921 Preston Team vs. French national team</td>
<td>15,000&lt;sup&gt;23&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 Doncaster Belles vs. Friends of Fulham</td>
<td>3,000&lt;sup&gt;24&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 Arsenal vs. Fulham</td>
<td>13,824&lt;sup&gt;25&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Arsenal vs. Leeds United</td>
<td>24,582&lt;sup&gt;26&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012, Great Britain vs. Brazil, at Wembley.</td>
<td>70,584&lt;sup&gt;27&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The table demonstrates how the number of spectators changed from 1895 to 2012.

From the early beginning women’s football matches gained popularity, one unbelievable thing is that, it took almost 92 years to break the record of popularity from 1920! Nowadays, women are overshadowed by men, this is still a men’s game, for them this is more available, profitable and people show more interest in male football.

On the other hand the situation of females improved, and their possibilities to play have developed also.

During most important games of Dick Kerr Ladies number of spectators was high, even in comparison to the crowd at men’s games. As football games in Christmas Day and Boxing Day were perceived as a tradition in Britain, this might have an effect on such

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.118
<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.118
<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.119
<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.119
<sup>24</sup> Ibid.
<sup>25</sup> Ibid.
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.
<sup>27</sup> BBC article, Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/olympics/18902297/> [08.10.3013]
an enormous number of viewers. It is very important that after only three years, the number of visitors increased fivefold, and the number of spectators on Boxing Day Dick Kerr Ladies game was 53 000. Dick Kerr Ladies gained popularity rapidly, not only for rising money for charity, but also because of the quality of performances, as said in *Manchester Guardian*, ‘the quality of the football was surprisingly good and astonished most of the spectators’. As the media were not really in favour of ladies footballers such a opinion in a newspaper means a lot. Ladies abilities to play had a very significant influence on the number of spectators, people were amazed by the determination of ladies footballers to play, the progress done by them. They were going to watch their games, not to laugh at them anymore.

Nowadays, there is still a stereotype is not suitable game for women, but the media are devoting more attention to ladies footballers. Unfortunately, women must continue to fight to gain viewers, the games from 1990, 2001 and 2008 were the finals of FA Women’s Cup. As we can observe a number of spectators increased so people show more interest to watch the most successful teams during finals, but since 2010 viewers number have started to decrease. Fortunately, a turning point in women’s football emerged, when 70,584 people came to watch the game at Wembley.

The reason for such a high attendance at Wembley might be explained by the people desire for being part of Olympics, but undoubtedly it gave the spectators a new perception of women’s football people were impressed when Great Britain had defeated Brazil 10, Ladies demonstrated the spectators that now there is no place for making jokes about ladies footballers because their abilities to play have significantly
improved. This could have a positive impact on the perception of women's football, and make people more open-minded.

5) **The Role of the media in women’s football**

The media have an important role in the society, they create some images and build people perception of the reality. The media can bring fame and glory but also can act as an opponent. The image of ladies footballers presented in media will be analyzed, to understand what kind of information people reached, and how it might influence their perception of ladies footballers.

At the beginning women's football was neglected by the press, then women's football became the subject of jokes, and finally it become accepted. Undoubtedly, the media had an impact on how ladies footballers were perceived, the media at the beginning diminished the merits of good footballers, questioning their gender. The question therefore arises here: did they want to discourage women from playing, and to leave football for men? Possibly yes, but not all people succumbed to the influence of press. After some time, ladies football gained acceptance, the press started to present the real image of great players, and no longer argued about their sex or disability to play. Eventually, newspapers, radio and television began to show interest in women's football, treating women equally to men, and not showing them any longer in a bad light.

In 1920's Dick, Kerr Ladies matches became even more popular than the men's games at weekends, which must have been very difficult to achieve if there was no media attention, or even if there was some attention based on criticism. The information
about ladies footballers and matches presented mainly in humour column, where women’s football was neglected. The hostile attitude of the press can be explained only by the issue of middle class women playing the game associated with the working class, which could not be properly perceived by the society. Some newspapers even labelled women players as a boys, calling them “Tommies”, while editors did not see the possibility that some girls were great at soccer. The most successful players were not doomed to fame, but they were portrayed as ‘freaks’ with unspecified gender, as one player Miss Gilbert- the best player on the field.

There was only one exception, the North’s goalkeeper Mrs Graham described by many newspapers as a role model, as in Manchester Guardian:

‘From the playing of the North goalkeeper, however, whose kicks were superior to the rest, I imagine the women players may after some further practice develop a style of a play which may be both vigorous and graceful. At present both teams only had a few months practice, and no real play therefore could be expected.’

Some of the magazines saw the opportunities for development, like Westminster Gazette: ‘Nobody could have expected the ladies in a few weeks would attain any skill whatsoever, and therefore nobody had a right to be disappointed at their feeble efforts’. But even though Dick Kerr Ladies played excellent game with a huge number of spectators, many newspapers described that event in a neglecting way, as

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28 Weekly Sun (in form of letter ‘Nannie’ to ‘My Dear Nora’): ‘Perhaps when the Day of the match comes really comes their [men’s] indignation will rise to the occasion. Most of us, I hope will join heartily in their cry of condemnation. What a horrible sight it must be to see a crowd of women tearing and knocking, falling and gasping in a “tussle”. Neither you, nor I venture to say, will ever become so advanced as that.’

J. F. Lee, (2008), The Lady Footballers: Struggling to Play in Victorian Britain, p.41

29 Ibid, p.68

30 Ibid, p.66
for example in *The Times*, [about the players] exhibited quite enough skill to disappoint those who had come to laugh³⁹. At present, the situation have improved, women’s football now has its own place in the media, it is not disregarded any more. But still women’s football is not as popular as men’s. Much more information about men’s soccer is available to the viewer, just because people show greater interest in male sport, and media show people what they want, that is why ladies football is not as popular in the media as male football. At the beginning the media perceived football as a game unsuitable for ladies, ignored them, mocked at them, undermined their gender, but with increasing women’s abilities to kick and tackle that perception of a girl unable to play disappeared, and the image of a woman playing football is common in the media.

6) **First hand insight since, 1960 to 2013**

The perception of women’s football, the same as capabilities to play have changed. By examining the interviews from an article 'Women’s Football: Still in the Hands of Men', I would like to answer the question how the perception of woman’s football have changed, as it will provide the first hand insight into the situation of women footballers growing up in England, and all the obstacles that they had to overcome to participate in this men’s game. All of nine interviewed ladies varied in age, so there is a possibility to compare their opportunities to enter the world of professional football. In addition, the video *England players on International Women's Day*, will be investigated, giving an opinion of current ladies footballers how the perception and opportunity to play have changed, and what they expect it will be in future.

³¹ ibid. p.118
Louise Stirling and John Schulz conducted interviews with women who either were football players since 1960, or continue to play football in England till today, by examining the interviews the changes in the possibilities to participate in football are easily seen, the same as the reason why those ladies wanted football to be their sport, and started the struggle to become football players.

For all ladies footballers the story begins in the same way, these the men who introduced women to the football world. Male authorities were always the most influential to encourage girls to play. In almost all cases football was a factor that built the emotional bonds between fathers and their daughters. From 1960's to 1990's the main problem appeared in the school, girls were not allowed to play with boys. Teachers, as the authorities for children in many cases, labelled the ladies footballers as being lesbian, simply due to the activity they undertook. They were excluded from many sports, while that was thought that they were too weak in both physical and psychological area. Football was the game for men, unsuitable and unnatural for woman, the opinion that ‘woman lack the strength or the stamina to run, kick or tackle’ was widespread. Football by almost everyone was perceived as a “male activity”, but what can be observed from the interviews, the easiest way to participate was to get the boys acceptance. There was a popular belief, that girls should not play football, that sport was seen as the one matching only for boys, there was nothing good about woman footballers, those playing well were gender ‘freaks’, and were called: ‘lads, butches and tomboys’. While on the other hand, those not playing well proved that was a male game. That was a barrier which most of the girls pass through, they

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34 Ibid, p. 30
35 Ibid, pp. 56, 75
need to show their skills to be involved and accepted by boys. Even if the story started like the following: ‘Oh god no she is a girl, she is rubbish, she can't play and don’t let her play’\textsuperscript{35}, as Tina mentioned, she managed to prove that she had abilities to play, she managed to win a bet and was allowed to play with a group of boys. But that was not possible for all females to play, for example for Sue, now 57 years old woman, ‘there was no chance of playing football at all’\textsuperscript{36}. Also Liz, who is now at age of 29, said that she had had no chance to practice football, because girls games were non-contact, and they were not allowed to play football - the game which involved aggression and contact, unacceptable for female behavior. \textsuperscript{37} Whereas the youngest of interviewed ladies - Tash, only 20 years old now, had completely different experience, in her school there was a girls team, she could practice there and even compete with other teams from neighboring schools.\textsuperscript{38} For almost all her life she was connected with female football, which shows directly that with the time, playing football by women became more accepted, and this sport is getting more and more available to girls.

Rachel Brown also saw how her situation turned around, and from being a player for leisure, she became a professional footballer in 1997, in her view there is a brilliant progress in women soccer, that will probably will continue. Nowadays also the people's perception have changed in a favorable way, ladies footballers are now not 'tomboys', even if at the beginning Karen Carney was the only girl at school playing football, and it was all negative, now people from school are now all positive about girls playing football and come to watch her games, so the perception have changed.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 65
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, p. 66
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, p. 75
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p. 71
The games level is also getting higher, it seems that everything is moving toward the right direction, even if women’s game is still overshadowed by men’s game\textsuperscript{39}.

From 1960 to 2013 great progress was visible. The possibilities for girls to participate in football highly increased, in view of the fact that many facilities to practice are available, and girls can start to practice very early. Also the perception have changed drastically, now people are positive about girls playing football, while in the past it was unthinkable for a girl to participate in that violent game.

7) Conclusion

Women had to overcome a great struggle to participate in football and to gain people acceptance, but at it is said ‘if nothing is ventured than nothing is gained’. With the will to fight and tenacity in achieving the aim from the times when the image of women playing football was unnatural and unacceptable, we finally get to the point where being a lady footballer in no longer controversial. We are not able to deduce what the situation of ladies footballers will look like at present, and how people perceived them if FA ban would not have been introduced in 1921. People now show more and more interest in games and they are involved in women’s football. The perception about ladies footballers returned to the days when even without the support of the media, matches enjoyed a great popularity. The perception of women’s football over the years had its twists and turns. Ladies footballers were mostly hated by men who thought, and in many cases still think, that this is a sport only for them, but on the other hand these were men who did give girls the first contact with a ball.

\textsuperscript{39} England senior players talk about how far women’s sport has come in recent years and how they hope women’s football will progress in years to come, England players on International Women’s Day, 2013 (video file), Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH09jixM5zce>, [17.06.2013]
Another wave of opposition was the government, because the image of a woman playing football was inconsistent with traditional values, but again there are exceptions, as during World War I, when the role of women in the society changed completely, and the Dick Kerr Ladies met with support and praise offered by the government. The media also presented women’s football from many various perspectives, mostly the journalists presented football as unsuitable for women, even if some of players could kick and tackle better than males, they were called ‘freaks’ and ‘tomboys’. Very few newspapers treated women’s football seriously, but fortunately, there were some which saw the future for ladies footballers. And nowadays, females are presented positively in the media and more attention is devoted to them. Women survived a test of time and finally gained acceptance. The stereotype of women who cannot play football, as this is the only game suitable for males, is spreading among those who had never nothing to do with women’s football. Despite the initial criticism, discrimination, and despite the time when women were forbidden to play football, they have managed to survive the test of time and eventually have gained recognition.
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Video files:
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