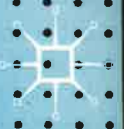


# GLOBAL SPORT LEADERS

A Biographical Analysis of  
International Sport Management



Edited By  
**Emmanuel Bayle  
and Patrick Clastres**





# 4

## Jules Rimet: FIFA's Missionary President

Philippe Vonnard and Grégory Quin

### Introduction

Football administrators can, in many ways, be likened to senior civil servants,<sup>1</sup> as both categories of people are motivated by the desire to further a specific domain, without necessarily bringing about political change, and they achieve this by implementing actions for and over the long term. This was certainly the case for Jules Rimet, who devoted his entire professional life to sport and became one of the sporting world's 'great leaders'.

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<sup>1</sup>Bourdieu, P. (1989) *La Noblesse d'état. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps*, Paris: Minuit; Feiertag, O. (1995) *Wilfrid Baumgartner, les finances de l'État et l'économie de la nation (1902–1978): un grand commis à la croisée des pouvoirs*. History doctoral thesis, Université Paris—X Nanterre.

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Although no single individual can achieve much on his own, even if he is the most powerful man of his time, and although his actions have to be assessed within a much larger context, Jules Rimet was undoubtedly the most important figure in international football during the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, Rimet was not only FIFA's (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) longest-serving president, he was one of football's great "missionaries",<sup>2</sup> whose belief in football as a force for good helped spread the sport across the globe. During his tenure as FIFA president, from 1921 to 1954, he oversaw the introduction of true professionalism, helped create what has become the world's greatest international sporting competition, the FIFA World Cup, and laid the foundations for soccer to become the world's most popular sport. He also played a major role in ensuring FIFA's autonomy from the *International Olympic Committee* (IOC).<sup>3</sup>

Our biographical analysis highlights Rimet's importance as the instigator and champion of these projects, but he was only able to bring them to fruition thanks to the support he received from many other people, including Germany's Peco Bauwens, Belgium's Rodolphe Seeldrayers, France's Henri Delaunay, Italy's Giovanni Mauro and Germany's Ivo Schricker, who served as FIFA general secretary from 1931 to 1951. Given the historical insights that are inevitably provided by researching the lives of key players in any field, it is somewhat surprising that most previous biographies of Rimet have been merely hagiographies<sup>4</sup> or purely descriptive accounts with little discussion of his impact on football.<sup>5</sup> The present chapter attempts to remedy this situation by filling in some of the gaps in Rimet's biography and providing a critical analysis of his role in developing FIFA.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Tomlinson A.; Sugden, J. (1998) *FIFA and the Contest for World Football: Who Rules the Peoples' Game?* Cambridge: Polity Press; Tomlinson, A. (2000) "FIFA and the Men Who Made It" *Soccer and Society* 1(1): 55–71.

<sup>3</sup>Carpentier, F. (2005) "Le conflit entre le CIO et la FIFA dans l'entre-deux-guerres. Les Jeux olympiques contre la Coupe du monde de football" *STAPS* 68(2): 25–39.

<sup>4</sup>Lasne, L. (2008) *Jules Rimet: la foi dans le football*, Saint-Cloud: Le tiers livre.

<sup>5</sup>Guillain, J.-Y. (1998) *La Coupe du monde de football: l'œuvre de Jules Rimet*, Paris: Amphora.

<sup>6</sup>This chapter is a revised version of: Grégory Quin, Philippe Vonnard (2014) "Jules Rimet: un missionnaire du football" *Les grands dirigeants du sport. 23 portraits et stratégies de management* (Ed. E. Bayle) De Boeck: Brussels: 25–43.

We begin by presenting his early life and career, which shows him to have been a committed promoter of football. We then describe his rise through the echelons of sports administration to the most powerful job in world football, and his commitment to both French and international soccer. We discuss the factors that motivated his actions, highlighting the importance of his Universalist outlook, which helped shape the first intercontinental football competition, created in the late 1920s, and underlay his rejection of the idea of creating autonomous confederations.

Our assessment of Rimet's career is based on a large number of documents<sup>7</sup> contained in the archives held by FIFA (congresses, executive committee minutes, correspondence) and by the Swiss (ASF), French (FFFA) and English (FA) football associations. Because football archives for the interwar period are incomplete, we also searched the archives of several French, Swiss and German newspapers, and the file compiled when Rimet was awarded France's *Légion d'Honneur*, which is available online.<sup>8</sup>

## Between Catholicism and Liberalism

Jules Ernest Séraphin Valentin Rimet was born on the 24 October 1873 in Theuley (Haute-Saône), the first of his parent's five children (three boys and two girls). His parents moved to Paris soon after he was born, but Jules remained with his grandfather in Theuley until he was eleven.<sup>9</sup> He finally joined the rest of his family in 1885, moving to Gros-Caillou, a working-class neighbourhood of Paris near the Champ de Mars, where his father had opened a shop. Two aspects of the young Rimet's upbringing were fundamental to his future career. The first was his social Catholic education, which forged the young

<sup>7</sup>Most of these documents were originally obtained for two earlier studies carried out by the authors: The first—"Une première élite du football européen (1904–1956), ou les prémices d'un champ footballistique européen"—was carried out by Grégory Quin under the 2011–2012 UEFA Research Grant Programme". The second was Philippe Vonnard's PhD thesis, "Genèse du football européen. De la FIFA à l'UEFA (1930–1960)", defended at the University of Lausanne in December 2016.

<sup>8</sup><http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/leonore/>.

<sup>9</sup>Guillain, *La Coupe du monde*: 15.



man's convictions. The second was discovering football, a new game that was starting to be played around Paris.<sup>10</sup> He immediately began working in his father's shop, but nevertheless managed to graduate from high school and go to university to study law. His first job was for a debt-collection firm,<sup>11</sup> which, along with his social Catholic beliefs, appears to have shaped Rimet's relatively liberal views. In fact, he had quite moderate political opinions, far removed from the intransigence of hard-line Catholics, who were still vehemently opposed to the French Revolution. However, he did not embrace the rampant anticlericalism of the time, which helped secure the separation of Church and State.<sup>12</sup>

Rimet completed his national service in 1895 and had no further contact with the military until the outbreak of the First World War, when, like many other people involved in sports,<sup>13</sup> he was called up by the army. He received his draft notice on 2 September 1914 and was told to report for duty in the reserve. Caught up in the patriotic fervour that had swept the country—his internationalist and pacifist leanings would not come to the fore until after the war—and despite being 41 years old, Rimet volunteered for front-line service. Thanks to his university degree, he quickly rose through the ranks, promoted from private to corporal to sergeant to lieutenant and finally, in 1919, to major.<sup>14</sup> He remained in active service for the whole war and was awarded the Croix de Guerre three times, the first in a long list of honours he would receive.<sup>15</sup>

The war and its aftermath convinced him of the need for deep and gradual reform of French society, so in April 1928 he acted on his

<sup>10</sup>Sorez, J. (2013) *Le football dans Paris et ses banlieues (de la fin du XIXe siècle à 1940): un sport devenu spectacle*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

<sup>11</sup>Pfeil, U. (ed.) (2010) *Football et identité en France et en Allemagne*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion: 51.

<sup>12</sup>Hilaire, Y.-M. (2006) "1900–1945. L'ancrage des ideologies" *Histoire des droites* (Ed. J.-F. Sirinelli) Paris: Gallimard: 519–565.

<sup>13</sup>Dietschy, P. (2005) "La Guerre ou le 'grand match': le sport, entre représentation de la violence et expérience combattante" *La Grande Guerre: pratiques et expériences* (Eds. R. Cazals, E. Picard, D. Rolland) Toulouse: Privat: 45–54.

<sup>14</sup>French National Archives, Documents "Léonore", Documents relating to the attribution of the Legion d'Honneur to Mr. Jules Rimet (2nd August 1949): 2.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*: 4.

convictions by standing for election as member of parliament for a constituency in Paris's 7th arrondissement. At the same time, he and his friends took "the initiative of creating a *Union Sociale du VIIe* in order to ensure the poor received medical care".<sup>16</sup> Like most French people, Rimet had been shocked by the horrors of the First World War and keenly felt the need to bring together nations and peoples. Believing in the power of sport, particularly football, to do this, he centred his election campaign round the need to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of sport among both private and public institutions and committees. In support of this stance, Rimet could point to the work he was already doing with sporting bodies. Despite claiming that normally it "did not do politics", the sports newspaper *L'Auto* gave his campaign a further boost by publishing a profile of him in which he was presented as "a man of great ambition" who hated "all kinds of empty rhetoric, which can hide inactivity" and as someone who could "speak for the world of sport in parliament".<sup>17</sup> In the end, Rimet was defeated at the polls, but his campaign had given him the opportunity to put his vision onto the political scene.

## The First President of a French Sports Federation to Embrace Professionalism

Rimet's career in sport began in 1897, when he helped form the *Red Star Club*, a multisport club whose members initially came from the emerging middle-class of civil servants, shopkeepers and lawyers. However, rising real estate prices forced it to move to the blue-collar Saint-Ouen district in 1909, thereby bringing Rimet into closer contact with working-class culture and people. Rimet was one of the prime movers behind the club's football section, although his contribution was motivated more by his passion for the game than by any interest in administration. He was not a very good footballer, as he later admitted

<sup>16</sup>Guillain, *La Coupe du monde*: 16.

<sup>17</sup>*L'Auto*, 17 November 1927.

himself,<sup>18</sup> but the *Red Star* football club allowed him to discover his sporting destiny. *Red Star* immediately joined the *Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques* (USFSA), a multisport federation whose football committee became one of FIFA's founding members in 1904.

France's other major sporting association at the time, and the USFSA's great rival, was the Catholic *Fédération Gymnique et Sportive des Patronages de France* (FGSPF). The differences between these two organisations came to a head in 1907, when the USFSA opposed the FGSPF's proposal to accept professionalism in football, with the result that the FGSPF created the *Comité Français Interfédéral* (CFI)<sup>19</sup> in order to improve the game's status. Despite being a member of the USFSA, Rimet did not agree with its dogmatic stance on amateurism, believing professionalism was necessary if football was to open up to all classes of society.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, he helped form the Ligue de Football Association (LFA), which affiliated itself to the CFI, an organisation in which he would play a key role. The creation of the LFA meant that French football no longer had a single, controlling body responsible for administrating all aspects of the game, including organising international matches. So, when FIFA's 1907 congress asked the USFSA "if it was the only federation governing football in France",<sup>21</sup> the USFSA was unable to provide the necessary proof and was excluded from FIFA.<sup>22</sup> Following intense negotiations, in 1908 FIFA decided to recognise the CFI as France's national football association, thereby allowing the CFI to become officially affiliated to the international federation in 1910.<sup>23</sup> Jules Rimet played an active part in this process, and his work with Charles Simon and Henri Delaunay contributed greatly to France's

<sup>18</sup>Rimet, J. (1954) *Histoire merveilleuse de la Coupe du monde*, Paris: Union européenne d'Éditions: 25.

<sup>19</sup>Wahl, A. (1989) *Les archives du football. Sport et société en France (1880–1980)*, Paris: Gallimard.

<sup>20</sup>Holt, R. (1998) "Sport, the French and the Third Republic" *Modern and Contemporary France* 6(3): 289–299.

<sup>21</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 3rd FIFA congress, 1906.

<sup>22</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 5th FIFA congress, 1908.

<sup>23</sup>Groeninger, F. (2004) *Sport, religion et nation. La Fédération des patronages de France d'une guerre mondiale à l'autre*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

reintegration into the international federation. Nevertheless, it was Delaunay and Simon who consolidated France's position within FIFA, as Rimet did not attend another FIFA congress until 1914,<sup>24</sup> just before the outbreak of the First World War.

Rimet's wartime service in the French army kept him away from the world of football during an important period in the sport's development.<sup>25</sup> For example, he took no part in the CFI's attempt in 1917 to hold the first French Cup. However, he had left the army in time to contribute to the creation of the *Fédération Française de Football Association* (FFFA), which came into being on 7 April 1919. This is a very important date in the history of French football, as establishing a dedicated, independent federation meant the game could be governed more easily. The first FFFA committee meeting elected Rimet president and Henri Delaunay general secretary, positions these two men would hold for more than 30 years. During this time they oversaw some of the most important developments in French football, including the organisation of a 'national' championship and the introduction of professionalism, in 1932,<sup>26</sup> and supervised the organisation of the third World Cup in 1938. As Hassen Slimani noted, professionalism in French football was a highly controversial issue and the subject of heated debate throughout the 1920s between "those who were interested in explicitly recognising the real economy of football, including its professionalization, and those who were more interested in conserving the advantages of hidden professionalism".<sup>27</sup> Rimet's position in this debate is not clear, as he was in favour of professionalism but he also committed the FFFA to controlling professionalism in order to

<sup>24</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 11th FIFA congress, 1914.

<sup>25</sup>Mason, T. (2006) "Le football dans l'armée britannique pendant la Première Guerre mondiale" *Histoire et Sociétés* 18–19: 62–75; Dietchy, P. (2007) "1918–1920, des tranchées au stade. Quelques éclairages sur la sortie de la guerre des sportifs français et des fédérations de football européennes" *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société* 3 (published online).

<sup>26</sup>Lanfranchi, P.; Wahl, A. (1998) "La professionnalisation du football en France (1920–1939)" *Modern & Contemporary France* 6(3): 313–325.

<sup>27</sup>Slimani, H. (2000) *La professionnalisation du football français: un modèle de dénégalion*, Sociology doctoral thesis, Université de Nantes: 109.

“maintain domination over players and clubs... [because] ...the FFFA is not only the governing body for competitions, clubs and players; it (and its members) is also a stakeholder in the football economy, whose financial and symbolic interests need to be defended, mainly by disparaging the building blocks of professionalism.”<sup>28</sup>

In addition to his work within football, in 1930 Rimet became president of France's *National Sports Council* (CNS), whose missions were to increase participation in sport, promote cooperation between the individual federations formed after the collapse of the USFSA, and help Olympic athletes with their training. It also acted as a political mouthpiece for the world of sport.<sup>29</sup> As Rimet told a reporter from *Match* in 1932, CNS

is not a governing body for sport in France. Sport federations are far too jealous of their independence to accept such an umbrella organisation interfering in the sporting field and even more so in their own affairs. CNS is a coordinating body that engages in discussions with the government about general issues.<sup>30</sup>

However, Rimet's horizons during the years following the First World War were not confined to becoming a prominent figure in French sport, he also had his eye on the international stage. In this respect, he was following in the footsteps of other great names in French sport, including Pierre de Coubertin, Robert Guérin (FIFA's first president, elected in 1904) and Henri Desgranges (the owner of *L'Auto* and instigator of the Tour de France). Like de Coubertin, Rimet championed a French form of Universalism, believing that sport could bring people together, but Rimet's vision was much less elitist and more democratic than de Coubertin's.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Slimani, *La professionnalisation du football français*: 144.

<sup>29</sup>Clastres, P.; Dietschy, P. (2006) *Sport, société et culture. Du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, Paris: Hachette.

<sup>30</sup>*Match*, 8 November 1932.

<sup>31</sup>Dietschy, P. (2011) “French Sport: Caught between Universalism and Exceptionalism” *European Review* 19(4): 509–525.

## FIFA President and the Quest for Financial Independence

Rimet was elected head of FIFA<sup>32</sup> during an unofficial congress in Antwerp in 1920 that also saw Rodolphe Seeldrayers elected vice-president and Carl Hirschmann elected secretary-treasurer. The archives provide little information about this procedure, which was contrary to FIFA's rules and constitution. Justifying this unorthodox process in his 1954 book, Rimet claimed that his election in Antwerp was provisional and later confirmed in a letter sent to all FIFA members by 31 December 1920.<sup>33</sup> If this is true, Rimet did not officially become FIFA president until 1 January 1921.

In its early years, just after the First World War, FIFA was a very modest institution with just 20 members, mostly from Europe. It had no official head office (it was run from Hirschmann's home), no real financial organisation (the secretary-treasurer managed all FIFA's funds personally), and no competitions of its own. In fact, its only direct involvement with competitive football was through the technical support it provided for organising the Olympic football tournament.<sup>34</sup> This situation changed completely during the 1920s, when its executive committee and annual congresses addressed two vital issues for FIFA's future: the development of autonomous governance and the acceptance of professionalism, both of which were supported by Rimet.

FIFA quickly realised that it would need a more efficient system of governance if it were going to effectively supervise the rapidly increasing number of international matches being played and the development of international football. The first step in doing this was to improve its financial situation, which meant achieving a higher and more regular income than could be obtained from annual membership fees alone.

<sup>32</sup>Before 1930 and its move to Zurich, FIFA did not keep many documents about its own governance.

<sup>33</sup>Rimet, J. (1954) *Histoire merveilleuse de la Coupe du monde*: 25.

<sup>34</sup>Mourat, A. (2006) “Le tournoi olympique de football: une propédeutique à la Coupe du monde? (1896–1928)” *Aspects de l'histoire de la coupe du monde de football* (Ed. A. Wahl) Metz: Université de Metz: 9–21.



FIFA's aim was to "carry out more effective propaganda, cover the expenses of all the committees, produce an annual report, pay a secretary and maybe publish a newsletter".<sup>35</sup> The system suggested at the 1920 congress was to impose a 0.5% levy on income from ticket sales earned by the organisers of international matches, usually the national associations. Rimet considered this levy to be fair, as it varied according to the size of each country's football association, but it was not to the taste of FIFA's smaller members, who were worried about having to pay too much. Discussions relating to the affiliation of the United Kingdom's football associations<sup>36</sup> raised another complication in that FIFA's executive committee had to decide whether or not the percentage system would apply "to games between the United Kingdom's football associations".<sup>37</sup> In the end, FIFA's congress rejected the proposal in favour of maintaining the fees system plus a very modest tax of 0.1% on international matches. This decision severely constrained Rimet's objective of expanding FIFA's role.

The executive committee tried to modify the system the following year by increasing the levy to 1%. Once again, the levy was rejected despite a statement by Rimet designed to win over the proposal's opponents. Subsequently, a commission set up by the 1924 congress to examine the issue suggested a system consisting of "an annual contribution of 25 dollars plus a tax of 0.75% on income from ticket sales for international games (with a minimum contribution of 5 dollars)".<sup>38</sup> The congress immediately accepted this proposition, allowing FIFA to consolidate its revenues over the next few years.

With its finances on a more solid footing, FIFA was now able to expand its activities and improve its governance. Hence, during the second half of the 1920s the federation appointed four new vice-presidents, increasing their number from three to seven, and doubled its operating costs. Then, in 1930, it took the momentous decision to

<sup>35</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 12th FIFA congress, 1923.

<sup>36</sup>Beck, P. J. (2000) "Going to War, Peaceful Co-existence or Virtual Membership. British Football and FIFA, 1928–1946" *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 20(1): 113–134.

<sup>37</sup>*France football*, 4 January 1924.

<sup>38</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 13th FIFA congress, 1924 [translated from the French].

organise its own World Cup. At this time, FIFA still did not have its own bank account or any liquid assets, and all the money the federation earned was managed and invested by its secretary-treasurer, Carl Hirschmann. As a result, when Hirschmann went bankrupt due to a series of poor investments and the disruption caused by the Great Crash of 1929, FIFA lost most of its finances and its initial reforming dynamic came to an end. Obviously needing to rethink its financial management, FIFA decided to appoint a salaried general secretary. The man they chose for the position, Germany's Ivo Schricker,<sup>39</sup> injected a new way of thinking into FIFA's internal affairs, reinforcing the federation's governance by introducing double-entry bookkeeping, and setting up FIFA's first headquarters, on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse. Although the original management team was very small, administration costs for the new headquarters consumed half of FIFA's entire budget at the end of the 1930s. Out of a total income of CHF58,000, approximately CHF25,000 were spent on salaries and CHF3000 were spent on loans.<sup>40</sup> However, very few of these costs were attributable to Rimet, who did not receive any remuneration for his presidential duties<sup>41</sup> other than expenses for travelling to meetings or to promote football around the world.

## A Professional World Cup Versus an Amateur Olympic Tournament

The interwar period saw huge growth in the popularity of football, which soon came to be played all over the world. Enthusiasm for the sport was particularly strong in South and Central America, whose national football associations gradually joined FIFA during the 1920s and 1930s, and thereby sat alongside the European associations at FIFA

<sup>39</sup>Wahlig, H. (2008) "Dr Ivo Schricker: Ein Deutscher in Diensten des Welt- fussballs" *Hakenkreuz und rundes Leder. Fussball im Nationalsozialismus* (Eds. L. Peiffer, D. Schulze-Marmeling) Göttingen: verlag die Werkstatt: 197–206.

<sup>40</sup>FIFA Archives, Executive Committee, Minutes from 14 March 1937.

<sup>41</sup>FIFA Archives, 1933 Status Report, p. 35.

congresses. Football at this time was mostly an amateur game, but the massive increase in the numbers of working-class footballers, who could not afford to play full time without a salary, raised the issue of professionalism in both Europe and South America. British football had had a degree of professionalism since the late nineteenth century and it was the British model that countries such as Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia adopted when they first accepted professional players. In contrast, Italy muddied the waters<sup>42</sup> by introducing a “non-amateur” football model under the Charter of Viareggio,<sup>43</sup> which allowed Mussolini’s Fascist government to claim it had not legalised professionalism. The issue was the subject of intense debate in Switzerland<sup>44</sup> and France,<sup>45</sup> as it was in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, where there were heated disagreements between ‘conservatives’ and ‘liberals’, even though most top-flight players in these three countries were already fully professional.<sup>46</sup> Despite the reticence of certain members of the football community, and although some historians believe that Rimet was simply “resigned” to the advent of professionalism,<sup>47</sup> studies of FIFA’s attitude show that Rimet and his colleagues were more open-minded about professionalism than their counterparts at the International Olympic Committee (IOC).<sup>48</sup> In fact, Rimet believed it was better to “embrace professionalism than to accept a form of ‘phony’ amateurism”,<sup>49</sup> while ensuring there was still room in the footballing

<sup>42</sup>Quin, G.; Vonnard, P. (2011) “Par delà le Gothard’. Les matches internationaux Italie-Suisse et la consolidation des champs footballistiques italien et suisse dans l’entre-deux-guerres” *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea* 5: 1–15.

<sup>43</sup>Martin, S. (2004) *Football under Fascism. The National Game under Mussolini*, Oxford: Berg.

<sup>44</sup>Vonnard, P.; Quin, G. (2012) “Éléments pour une histoire de la mise en place du professionnalisme dans le football suisse: processus, résistances et ambiguïtés” *Revue Suisse d’Histoire* 62(1): 70–85.

<sup>45</sup>Lanfranchi, P.; Wahl, A. (1998) “La professionnalisation du football...”

<sup>46</sup>Davies, D. J. (2000) “British Football with a Brazilian Beat: The Early History of a National Pastime (1894–1933)” *English-speaking Communities in Latin America* (Ed. O. Marshall) London: Institute of Latin American Studies: 261–284.

<sup>47</sup>Wahl, A. (1998) “Un professionnalisme de résignation en France” *Sociétés et Représentations* 7: 67–75.

<sup>48</sup>Carpentier, “Le conflit entre le CIO et la FIFA”.

<sup>49</sup>*Match*, 28 February 1933.

world for both amateur and professional players. Consequently, he was careful to distance FIFA from the IOC’s hard-line stance.

FIFA’s desire to maintain its independence from the IOC was one of the reasons it decided to hold its own World Cup, which quickly became one of the world’s greatest sporting events<sup>50</sup> and far more important than any Olympic football tournament. Towards the end of his life, Rimet helped mythologise the creation of the World Cup in a book entitled: *Histoire merveilleuse de la Coupe du monde*, in which he presented the competition as an unforeseen opportunity that arose in 1925 during a conversation in Geneva with Enrique Buera, a Uruguayan diplomat.<sup>51</sup> Whatever the truth of this story, recent research<sup>52</sup> suggests that the first steps toward creating the World Cup were also motivated by rivalry between Rimet and other European football administrators such as Henry Delaunay, the FFFA’s very active secretary, and Hugo Meisl, the general secretary of the Austrian Football Association and a champion of professional football in Central Europe.<sup>53</sup> Different opinions have been expressed as to the reasons for the friction between Rimet and Meisl, but it may well have been triggered by Meisl’s bid to become FIFA general secretary in 1930 and his calls for FIFA to be reorganised by abolishing the annual congress and renewing relations with the British associations.<sup>54</sup> What is more, Meisl’s statements and proposals made him appear more presidential than the president himself, so it may have been his stature as an international

<sup>50</sup>Dietchy, P.; Gastaud, Y.; Mourlane S. (2006) *Histoire politique des Coupes de monde de football*, Paris: Vuibert; Mourat, A. (2008) “Le tournoi olympique de football: une propédeutique à la Coupe du monde? 1896–1928” *Aspects de l’histoire de la Coupe du monde de football* (Ed. A. Wahl) Metz: Centre Régional Universitaire Lorrain d’Histoire: 9–21; Charroin, P.; Wacquet, A. (2008) “L’Universalisme professionnalisant du football contre l’amateurisme internationaliste olympique” *Les paris des jeux olympiques de 1924, Volume 2: Les paris sportifs* (Ed. T. Terret) Biarritz: Atlantica: 445–490.

<sup>51</sup>Rimet (1954) *Histoire merveilleuse de la Coupe du monde*: 27.

<sup>52</sup>Quin, G. (2013) “La Coupe de l’Europe Centrale (1927–1938), une compétition internationale oubliée?” *Stadion* 37(2): 285–304.

<sup>53</sup>Hafer, A.; Hafer, W. (2008) *Hugo Meisl, oder die Erfindung des Modernen Fußballs. Eine Biografie*, Göttingen: Verlag die Werkstatt.

<sup>54</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 19th FIFA congress, 1930.



leader that cost him the job of FIFA general secretary. For this post, he lost out to Ivo Schricker, a man Gabriel Hanot described as a “mere pen pusher” in an article in the French newspaper *Football*.<sup>55</sup>

All these people were, however, committed to football and determined to develop the game, which they did through numerous initiatives, undertaken either in their own name or within an international body or group of national associations. The earliest attempts to organise a major international competition were made in 1905 and 1906, but it was not until 18 November 1926, at a conference in Prague<sup>56</sup> chaired by Hugo Meisl and involving the Austrian, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian and Italian football associations, that the concept of a true world cup was born.<sup>57</sup> According to Rimet the Prague resolution came about because “no competition existed for non-amateur[s] and professionals, and given that many countries wanted an international competition for propaganda reasons and the increased public interest in football; [the nations gathered] asked for the creation of an international competition for the best teams from each country (with no distinction due to the status of the players) under the name ‘European Cup’”.<sup>58</sup>

A few days later, during a meeting of FIFA’s executive committee, Meisl spoke on behalf of the conference and proposed a European Cup to be played “between the best national teams, whether they are composed of amateurs, non-amateurs or professionals”.<sup>59</sup> In fact, he suggested creating two competitions, one for clubs (focused on countries where professionalism already existed) and one for national teams (open to all FIFA member associations). This initiative—presenting his proposal to the executive committee—showed Meisl’s awareness of the need to comply with FIFA’s statutes, article 20 of which states:

<sup>55</sup>*Football*, 6 August 1931.

<sup>56</sup>*Der Kicker*, 2 November 1926.

<sup>57</sup>Eisenberg, C.; Lanfranchi, P.; Mason, T.; Wahl, A. (2004) *100 Years of Football: The FIFA Centennial Book*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson: 102.

<sup>58</sup>Rimet (1954) *Histoire merveilleuse de la Coupe du monde*: 30.

<sup>59</sup>*L’Auto*, 7 Décembre 1926.

The Federation claim[s] the sole right to organise an international championship. The organisation of international competitions is based on the agreement of the Federation. Any international competition has to be notified to the Federation.<sup>60</sup>

Although the discussions in Prague did not restrict participation to European teams or countries, Rimet felt that the wording leaving open the possibility of including non-European countries was meaningless because “obviously, the promoters of a European Cup surely want to maintain it as a continental competition”.<sup>61</sup> Such exclusiveness went against Rimet’s belief in sporting Universalism, so the only decision he made about the competition in 1926 was to convene an ad hoc commission, including Henri Delaunay, Gabriel Bonnet and Hugo Meisl, which met in Zurich in February 1927.<sup>62</sup> Once again, the 1927 congress, held a few months after the ad hoc commission, failed to reach agreement about an international competition. Nevertheless, progress was being made, with, for example, the British delegates indicating their willingness to accept the principle of a Central European competition, whose format would be subject to further discussion.<sup>63</sup>

Now that the idea of organising a world cup had been accepted, the 1928 and 1929 FIFA congresses were able to determine the shape of the new competition by passing resolutions specifying how, where and when a competition open to every FIFA member association would be organised.<sup>64</sup> Continuing discussions by the Delaunay-Bonnet-Meisl Commission, also known as the ‘World Cup Organisation Commission’,<sup>65</sup> resulted in the competition being open

<sup>60</sup>FIFA Archives, Status, 1928 status.

<sup>61</sup>Rimet (1954) *Histoire merveilleuse de la Coupe du monde*: 30.

<sup>62</sup>Dietschy “French Sport”: 513.

<sup>63</sup>Football Association Archives (England), Executive Committee, Report from the English delegates at the 17th FIFA congress, June 1927, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 17th and 18th FIFA congress, 1928 and 1929.

<sup>65</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 17th FIFA congress, 1928.

to both amateurs and professionals (autumn 1928), but an attempt to introduce financial rules for the competition (1929) failed to gain the necessary unanimous approval. In response, Rodolphe Seeldrayers, a FIFA vice-president decided that FIFA would take only 10% of the gross revenues from the competition, as the costs of organising the tournament (travel and accommodation expenses, administration expenses) would be borne by the host country.<sup>66</sup> Delegates at the 1929 FIFA congress chose Uruguay to host the first world cup, after Holland, Sweden, Argentina, Hungary, Italy and Spain withdrew their bids for a variety of reasons, ranging from Uruguay's domination of international football during the 1920s (Argentina) to expressions of friendship for another potential host country (Italy and Spain).<sup>67</sup>

Hence, Rimet was by no means solely responsible for creating the World Cup, despite the impression given by FIFA's decision to call the trophy presented between the end of World War II and 1970 the Jules Rimet Cup. However, Rimet's Universalist beliefs were a very important factor in ensuring the competition was truly international, rather than being restricted to Europe. Although the first edition of the World Cup, held in 1930, was only a moderate success in terms of the number of teams it attracted (just 13) and the media attention it generated in Europe, it showed football's popularity, raised awareness of the quality of the European teams<sup>68</sup> that travelled to Uruguay and generated reflection about considerations beyond the field of play. For example, René Lehmann wrote in the French magazine *Match*: "... friendship, the bringing together of peoples through sport, a kind of happy diplomacy consisting of presenting the arrival of European players as messengers to their Latin Sisters from Europe (...). Mr. Jules Rimet's persuasive diplomacy deserved this success".<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 18th FIFA congress, 1929.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Belgium, Rumania, Yugoslavia and France.

<sup>69</sup>*Match*, 24 June 1930.

## Rimet's Presidency: The Golden Age of Universalism?

One of Rimet's greatest attributes was his ability to avoid and/or resolve conflicts, whether they were caused by sporting rivalries or diplomatic tensions. In fact, he considered FIFA to be a sporting equivalent of the League of Nations, which had been set up in Geneva in 1920. He summarised his vision of FIFA during a speech to the 1950 congress, in which he suggested that the federation's ambition should be to "move the ideal human qualities shown on the pitch into everyday life. The team we can see playing, united, loyal, disciplined, measured, so perfectly united, isn't it a perfect reflection of what our civilisation should be?"<sup>70</sup>

Rimet's diplomatic talents came to the fore during the 1930s when relations between FIFA's South American and European members almost collapsed over the issue of Europe's continuing domination of the world body.<sup>71</sup> The growth in South American football since the creation of the South American Football Confederation in 1916 meant that South America's football associations now saw themselves as representatives of one of the world's most important football regions. As such, they were unwilling to accept Europe's continuing domination of FIFA and felt they should have more influence over the world body's governance.<sup>72</sup> Faced with Europe's continuing refusal to consider their demands, South America's football associations eventually threatened to withdraw from the world federation unless they were given greater say in how it was run. Awarding the first World Cup to Uruguay helped sooth these grievances, as did the creation of a permanent South American seat on the executive committee, in 1938, but it took a visit from the president in March 1939 to finally resolve the tensions.

<sup>70</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 27th FIFA congress, 1950.

<sup>71</sup>Dietschy, P. (2013) "Making Football Global? FIFA, Europe, and the Non-European Football World, 1912-74" *Journal of Global History* 8: 279-298.

<sup>72</sup>For more on the relationship between South America and Europe inside FIFA, see: Vonnard, P., Quin, G. "Did South America foster European football? Transnational Influences on the Continentalisation of FIFA and the Creation of UEFA, 1926-1959" *Sport in Society* (published online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2016.1221208>).

However, this delicate balance was immediately overthrown by the Second World War, which caused such deep divisions between the warring countries that it was difficult to maintain international sporting relations between 1942 and 1949. Archives from this period, including Rimet's correspondence, show the importance of the friendships between executive committee members, who frequently asked after each other's fortunes during the war years, even if they were rarely able to meet. Ivo Schricker, who continued working at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich, was particularly active in maintaining correspondence within the executive committee. Rimet was able to travel to Zurich only twice between 1940 and 1945, whereas before the war he had gone there several times a year. Nevertheless, correspondence shows that some delegates managed to meet outside Switzerland and that football was still the main topic of discussion between them. As the war came to an end, football's administrators began examining ways of rebuilding international relations. For example, Belgium's Rodolphe Seeldrayers met the Netherlands' Karel Lotsy on several occasions, and Rimet, sometimes with Rodolphe Seeldrayers, held meetings with Germany's Peco Bauwens. Relations appear to have been more strained with Italy's Giovanni Mauro, Finland's Erich von Frenckell, Czechoslovakia's Rudolf Pelikan and Yugoslavia's Mihailo Andrejevic.

The end of the war was a relief for all FIFA members, but there was great resentment against the Germans, especially Peco Bauwens. However, Rimet does not appear to have shared this feeling and continued to support his German colleague. Was this the result of his Universalist beliefs or was it simply due to his personal friendship with Bauwens? The archives do not provide a definitive answer to this question, but Rimet's efforts to avoid antagonism influenced all FIFA's discussions during the second half of the 1940s. Although FIFA's 1946 congress voted to exclude Germany and Japan,<sup>73</sup> it was agreed to "resume relations with Austrian and Norwegian associations, and it is decided that those associations do not lose their right to be FIFA members".<sup>74</sup> This decision was justified on the grounds that the changes in government in Austria and Norway had been imposed, so their

<sup>73</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 25th FIFA congress, 1946 [translated from the French].

<sup>74</sup>FIFA Archives, Executive Committee, Minutes from the 10, 11 and 12 November 1945.

support for the Nazis did not reflect the democratic will of the people. Nevertheless, enduring tensions in Europe meant the decision was not unanimous, with the Danish Football Association, in particular, opposing the rapid reintegration of Norway. Rimet referred to Denmark's position in a letter he sent to Schricker on 10 January 1946: "The tone of this letter does not surprise me. All those countries suffered [...] from the German occupation. Hence, they feel a legitimate bitterness toward those whom they think—very wrongly from our point of view—did not fight enough against the invaders of their country."<sup>75</sup>

Again, Rimet played a key role in helping FIFA navigate these difficult waters. In fact, Rimet's ability to bring people together was undoubtedly his most important quality as FIFA president. For Pierre Delaunay, who became general secretary of UEFA after the death of his father, Henri, Rimet was not an 'English-style' president who just set a course to follow and attended meetings; he was more a 'French-style' president, who would shake hands, try to defuse tensions and, sometimes, propose concrete solutions to crises.<sup>76</sup> Although such stereotypes have to be taken with a pinch of salt, they may go some way to explaining the often-difficult working relationship, especially when it came to national issues, between Rimet, who tended to think in terms of politics and diplomacy, and Henri Delaunay, who was more inclined to focus on rules and regulations.

## Universalism Versus Continentalism

In the early 1950s, as Germany was officially reintegrated into FIFA,<sup>77</sup> the federation was hotly debating possible changes to its constitution and governance. FIFA's greatly expanded membership<sup>78</sup> and increased

<sup>75</sup>FIFA Archives, Rimet's correspondence, Letter from Jules Rimet to Ivo Schricker, 10 January 1946.

<sup>76</sup>Interview with Pierre Delaunay, 18 September 2012.

<sup>77</sup>Wahlig, H. (2010) *Ein Tor zur Welt?* Göttingen: Verlag die Werkstatt.

<sup>78</sup>Between 1935 and 1953, FIFA's membership increased from 50 countries to more than 80 countries. FIFA Archives, Secretary's Report, 1954–1955.



head office workload<sup>79</sup> led many members to believe it was time for the federation to be partially decentralised. Vocal support for these changes came from some of FIFA's younger representatives, including England's Stanley Rous, Italy's Ottorino Barassi and Switzerland's Ernst Thommen, as well as the South American associations. The debate was also an opportunity for South America's associations, along with the Soviet Union, to renew their demand for more power within FIFA, in the name of equal consideration for all members.<sup>80</sup> Their vision was shared by the United Kingdom's football associations,<sup>81</sup> which wanted to see FIFA open its doors to the newly decolonised countries of the Commonwealth. These reforms, which were introduced in the last few years of Rimet's presidency, reflected the new world order that was emerging in the 1950s.

Diminished by old age, Rimet was much less active in the federation's affairs and he slowly began to lose his authority. Although he was re-elected president at the 1950 congress in Rio, just before his 77th birthday, he had to accept the organisation of an ad hoc commission to assess proposals for the "re-organisation of FIFA" put forward by the national associations. The composition of this commission was the subject of intense discussion, but European countries eventually managed to maintain their dominance. Nevertheless, it was becoming increasingly obvious that Rimet was unable to keep up with these developments, so, following Ivo Schriker's retirement in 1951, another commission was set up to run FIFA's day-to-day affairs and find a future president. Founding members of this commission included Rous, Barassi and Thommen. Rimet's declining influence was further highlighted by the commission "forgetting" to invite him to one of its meetings "due to a misunderstanding".<sup>82</sup> Rimet was sent a letter of apology, but this snub

<sup>79</sup>Vonnard, P. (2012) *La Genèse de la Coupe des clubs champions européens. Une histoire du football européen (1920–1960)*, Neuchâtel: CIES.

<sup>80</sup>Kowalski, R.; Porter, D. (1997) "Political Football: Moscow Dynamo in Britain, 1945" *International Journal of the History of Sport* 14(2): 100–121.

<sup>81</sup>Beck "Going to War".

<sup>82</sup>FIFA Archives, Executive Committee, Minutes from the 11 October 1950.

showed he was no longer truly in charge at FIFA and that his era was drawing to a close. In addition, the man chosen to succeed Schriker, Kurt Gassmann, was a close friend of Ernst Thommen<sup>83</sup> who was appointed ahead of many other candidates even though he had not officially applied for the post.<sup>84</sup>

In 1953, FIFA held an extraordinary congress in order to examine possible changes to the federation's constitution (statutes and rules). After much debate, the congress voted to allow national associations to group together into regional confederations within FIFA and to give these confederations the power to elect (and dismiss) FIFA's vice-presidents and executive committee members.<sup>85</sup> Rimet, who was excluded from this process, was wary of these changes, which he felt would "interfere with the proper administration of the institution".<sup>86</sup>

Although Rimet is less well-known than Pierre De Coubertin, he is undoubtedly one of the most important sports administrators of the first half of the twentieth century, a field in which he achieved the recognition that had eluded him in other areas of public life, most notably politics. More importantly, he remained true to his faith in sport as a way of creating a common language between peoples and in football as a vector of peace. He summarised this belief in a political testimony he wrote in 1954, in the twilight of his life, entitled "Le football et le rapprochement des peuples".

## Conclusion

That same year, during his introductory speech at his last FIFA congress, Rimet spoke about his still youthful passion for the game: "Sir, [...] the melancholy which could affect me dissolves before the certainty that the

<sup>83</sup>Homburg, H. (2007) "Ernst Thommen, die Schweiz und der Weltfußball, 1946–1962" *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* (107): 69–102.

<sup>84</sup>Archives FIFA, Executive Committee, Minutes from the 17 April 1951.

<sup>85</sup>Archives FIFA, Minutes of the 2nd extraordinary congress, 1953.

<sup>86</sup>FIFA Archives, Minutes of the 29th FIFA congress, 1954.

future will build on the past, with the same fervour, the same faith, the same enthusiasm, the same desire and the same will to serve soccer and, beyond it, the youth of the world.”<sup>87</sup> After lengthy applause, Rimet was appointed honorary president, as befitted a man who had earned his place in the annals of football.

Although the most powerful person in any sport federation is usually the general secretary, a long-serving and charismatic president can have considerable influence over a federation’s actions and future. As the ‘irremovable president’ of both FIFA and the French Football Association for more than 30 years, Rimet was that kind of leader. Under his stewardship, FIFA created an international competition that would become the world’s greatest single-sport event, turned football into a truly professional sport and created numerous initiatives to increase participation in football.

Rimet’s contribution to football has led to him being called a visionary, a missionary and a ‘sporting statesman’. To this list, we would like to add ‘volunteer’, as he was never remunerated for his work. Naturally, FIFA paid his expenses for attending committee meetings and congresses, but Rimet firmly believed that FIFA’s administrators should be motivated by their commitment to the sport, rather than by financial reward.

Like all high-profile figures, Rimet made enemies during his career, but he also knew how to bring people together to implement the measures he felt were needed to develop football and to reform the structures of governing bodies. Nevertheless, the network he had built up was less effective after the Second World War, as a new generation began to take over and football had to face new challenges resulting from decolonisation, FIFA’s increased membership and the creation of continental confederations. Rimet’s era was coming to an end, but his moral influence would continue long after he retired. For example, during his campaign to be elected FIFA president, 20 years after Rimet retired, Brazil’s FIFA representative, João Havelange, highlighted his commitment to

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

reforming FIFA by holding up Rimet’s achievements as a model his opponent in the election, Stanley Rous, had failed to live up to.<sup>88</sup>

## Biography

- 1873: Born in Theuley.
- 1885: Moved to Paris.
- 1895: Military service.
- 1897: Foundation of the *Red Star Club*.
- 1898: Marriage to Jeanne Peyrègne (they had three children).
- 1910: Creation of the *Ligue de Football Association*.
- 1914: Attended his first FIFA Congress.
- 1914: Joined the military reserve.
- 1919: Awarded the *Croix de Guerre* three times.
- 1919: President of the FFFA.
- 1920: President of FIFA.
- 1930: President of the CNS.
- 1931: Officer of the Légion d’Honneur.
- 1949: Resignation as president of the FFFA.
- 1954: Resignation as president of FIFA.
- 1955: Honorary president of FIFA.
- 1956: Died in Paris (23rd October).

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<sup>88</sup>IOC Archives, João Havelange’s personal file.

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# 5

## Henri de Baillet-Latour: Globalising the Olympic Movement

Florence Carpentier

In 1925 the members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) entrusted Henri de Baillet-Latour with the delicate task of taking over from Pierre de Coubertin, France's famous founder of the modern Olympic Games, who had presided the IOC for almost 30 years. Baillet-Latour, a Belgian count from Brussels, had joined the Committee in 1903 but played little part in its affairs until 1920. He owed his appointment as president to his successful organisation of the Antwerp Olympics just a few months after the end of the First World War, the decisive role he played in creating the Executive Board and his trips to South America to promote the IOC and further its interests. The challenges facing the new president were both internal and external, and included meeting calls to replace Coubertin's autocratic style of management, protecting the IOC's institutional monopoly in the face of the increasing strength of the international sports federations, and expanding the Olympics across the globe. Elected at the age of 49, Baillet-Latour would remain president until his sudden death in January 1942.

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