For Nancy, Edison, and Gloria

# Prologue

*Montevideo, 31 July 1924*

MANY THOUSANDS stood impatient at the docks that afternoon. They clamoured for a space on top of cars and buildings and watchtowers and light posts, wherever they could to catch a glimpse of their heroes. The crush became too much for some and they fell into the freezing cold water. At 3pm, anticipation palpable, planes swirling, on the horizon appeared the *Valdivia*. Waving national flags, banners, hats and handkerchiefs, the delirious crowd welcomed home Uruguay's triumphant national football team. Olympic gold medallists, world champions. With precision and art, they had turned the Old World's conception of the game upside down.

In Uruguay, football is everything. 'Every time the national team plays,' said the late thinker and novelist Eduardo Galeano, 'no matter against whom, the country holds its breath. Politicians, singers, and street vendors shut their mouths, lovers suspend their caresses, and flies stop flying.' No one expressed it quite like Galeano. In 1968, as Uruguay sank deeper into social and political crisis and a group of young revolutionaries took arms, the 27-year-old released *Su Majestad el Fútbol*. 'I like football,' he said in the prologue. 'Yes, the war and celebration of football. And I like to share euphoria and sadness in the stands

with thousands of people I do not know and with whom I identify fleetingly in the passion of a Sunday afternoon.'

That's how the people felt back in 1924. From afar they had followed their young compatriots as they dazzled the old continent and swept aside all. From afar they had imagined themselves in it all by reading the epic chronicles of *El Día,* newspaper of the masses, the only one to send a correspondent to Paris. And they felt it when after each triumph, especially the gold medal match against Switzerland, that correspondent, Lorenzo Batlle Berres, would say, 'You are Uruguay!' Together at the docks they knew their little country had broken out from the shadows of Brazil and Argentina.

In 1924, nothing represented Uruguay like its national team. At a time the country began its centenary celebrations, the sky blue shirt, *La Celeste*, became a potent symbol of the nation. A symbol of a prosperous country with an educated citizenry and a capital that could stand proud alongside those in Europe. A society many attributed to the work and vision of José Batlle y Ordóñez, the former president whose advanced social and labour legislation helped transform Uruguay from a 19th-century theatre of war into a secular social democracy and the first welfare state in the Americas.

*La Celeste* represented the success of what they called a 'hyper-integrative' society; a peaceful, inclusive, and equal country. An optimistic nation. A so-called melting pot. Just one look at the Olympic team shows it. A group of working-class players, mostly sons of immigrants, could not only represent a nation but reach the top of the world. What better proof of this fair and equal society than José Leandro Andrade, Black football star, three-time world champion, three-time South American champion. And what better proof than Uruguay's unique playing style, a home-grown amalgamation of combination and joy that had no equal.





Yet this footballing tradition wasn't invented in 1924. It was the culmination of a decades-long process of popularisation. From the beginning the game was entwined with Uruguay's national story since its creation as a buffer state, a story based upon the lack of a unified identity and territorial integrity and the constant threat from its giant, interfering neighbours – Brazil and Argentina. Conscious of such vulnerabilities, Uruguayan nation builders agreed that only through the quality of its citizens could the small country survive.

Football arrived as Uruguay began consolidating as a nation state. When it saw itself as a new nation. A white nation. It was a nation born from genocide. One of the first acts of the first president of the republic was a cowardly deception and ambush and murder of 40 Charrúa people, with another 300 taken prisoner. Since the Salsipuedes massacre of 11 April 1931 Uruguay became what cultural and literary scholar Gustavo Verdesio called an 'amnesic nation', forever seeking to erase or deny its Indigenous heritage. The country also denied its Black heritage. The people who in their slavery and eventual freedom built the country and fought its wars and formed part of its working-class mass remained officially invisible, constantly marginalised.

Uruguay's official national story was underpinned by immigration. By the hundreds of thousands of mostly Italian and Spanish who crossed the Atlantic with dreams of América and settled in Montevideo, the region's first port of call. In the second half of the 19th century, Uruguay's population multiplied several times, reaching one million by 1900. One-third of the country's inhabitants were concentrated in the economic and political centre of Montevideo, slowly industrialising and expanding. In 1908 one-third of the capital were foreign-born. The overwhelming majority were children or grandchildren of

immigrants. Demographic transformations accelerated the need for a unified identity, to forge a national consciousness among those with little connection to Uruguay. Journalist and politician José Pedro Varela's transformational reforms in the 1870s established free, obligatory, and secular education as crucial in assimilating new arrivals and producing educated and patriotic citizens of their children.

Football arrived in a Uruguay plagued by political instability and violence. By a decades-long intermittent civil war between the liberal Colorado Party who controlled the national government and represented Montevideo, and the conservative National Party, the Blancos, who defended rural culture and tradition. In Uruguay one was either a Colorado, a Red, or a Blanco, a White. Party spirit and rivalry was passed down to their children. Political questions were still settled by insurrection. By 1900 the country had experienced around 50 coups, uprisings, or revolutions of some sort.

Football arrived when Uruguay's identity was at stake. When the country needed to set itself apart from its more powerful neighbours. When it needed to unite a heterogeneous mass of immigrants and workers, to include them and their children in the national story. When it was desperate to stop Uruguayans killing Uruguayans for the colour on their shirt. And it arrived when the people themselves were looking for something to call their own, something to find and understand their place in times of sweeping transformations. And soon they would find an English game that, as football journalist Luis Prats said, would 'move to the beat' of the nation, and become 'an expression through which they could observe the events that shaped their era'.



# 1

# Precarious Walls

ONE DAY in October 1878, 22 men gathered on an open field in the Montevideo suburb of La Blanqueada. They met not far from the site of an event steeped in national significance. Back in 1811, in the Quinta de la Paraguaya, the revolutionary leaders of the *Banda Oriental* proclaimed José Artigas as *Jefe de los Orientales*, ushering in a struggle for independence from Spanish rule. Now, 67 years later, another group was taking part in another event of national importance – the first game of football on Uruguayan soil.

They played two matches that day. A Uruguayan side bolstered by several British people and their sons faced a team of Englishmen. The first ended in a draw, the second a win for the Uruguayans. And in an inadvertent homage to that revolutionary cry of 1811 they were brutal struggles. They say one player suffered two broken ribs in a collision. 'It was a very rough game in those days,' recounted Pedro Campbell Towers, a participant that afternoon. 'Football had not yet been properly defined … it was played almost like rugby.'

While those initial encounters are remembered through oral tradition, Uruguay's first recorded football match took place on 25 August 1880, the country's Independence Day.

The match once again took place at La Blanqueada, and a Uruguayan side once again faced an English opponent. On this occasion, however, the event counted on the presence of a local observer who, under the pseudonym '*Glauco*', penned the first local impressions of the game for newspaper *El Siglo*.

The chronicler described the combatants. On one side stood the Uruguayans, 'sons of our principal families', who in their youth had 'practised those customs of the Saxon race'. On the other was a team of 'English youths, in whose veins ran the pure blood of the blond Albion'. And as they took positions on what seemed like a vast green carpet, out of nowhere appeared 'a man with a white beard, dressed in black, looking more like a missionary than a player … he was the referee of this strange gathering'.

From the opening whistle it was chaos. 'From all sides,' *Glauco* observed, 'grotesquely dressed individuals run, scream, push, fall, rise.' The references to violence and pyramid formations and scrums have led many to conclude that the football played that day was in fact rugby, not association rules, although Towers' comments about a 'yet undefined' game leave open the question. Whatever the code, this never-before-seen English game produced an intriguing reflection:

'I do not know why in those moments, when I was watching that spectacle until that point unknown … I remembered Dante, and in one of those strange and mysterious aberrations of the spirit I also remembered carnival and a crazy house … football thus has a sublime side and a ridiculous side.'

From the beginning, the game of the 'crazy English' had entered the Uruguayan imaginary. Yet there was something alluring about this strange spectacle, a plasticity from which something beautiful could be realised. 'Three





hurrahs!' the chronicler dedicated to the victorious Britons. 'Hurrahs that could only be launched by true Englishmen.' Then, a final call to the defeated: 'Although I do not believe that national honour may be engaged on this occasion, I would ask my compatriots to make new efforts to achieve the laurels conquered by the children of the blond Albion.' The message was all prophetic. They need not abandon all hope. One day a future generation of Uruguayans would take this foreign game and make it their own.

But for the time being, football remained the sole domain of the so-called true Englishmen. After mediating Uruguay's creation as an independent buffer state in 1828, Great Britain remained inextricably linked to the nation's material growth and ideas of progress. Despite reaching a peak population in Uruguay of around 2,000 in the 1890s, compared to 40,000 in neighbouring Argentina, the British pervaded the Uruguayan economy. As the country grew, London banks met its financial needs. Britons arrived in Montevideo and ran almost all of its public utilities, while engineers and workers laid railways connecting the interior to the capital and facilitating the entrance of Uruguayan meat and wool into the Atlantic economy.

In keeping with their economic influence, the British garnered a respect not afforded to the hundreds of thousands of Italian, Spanish, and French immigrants seeking a new life in the Río de la Plata estuary region. In the eyes of Uruguay's political elite and educators, the British were different. Those tasked with grappling with the country's identity issues saw the 'sensible' Anglo-Saxon as a model of 'civilisation', a beacon of modernity and progress to which emerging Latin nations should aspire. British regional differences mattered little and class distinctions less. Those born in Glasgow or London or Dublin were all considered English, their social status back home erased. In Uruguay,

the so-called English were 'a special type of immigrant', according to Franklin Morales, 'each in a certain sense a "milord"' in the social imaginary.

Aware of their special status, these 'milords' etched their own little world in Montevideo. They established a church and social club, a hospital and cemetery, English-language newspapers and schools. Historian Álvaro Cuenca called these institutions a sociocultural consequence of Britain's informal empire, a strategy to 'combat and defeat the most profound fear of the Late-Victorian era: turning native'. In a distant, 'uncivilised' environment, the British erected 'cultural walls' behind which they could retain a sense of identity and stay connected to home.

One of the first cultural walls arrived at the end of 1842 when a group of British residents – many of whom had fled the tyrannical rule of Juan Manuel de Rosas in Buenos Aires – founded the Victoria Cricket Club. They played in Pueblo Victoria, a zone north-west of Montevideo Bay named after the recently crowned monarch and home to the meat-processing plant of prominent businessman Samuel Fisher Lafone. Yet British dreams of leisure and seclusion were dashed just months later when Manuel Oribe and his rebel army entered Uruguayan territory and fixed their sights on the capital. So they abandoned Pueblo Victoria, retreating behind the fortified walls of Montevideo's Old City where they would remain for the next eight years during the Great Siege. Described by Alexandre Dumas as the 'New Troy', the Uruguayan Civil War attracted global powers and an Italian exile called Giuseppe Garibaldi. His legion of volunteer compatriots donned red shirts and fought for the defence of Montevideo.

On 18 July 1861, a decade after the end of the civil war, a group of majority Victoria Cricket Club members founded the Montevideo Cricket Club (MVCC). A pioneer





of Uruguayan sport, MVCC introduced rugby, tennis, and indeed football to Montevideo. Yet the club's significance went far beyond sport. This was a model English institution. Their home in the faraway neighbourhood of La Blanqueada symbolised their exclusive nature. Outside the purview of Montevideo proper, the place they called the 'English ground' provided a space in which the British community could come together, consolidate affections, and host the British Navy squadrons passing through the Uruguayan capital.

It was a similar story across the rest of South America, with British merchants, bankers, and educators founding cricket clubs in Buenos Aires, Valparaíso, Rio de Janeiro, and Lima. And occasionally they came together, behind a curious transnational cultural wall. In 1864, MVCC invited their Buenos Aires equivalent to play the continent's first international cricket match. Then, in a moment quintessentially Uruguayan, the idea was abandoned after yet another insurrection. Sporting activity slowed for the next two years as Uruguay joined Brazil and Argentina in their long and destructive war against Paraguay. And in 1868, while they cut their neighbour into pieces, Montevideo and Buenos Aires finally played their game and began an international sporting tradition.

Yet sporadic cricket internationals did little to enrich Uruguay's sporting culture. Montevideo Cricket needed a domestic rival. So on 8 May 1874, 45 mostly British residents – many of whom were MVCC members – founded the Montevideo Rowing Club. Though closely tied to the British community, Montevideo Rowing boasted a more cosmopolitan identity linked to the capital's port activities and a more diverse membership including Germans and several *criollo* (native-born Uruguayan) elites. And they soon established a friendly rivalry with Montevideo Cricket Club,

playing rugby and cricket and participating in athletics carnivals.

In June 1881, the cricket and rowing clubs played Uruguay's first recorded inter-club football match. The English Ground bore all the hallmarks of an exclusive British gathering. The most conspicuous members of the community braved the disagreeable weather to fill the main stand. On the pitch, the British minister-resident and consul-general to Uruguay, Edmund Monson, provided the ceremonial kick-off and served as referee. And in contrast with the self-image of those present, the game was marred by violence and disorder, MVCC's captain forced off the ground after a heavy hit. Yet the ugliness of the spectacle hindered little its significance. It was the start of what historian Juan Carlos Luzuriaga called 'Football and Friends', an insular British sporting culture carried out in the most upright and correct amateur spirit.

Montevideo Rowing Club's appearance soon threatened this exclusive culture. In contrast with the distant English Ground, their activities took place on Montevideo Bay, an accessible public space open to all the city's social classes. When their first rowing competition took place in 1875, the local press was struck by a 'spectacle that we have never witnessed amongst us'. The following year, 10,000 people watched the regattas between Montevideo and Buenos Aires. *Criollo* elites young and old rushed to join the nascent institution. Uruguayans began thinking they could stand on an equal footing with their British counterparts.

The cultural walls trembled. A decade on, discontent ran through the rowing club's *criollo* element. The so-called cosmopolitan club had remained decidedly British, rules stipulating that members must be 'properly acquainted' with the English language to form part of the committee. Perturbed by the exclusionary policy, Uruguayan members





lobbied to reform the club's statutes. The British majority dismissed their grievances. Tensions soon played out on the water. In the summer of 1888, a Uruguayan crew defeated their British counterparts in an internal competition. That triumph lit a fuse. On 5 May 1888, over 60 *criollo* members resigned en masse and founded a breakaway entity, Club Nacional de Regatas. It was a transformative moment in Uruguayan sport, the first 'national rebellion' within a British-dominated entity. The first time locals showed that they too could control their own sporting destinies. Montevideo's English-language press seethed, *The Express* condemning the rebel 'busybodies' and 'mischief makers' for their audacious attempt 'to convert an English institution into a native one'.

Football, however, remained a thing of the English. On 15 August 1889, a combined Montevideo Cricket and Rowing side hosted Buenos Aires Football Club in the first international played in the Río de la Plata. The match served as a homage to Queen Victoria's 70th birthday. The community filled the English Ground, joined by a large portrait of their monarch brought in from the British consulate, 'her eyes lowered in a mask of disdain' according to Eduardo Galeano. And there was truth to his claim, for it had rained for days so the ground was heavy and the spectacle ugly, the Argentines winning 3-1. Though reaffirming football as exclusive and English, that first international marked the beginning of a rivalry that would consume future generations.

The fixture also introduced the first wave of expert footballers to Montevideo. The most talented was Offley Scoones, who formed part of the influx of young British professionals and workers into Uruguay in the late 1880s. Of a privileged upbringing, Scoones brought a footballing pedigree from his time at Old Westminster FC, where he

faced London's strongest teams and reached the FA Cup quarter-finals in 1884 and 1886. He also earned an Oxford University 'Blue' and was apparently a reserve for the famous Corinthian team. And in that first international, Scoones produced a fine individual effort to score Uruguay's first international goal.

When the Montevideo team travelled to Buenos Aires the following year they had another young English talent. Henry Stanley Bowles had arrived in Uruguay earlier that year, the 18-year-old using a family connection to gain work at the Montevideo Telegraph Company. Like Scoones, the Brighton-born forward boasted a skilful game, supposedly playing for the youth side of the famous Preston North End. And like Scoones, he scored Uruguay's consolation goal in a 2-1 defeat to the Argentines, in which a Scot by the name of Alexander Watson Hutton served as referee.

The most important figure in those first Uruguay–Argentina contests was William Leslie Poole. A Kent-born Anglo-Scot, Poole completed his secondary studies at Cambridge before sailing across the Atlantic. Arriving in Montevideo in 1885, the 18-year-old immersed himself in the community through sport, playing cricket for MVCC and becoming vice-captain of Montevideo Rowing in 1888. And he was an expert footballer, playing at centre-forward and significantly, perhaps revealing his Scottish roots, displaying a more refined passing game, privileging combination over the brute force of dribbling. Yet Poole's importance went beyond exclusive sporting cultures and consolation goals. It all started when he reversed his original intentions to gain office work to take a job at Montevideo's English High School.

Founded in 1874 by prominent resident Henry Castle Ayre, the school educated the sons of British residents and those of the local elite. It served as a formative cultural





wall for an impressionable Anglo-Uruguayan youth thought to be more susceptible to *criollisation*. And like Alexander Watson Hutton in Buenos Aires, Ayre, along with Jeffries T. Ashe at the Montevideo British School, saw team sports as essential to the formation of their students, to instil self-confidence and discipline and respect for authority. In a word, to create strong, healthy, moral men capable of maintaining the patriarchy and serving the empire. In 1881 Ayre introduced football to the school, founding the Junior Cricket and Athletic Club in 1884. Arriving the following year, William Leslie Poole went further, complementing his official teaching duties by playing football with the youngsters.

While the British School played sports at La Blanqueada, Poole took his English High School pupils on horse-drawn trams from the Old City to the coastal suburb of Punta Carretas. Back then the area remained a vast open space, its few landmarks including a lighthouse and an old racecourse. And there, on fields overlooking the sea where the Río de la Plata met the Atlantic, Poole instilled within his students a love for football. Like Montevideo Bay before, Punta Carretas brought football into the local consciousness. With no walls or fencing, a game played by an exclusive institution could be watched by all. In their 1942 book *Del Fútbol Heroico,* the Magariños brothers recounted the game's first steps on the coast. Among the first local observers were fishermen and families and children who scoured rocks and collected shells and scraps. And at first they were startled as they watched this band of uncouth youths running around, kicking a strange round mass, shouting in an even stranger tongue.

The most enthusiastic of those boys was Henry Candid Lichtenberger. Born in Montevideo to a Brazilian father of Alsatian roots and an Irish mother of Scottish descent, he

completed his studies at 12 and began working soon after. Despite leaving the English High School the year of Poole's arrival in Uruguay, Lichtenberger played with the teacher at Punta Carretas and the Montevideo Rowing Club, which he had joined at the age of 15. Yet Lichtenberger preferred the company of his former class-mates. They all preferred the freedom of Punta Carretas and its sea breezes, and there they intensified their love for the game.

The budding young footballers received a boost in early 1891 when 20-year-old John Woosey arrived in Montevideo. He was back in his city of birth after at least a decade in north-west England with his Uruguayan mother and Lancashire-born father. And in a story similar to Brazilian football's 'founding father' Charles Miller, Woosey, having learnt and lived football's popularisation first-hand, returned to Uruguay with a little book of rules and a desire to continue. And out there at Punta Carretas he found a group of like-minded youngsters longing for something more than the odd kick-about. Now, armed with up-to-date knowledge from the cradle of the game, it was time to create something of their own.

So towards the end of May 1891, Lichtenberger reached out to his former school-mates and friends to bring their passion to light. On 1 June 1891, 22 former and current English High School students founded a club called Football Association. The name, though lacking imagination, quite perfectly revealed the significance of the moment – this was Uruguay's first club dedicated exclusively to the practice of football.



# 2
# Classrooms and Workshops

THEY ARRIVED as Uruguay reached a critical juncture. Fifteen years of militarism had ended. With the 1890 election of president Julio Herrera de Obes, the era of dictatorial leaders and revolutions was no more. Uruguayans now looked to a future of prosperity and freedom. And they say the return to civilian rule provided fertile ground for the massive integration of the *criollo* in sport. It had begun with the national rebellion within the Montevideo Rowing Club. Now it was football's turn to bring the country out of the shadows of despotism and into a more enlightened era. Buzzetti and Gutierrez Cortinas said it in their early history of Uruguayan sport. For them, football, 'the sport of the people and the sport of peace', was 'the most suitable *criollo* manifestation of the brotherly spirit of that historical stage'.

Curiously, it would take a group of English High School students to create Uruguayan football's first national expression. Football Association's founding statutes explicitly banned foreign-born members. This was an exclusively *criollo* club. But they were more than just Uruguayan-born sons of English. They had a strong Scottish heritage through their teacher William Leslie Poole, Lichtenberger, and first president Willie Maclean,

while founders Pedro Bermudez and Carlos Chasquetti reveal a Latin element from the beginning.

Of course these were privileged youths, born fortunate enough to access the most exclusive education and already immersed in British-dominated economic activities. And when the young aristocrats announced themselves to the *petit monde* of Montevidean sport, the British community celebrated. At last, they must have thought, a new piece to their cultural wall, a fresh institution behind which a new generation could uphold their 'superior' way of life. Unbeknownst to them, however, Football Association were different. These Uruguayan-born youths longed to free themselves from the structures and discipline of the English High School, to break out from the comfortable world of the milord.

Football Association played their first game at the English Ground on 2 August, facing a Montevideo Cricket Club led by none other than William Leslie Poole. And it took Poole just minutes to put his disciples in their place, scoring MVCC's opening goal in a 3-1 win. Nevertheless, the junior team earned praise for their performance, 'again and again applauded for their plucky defence' according to the *Montevideo Times*. A rematch three weeks later ended in disaster. The senior club, reinforced by Henry Stanley Bowles, decimated the newcomers 6-0.

Undeterred, the youngsters pushed on. In the final days of September they gathered for an extraordinary assembly. There they adopted two significant resolutions. The first was an official name change, with Football Association becoming Albion Football Club. And while that new name served as a homage to Great Britain, the second resolution reaffirmed their national character, the club adopting Uruguay's sky blue and white as official colours. From the beginning they were a paradox. Linked to the old creators





in name but firmly national in dress, Albion would navigate that awkward space between British expectation and the urge for something new.

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Seven days after Albion's assembly, a group of railway employees gathered in Villa Peñarol, 10km from Montevideo's city centre. The neighbourhood had led a quaint existence until 1890, when the London-owned Central Uruguay Railway company acquired 20 hectares of land to establish its base of operations. On 1 May 1891 the company inaugurated its workshops and Peñarol transformed into a classic industrial township. There the people developed a strong local identity tied intimately to the railroads, with everyday life moving to the rhythm of the trains and the whistle of the workshop. Community feeling strengthened within the Centro Artesano, a cultural centre for workers, which from 1894 would also house Peñarol's first public school.

And on 28 September 1891, 15 employees resolved to found the Central Uruguay Railway Cricket Club (CURCC), a centre of leisure for management and workers. While its 118 founding members reflected Peñarol's demographic make-up with 72 British and Irish, 45 Uruguayan, and one German, CURCC adhered to strict company hierarchies. The presidency was awarded by acclamation to the company administrator, the first of whom was Frank Henderson. Their first cricket side featured an all-English XI of management and high-ranking employees. On their debut they faced a Montevideo Cricket side led by William Leslie Poole and Henry Stanley Bowles, Poole taking a tidy eight wickets in the match and MVCC winning by 13 runs.

When the cricket season ended, CURCC turned to football. The impetus came from member John Woosey, the

same John Woosey who barely a year earlier had returned to Uruguay with his little book. Now, working as an engineer in Peñarol, he moved that the club adopt association rules football, a proposal approved in May 1892. The team adopted the Stephenson's Rocket-inspired colours of yellow and black (though for their first decade that yellow would take a darker, almost orange tone.) And while CURCC's board and cricket side reflected company hierarchies, the football section would be a little more open. One of their first matches, a 2-0 win against a British School XI, featured Uruguayan-born founding members Woosey, Thomas Davies, and Herbert Sagehorn.

'CURCC wasn't only the administration of the railway company and its offices,' said Buzzetti. 'CURCC wasn't only Mr Frank Henderson. CURCC was Woosey and Sagehorn, who wanted a *criollo* football and with that thinking had founded Albion ... Like that, the club was a democratic and levelling factor in the rigid functional discipline of the company.'

CURCC's first footballers were as diverse in social class as they were in nationality. Their first captain, John McGregor, hailed from Glasgow and was the son of a riveter. Dublin-born twins and shopmen John and Richard Burns were another example of British and Irish working-class mobility, of those who traversed the Atlantic in search of a better life or at least some adventure. Arriving in Peñarol in 1891, the two immersed themselves in Uruguayan life. John, who won local sympathies for his involvement in yearly carnival celebrations, would marry a Uruguayan, live the rest of his days in his adopted homeland, and be buried in Montevideo in 1945.

At first, company management must have encouraged worker involvement in the club. They saw in football a healthy diversion from vice, something to create a compliant





and productive labour force. Yet the Scottish and Irish workers didn't share their narrow English conception of sport. For them, football was a passion, a game more suited to the realities of this burgeoning working-class suburb. A space where hierarchies could be erased. And it would soon spread to others.

The people of Peñarol got their first look at the game on 25 May 1892, when CURCC hosted Albion for the first time. A crowd of 2,000 had gathered at the new football ground, the railway workshops and its chimneys silhouetting in the background. And when both teams appeared the crowd focused on a young, very un-British-looking player lining up at centre-forward. Julio Negrón was an English High School graduate raised in all manner of team sports. Yet when he crossed the white line his privileged British formation washed away. Those at the ground saw in Negrón a *criollo* just like them. Albion won 3-1 that day, but it didn't really matter.

CURCC's arrival wasn't celebrated by all. Albion expelled Woosey and Sagehorn from the club, so offended were they by their switch to Peñarol. Like that, Montevidean football took a dramatic, competitive turn. An immediate rivalry developed between the railway club from the 'Villa' and the students from the city. Hostilities renewed at Punta Carretas on 18 July, Uruguay's Constitution Day. Albion ran out 3-2 winners, Woosey scoring a consolation goal for the railway club. The following month in Peñarol, another sizeable local crowd saw CURCC exact revenge, Woosey scoring once again in a resounding 5-0 victory.

Despite initial tensions, both clubs worked to maintain friendly relations. The following year Albion toured Peñarol's workshops, while other matches ended with afternoon teas and banquet dinners. One particular night in 1893 featured renditions of 'God Save the Queen' and 'Auld Lang Syne'. Uruguay's first football clubs have been placed

within the game's so-called foreign phase, a necessary move to pave the way for an inevitable 'national' reaction. And on the surface there is little to argue. Albion were born in the English High School. Many were sons of British and held links to Montevideo's de facto British economic elite. CURCC's foreignness was plain to see. This was the sports club of a London-owned railway company, the most potent symbol of British economic power in both Uruguay and the rest of South America.

Yet the most rudimentary look offers something different. Albion's foreigner ban was all a national expression, their sky blue and white colours at the very least suggestive. CURCC's Englishness too was but a façade. Their *criollo* and working-class players not only challenged prevailing English conceptions of sport, but were moving to the beat of the popular soul. In 1892, the people already called them the 'Peñarol Club'. Soon they would be less a company team than a local expression. Together, Albion and CURCC were creating a new football, a game that would soon reach the multitude.

Albion took the lead in breaking from the old guard. They engaged with Montevideo's English-language press. Using pseudonyms '*Spectator*', '*An Albion*', and '*X*', members and sympathisers sent team information and match reports to the *Montevideo Times* and the *Uruguay Weekly News*. 'We must reproach our football friends of the MVCC for their neglect in keeping us informed of their movements this season,' said the *Times* as early as 1892. 'The Albion Club is far more attentive in this respect.' They even went beyond national borders across the Río de la Plata, sending team information to the *River Plate Sport and Pastimes* in 1893.

But the young Albions wanted more. They wanted to bring football to the attention of the wider Montevideo public. Enrique Lichtenberger penned long, descriptive





match reports and arrived at the offices of *El Siglo*, chronicle in hand. But the Uruguayan editors struck a blow to the youngsters' ambitions. 'Almost laughing at us,' recalled Lichtenberger, 'they told us not to waste our time, that "these things do not interest anybody".'

Perhaps they had a point. To the outside observer, Albion appeared nothing more than a group of English kids playing a strange game. Reduced to numbers they were simply awful. Despite holding a positive record over their Peñarol rivals, Albion remained at the mercy of MVCC, losing all nine games from 1891 to 1893, conceding 42 goals and scoring just five. 'The MVCC has again proven themselves superior to us,' Albion's captain, J.S. Stewart, lamented at the start of 1894. 'But nevertheless, I feel sure that the day is not far off, when our decided efforts will be crowned with the success long tried for.'

So for their 1894 debut against Montevideo Cricket Club, Albion introduced a player no one could ignore. David Ramsay cut an unremarkable figure as he lined up at outside-right. The teenager was blond and skinny to the point of frail. What were Albion thinking, some must have wondered, throwing this boy up against the likes of William Leslie Poole and Offley Scoones, the most hardened and accomplished footballers in the land? MVCC scored three goals before half-time and the cynics were correct. Another year of disappointment awaited.

Then in the second half, Albion sprang into action. And Ramsay was the spark, the nimble forward scoring twice to lead his team to a remarkable comeback, 4-4 the final score. Albion had done it. They had avoided defeat against MVCC for the first time. And it was all thanks to their new recruit. He was a revelation, young Ramsay, earning praise for his passing game and neat finishes. Two weeks later he scored a hat-trick in a 6-1 evisceration of CURCC

in Villa Peñarol. His talent was so great that a desperate and undermanned MVCC began requesting his services. Playing alongside Poole and Scoones, Ramsay perfected not only his own technique but also the art of combination. And there began the next transfer of footballing knowledge in Uruguay. An evolution stemmed from cooperation as much as imitation, from foreign-born to home-grown.

And in June 1894, Poole joined his former students for their return match against MVCC. Anticipation was high after that historic draw, the English Ground attracting a larger-than-usual attendance. And those present found a nervous and aggressive MVCC side, constantly arguing with the referee and heavy in the tackle. When they did decide to play football they went 3-0 ahead, Negrón scoring two and Scoones the other. But then Albion came back, David Ramsay equalising in the second half after a well-worked combination initiated by Poole. Then, with five minutes remaining, Scoones scored his second to give Cricket a 4-3 win.

At the final whistle, an unfamiliar displeasure ran through the Albion camp. Some non-playing members were seething. The reasons came to light days later. Writing to the *Montevideo Times*, an Albion member criticised MVCC's game, their constant 'mistaking the player for the ball, and upon every occasion taking the man, and through their inability to turn, kicking the ball out of play'. Yet it wasn't the physicality or bad tempers that offended the Albions. There were more sinister actions. The first concerned the involvement of two expert HMS *Sirius* players. 'Given that this was a match between the MVCC and the AFC,' wrote 'An Albion', the inclusion of the sailors 'at the last moment and without any notification of any kind given to the captain of the Albion … appears, at the very least, extremely irregular'.





The more egregious act took place in the second half. As Albion dominated, wind and momentum in their favour, their opponents secretly switched the match ball with an older one, the move slowing play down and allowing the seniors back into the contest. 'This unsportsmanlike conduct on the part of the MVCC,' said *Uruguay Weekly News*, 'to put it as mildly as possible, has been strongly and justly condemned by all who take an interest in the game.' Another opinion, signed by 'Fair Play', described the shock of the Albion side, who 'returned to town fully convinced that the MVCC will never lose a match if they continue as they have begun'.

They were the first examples of *Viveza Criolla* in Uruguayan football. But this wasn't 'native cunning', that *criollo* disregard for rules that in future years would become central to *Rioplatense* footballing folklore. This was a *Viveza* from one of Montevideo's oldest and most important English institutions, a cultural wall separating the so-called sensible Anglo-Saxon from the 'uncivilised' *criollo*. Perhaps it was recognition of where Uruguayan football was heading. Fearing *their* game was slipping away into the hands of a young and energetic *criollo* side, Montevideo's old guard, desperate, resorted to violence, time-wasting, and trickery, the likes of which had never been witnessed on a Montevideo field. Whatever it was, it marked the end of not only the idea of 'Football and Friends', but also that of English moral superiority.

Buoyed by their moral victory, Albion pushed on. A week later, they hosted HMS *Sirius* in the first international held at Punta Carretas, suffering a heavy 5-1 defeat. Pride battered, Albion saw no option but to reinforce their team for the return match. So after bringing in William Leslie Poole, Julio Negrón, and Offley Scoones, they recorded a memorable 4-3 victory.

Perhaps that result sparked an epiphany within Albion circles. The club needed footballers to match their lofty aspirations. So in March 1895, at the initiative of Enrique Lichtenberger, Albion officially abandoned their ban on foreign-born members. In another significant move, the club changed their colours from sky blue and white to the navy blue and red of Great Britain. Some say Albion had retreated to their British roots, their old and exclusive ways. An extraordinary meeting in 1894 tells another story. 'The principal cause for this change,' reported the *Montevideo Times*, was 'to enable the players to distinguish each other more rapidly and to obtain uniformity, it being found difficult with the old colours to obtain a similar shade of blue in all the shirts.'

The incorporation of foreign members simply made official what was already occurring. Albion had included foreigners and non-affiliated players since their inception. They shed their exclusionary policy not as a retreat, but to strengthen. What they were really embarking on was the consolidation of a football culture that was more serious, more competitive than that imagined by their British forebears. And so began a recurring theme in Uruguayan football's early years, its roots in the open fields of Punta Carretas where William Leslie Poole had imparted knowledge to his Uruguayan students. To improve, football needed to open up to all elements, regardless of their origin. Those in Peñarol too had acknowledged the changing times, the railway club accepting non-employee players from 1894. In the following year, the club would name Julio Negrón as their first Uruguayan-born captain.

By the start of the 1895 season, Albion's membership had jumped from 39 to 73. The *Montevideo Times* congratulated the 'progressive club, the energy of which is giving example to its seniors'. In the club's season opener against HMS





*Barracouta*, a crowd of 250 people were at Punta Carretas. In a match report sent to the *Montevideo Times,* a gleeful Albion member extolled the 'large number of Uruguayans, many of whom had probably never witnessed a game of football before, but who were nevertheless prodigal in their cheers and shrieks of laughter when the players were rolled over'.

At the end of the season, Albion received their first local, non-British recognition when the Liga Patriótica de Enseñanza (Patriotic League of Education) invited the club to participate in a fundraising event at Punta Carretas. 'This is a new and commendable departure in native fetes,' said the *Montevideo Times*, 'and we congratulate the energetic Albion Club on being once more to the front.' Over 3,000 people gathered at the old Este Hippodrome, joined by Uruguay's minister of war. And there, amid the extensive programme of musical performances and athletic contests, the football caught the attention of all. The *Montevideo Times* described a 'roar of laughter that rose from the spectators packed around the field', noting the 'good effect' of the spectacle from the grandstand.