

Football crazy, Football Math: A grumpy person's guide to football and its mathematics

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Abstract

Football, also known as soccer, used to be a sport but is now alas, a media event with an unusual form of mathematics which will be called FootballMath here. This is a short grumpy person's guide.

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1 Overview

Football is the strange spectacle which appears nearly all the time on those television channels that can afford to pay for it. It is played in good old-fashioned English places like the Emirates Stadium and the teams are packed with home-grown footballing talent with names like van Zwiebeldonk and Mbwzycsk. These names are clearly made up to provide endless amusement when the media presenters attempt to pronounce them as many of them are now able to pronounce names like Best without assistance.

The main object of the game is to soak up what little money is made available for sport in England under the aegis of a succession of powerless non-entities appointed by Government under the misnomer *Sports Minister* so that other sports like athletics, hockey, swimming and tennis shouldn't get ideas above their station. This allows most of the country to get down to the serious business of moving relentlessly up the obesity league table in anticipation of it becoming an Olympic sport by 2012.

2 The pitch

The playing area is a large green rectangular pitch on which the players can collapse on frequent occasions even when apparently standing on their own. The pitch also serves as a useful place to store toilet rolls which the spectators (see below) throw onto it from time to time to encourage the players.

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3 The referee and linesman

The referee, a man in black, is present to give the players someone to spit and shout at although on occasions, the players are quite content to fight each other. Sometimes they fight someone else with the same coloured shirt but it is not obvious why. It may of course be simple short-sightedness which accounts for the frequent use of the number zero, (see below). The referee occasionally blows his whistle which is a signal for all the players to surround him and shout a word beginning with F a lot. Curiously only the players with names like van Zwiebeldonk seem to know other English words.

The referee is assisted by two linesmen who run up and down each side of the pitch waving a flag. It is their job to be abused verbally and sometimes physically by the players when the referee is inconveniently too far away. For this privilege, they appear to be paid about the same amount as a player earns in 10 milliseconds so they obviously cannot be very important.

4 FootballMath

It is expensive to pay for all this so the game has developed its own mathematics. There are two elements:-

$$\{zero, bung\} \tag{1}$$

One operator is defined and the set is closed with respect to this operator and obeys the following:-

$$bung + bung = bung \tag{2}$$

$$bung + zero = bung \tag{3}$$

The element *zero* is otherwise used only for scores. There is no negative operator. Readers will note the strong similarity between *bung* and infinity in normal arithmetic.

In order to pay for the *bung*, a number of income schemes are used as follows:-

- Making numbers up
- Changing the shirt colours every week and expecting the spectators to pay 100 quid a time for them.
- Inviting the media (see below) to pay for it by showing it on television and then talking about it for longer than the match takes. Interviews are sometimes held with the players but are mercifully brief and are comparable in interest to interviewing a wardrobe.
- Selling the club to somebody with a name like Mbwrzycsk as part of an elaborate international tax deal.

Note that the most important thing is that income should generally be less than expenditure on the *bung* and on the *transfer fee*. A *transfer fee* is a way of moving a van Zwiebeldonk from one club to another, necessitating a change of shirt and forcing spectators who like players called van Zwiebeldonk to buy yet another shirt. The shirts are very useful however and are often worn in places like Spain where they are used to ward off evil spirits like sobriety. The shirts conveniently bulge in the middle for comfort.

5 The media

The media is made up of former players of the game, being the relatively small number who know some English words and are not called van Zwiebeldonk, and also jolly fat men who would have liked to have played the game but have managed to pick up the rudimentary language used. For this, they receive large amounts of money although this money generally obeys normal arithmetic rules.

6 The spectators

They are there to pay for all this. They are curiously optimistic and have no short-term memory enabling them to chant simple songs of love and adulation containing words beginning with F and remembering triumphs so far in the past that they have dimmed into mythology.

7 Useful phrases

- *F**k* All purpose word used as adjective, noun, gerund, adverb and occasionally verb.
- *Give it to 'em* Remove the opponent's legs from the knees downwards in the fond hope that one's own team might be able to capitalise on the advantage. In the case of England (see below), this would have to occur to the entire opposition team to provide sufficient hope. Nailing the opposition goalkeeper to his post would also be beneficial. Some spectators carry hammers to assist in this enterprise.
- *Ref* Usually followed by a pejorative implying the referee is at the very least disabled.
- *He's going to get his f**king head kicked in* A song of love and adulation starting on the tonic and moving snappily to the 6th and finishing on a resounding flattened seventh. Sung on the frequent occasions when the action on the pitch is even less appealing than usual.
- *We was robbed* First person plural form of *I was robbed*. It means that the opposing side has won by virtue of being better.

8 International Football

The game is also played between countries. England has a team made up of those few players in English football not called van Zwiebeldonk and as a result usually could not defeat a girl's netball team although they often have better haircuts and jewellery. The England team has a manager appointed who must not be English in case he claims to have been abducted by aliens or something else equally embarrassing. The manager has little effect on the team however and must enjoy occasionally sitting in cold places comforted only by the several million pounds a year compensation they receive.

The manager is appointed by an organisation called the FA which is derived from the expression "to know FA". The author of this short pithy introduction to the *beautiful game* as it is known by people who do not know the meaning of the word *beautiful*, has applied for this job on several occasions on the grounds that he could not possibly f**k it up (see above) any more than the existing incumbent. Moreover, he is prepared to do it for half the money so everybody wins. By way of recommendation, the author is willing of course to spend some time picking up the rudimentary vocabulary and boundless optimism necessary as well as forgetting everything he ever knew about mathematics in order to be able to function on the financial side of the game as well.

Members of the FA have to be able to ignore any of the more unpleasant aspects of the game whilst continually attempting to remind everybody that it is still 1966, a year when the England team unaccountably won something called the *World Cup*. Hollywood have now made a film of this phenomenon called "Groundhog Day". England have never been in the remotest danger of repeating this as every time they manage to beat teams of welfare workers from Guernsey to qualify for the *World Cup*, they keep meeting a team called Germany who for some reason which the people who wear football shirts on holiday in Spain cannot understand, are always better than England.

For more information, consult the bibliography.

References

- [1] Various (1960-) *Match analysis of the day*, BBC