

TABLE FOOTBALL HISTORY

We all love table football, but who invented it and when? The answer is not easy to get. Probably it is correct to assume real football, established by the 1860's, must have been invented first. But even here the history of 'real' football has an ancient past. Rabbi R Brasch's book, *How did Sports begin?* (1972) shows more has been lost to history than can be recalled. Desmond Morris's book, *The Soccer Tribe*, indicates how old our modern game is. The Reverend P.H.Francis's book, *A Study of Targets in Games*, reminds us how foolish it is to be certain of anything. Certainly, by the 1890's many table top parlour games had been patented imitating football. They used wires, levers and or rods to move players to kick a ball. Mr A Drewe has an early example given to his father in 1900 on show at Castle Drogo, at Drewsteignton, Devon. But it has little in common with our own Bar football table. An example of a slightly closer relative would be UK patent 24698 in 1908 by Chatham resident Edwin Walsham. But again it is not quite what we would enjoy to play today. Incidentally, Subbuteo, developed by 1947 was a late entrant to the field.

The earliest version using a horizontal bar attached to the players waist and rotated to kick the ball appears to be claimed by Edwin James Lawrence of Birmingham in 1913. But this was only a game of two goalkeepers. Nevertheless it appears to have been a British milestone.

My favoured claim to the first proper table is UK Patent 205991 by Harold Charles Thornton of London in 1922. It has all the elements necessary for an English claim to the invention. Yet, you will probably come across competing claims from time to time which muddy the waters.

In *The Complete book of Foosball* by Johny Lott (contemporary Books, Chicago 1980), it is claimed "the earliest United States patent for a 'foosball' table was registered in 1901 but it is generally agreed that foosball, like soccer, originated in western Europe". I have tried to locate that patent, and it appears to be a reference to a pump handle that was cited in error. Also from the USA comes the claim by Larry Patterson of Cincinnati that he imported the first-table soccer game to the US in 1962 attributing the invention graciously to the Goetsli family (later of the Electro-Kicker company) in France in the 1920's.

One of the most famous players of all time, Zeck Mullins, claims at the age of four his neighbour made a DIY table for him. Sadly I do not know what year that was, but since parts of a wrecked 1949 Studebaker car were used it is not critical to the debate.

On the Internet an article from *Replay* magazine is reprinted from 28/02/1976 claiming: "The original game we know as table soccer probably originated in Germany in the late 1920's, early 30's. We say "probably" because some feel the French were working with the games at the same time. But the game did flower in Germany...years before it made its first timid appearance in the US.

The French claim should be documented, but I have yet to see any evidence for this. In fact my research is more a product of what I have been able to discover in the UK and Swiss patent offices and through attempted international searches and contacts than from any certainty or comprehensive knowledge. *The Complete Book of Foosball* relates the claim in *Le Soir Illustre* No 2471, November 1979, p26 that the inventor was yet another Frenchman, Lucien Rosengart, who lived from 1880 to 1976. An employee of the Citroen automobile factory, and inventor of the minicar, frontwheel drive, the seat belt, and babyfoot, yet another name for what we call table football.

The Spanish have a claim or two! Augustin, the owner of the Calle la Senyera, 46006 Valencia, claimed his table was eighty years old (a few years ago now). Interestingly identical models were still being made recently by Futper S.A. of Paiporta, Valencia, Spain. But they have not responded to an enquiry into their fame. Interestingly it is nearly identical to the 'Sokit' table marketed in the UK under a 1939 patent which also seems to be the model for the famous "Lilliput" table introduced to the UK by Edgar Boulter in 1947 having seen tables in use in Switzerland after the war. This may well have been the table manufactured by the Swiss company called Kicker, located in Geneva, one of the oldest manufacturers. But the oldest Swiss patent does not seem to predate 1933 and was immediately followed by many imitators.

Back in Spain, the magazine *El Pais* (176, 3 July 1994) claims 17 year old Alejandro Finisterre invented table football in 1936 to allow children to play on wet days in Montserrat, Cataluna; perfecting the game when in exile in Guatemala. He lived in the US wher it reports the Mafia took an excessive interest in his machines so he went to Mexico where the idea was pirated.

And, to cap it all, (for now at any rate) Eugene Lee Peppard, who marketed 'Tournament Soccer' in the USA, thought the game might have Chinese origins in his patent application for an improved foot design. My money is still on Table football being an English invention. But I can by no means be certain. I will pay £25.00 cash to the first person to prove I am wrong, and willingly, because it is so frustrating to not know who should get the credit. Especially as with each death of those who might know, a whole library of knowledge is lost. In any language!

David Lavender, a historian of the game, noting the inroads of computer simulations imitating football has written, "The next step-virtual reality football-may raise the question: Why not kick a ball around a field?... Bar football, however, [even when it is not raining] has outlasted sophisticated machines...because of its fast, skillful physical entertainment value... it is played internationally in tournaments by competitors whose advanced playing techniques demonstrate extraordinary hand and eye co-ordination." Also of course its great fun. And we owe a great debt of gratitude to whoever it was who invented the game of whatever nationality and almost as much to those who independently or subsequently popularised it. That includes yourself, and your opponent!

YEAR	COUNTRY	PATENT No.	SUMMARY
1890	U.K.	11037	model boots on handles: a bit of a joke
1890	U.K.	1753	cannon effect of big & smaller balls like billiards
1890	U.K.	1742	Blow football (later modified with tubes, bellows)..
1890-'13	U.K.	Various	counters, dice, vertical spin men, etc etc.
1908	U.K.	24698 ✓	men on rods under table top
1909	U.K.	5858	moving foot using lever
1910	U.K.	21367	another vertical spinning man example
1913	U.K.	27308 ✓	THE FIRST man (goalie) on horizontal shoulder rod
1914	U.K.	24261	dummy man
1917	U.K.	110526	man on wire underneath table
1919	U.K.	134154	man on extending rod: a bit of a joke
1919	U.K.	148048	finger operated foot: a bit of a joke.
1919	U.K.	150058	man on long handle with kicking foot
1921	U.K.	189286	men on long lengthwise wires
1922	U.K.	205991 ✓	THE FIRST PROPER TABLE?
1922	U.K.	207270	Rods & levers under the table (Coin freed)
1925	U.K.	257722 ✓	proper table but with telescopic rods
1922-'30	U.K.	Various	rods, levers, under table example (various)
1931	U.K.	341564 ✓	proper table
1933	U.K.	394582	Swiss proper table
	U.K.	415260	proper table
19... etc	SWITZ..	160197 ✓	First Swiss patent for a proper table (many copies)
193...	USA	1934381 ✓	First American Table
1936	U.K.	442119 ✓	Swedish 'coathanger design' table
1939	USA	2215687 ✓	American design
1935-'50	U.K.	Various	Various incidental designs of little importance
1939	U.K.	523882 ✓	Coin freed table of mature design (Lilliput)
1941	USA	2282846	American table
1941	BELGIUM	505910 ✓	Playing Surface
1951	FRANCE	991038	Playing surface
1951	FRANCE	991037	Playing man
1952	U.K.	689305 ✓	Coathanger design table <i>ALSO</i>
1952	FRANCE	1012694	Bearing design <i>NS: 69749/102/1000000000</i>
1953	FRANCE	1034971	'Bendy feet' design!
1954	SWITZ..	302 183 ✓	Another simple design (many earlier since '33 missed)
1954	ITALY	499723	Italian stylish design
1954	ITALY	503033 ✓	man
1954	ITALY	504648 ✓	man
1954	USA	2769638	Sloping table
	U.K.	719038 ✓	Coin freed table with telescopic rods
	U.K.	739976	Cork ball with weighted core
195...	ITALY	532808 ✓	man with scooped foot design
1956	USA	2832596	Sloping table
1956	SWITZ..	322881	Playing surface
1954-'59	U.K.	Various	Various incidental designs of little importance
1961	U.K.	870129 ✓	Score counting table
1961	U.K.	870130 ✓	Telescopic rods design
1961	FRANCE	75147 ✓	Patent of addition: Undertable illumination & surface
1960	USA	3056605	Magnetic pieces: a bit of a joke
1964	FRANCE	1355361 ✓	Transparent top
1964	FRANCE	1359795 ✓	Magnetic man
1964	CANADA	684876 ✓	Goal mouth rubbish clearer
1965	ITALY	686961 ✓	Vertical control handles
1965	SWITZ..	389478	Identical to 684876
1965	SWITZ..	390764	Man (screw fitting onto rod)
1966	USA	3400930	Table with external ball chute
1967	USA	D208480 ✓	man
1959-'70	U.K.	Various	Incidental designs of little importance
1967	NETHERL..	6515128 ✓	'Free range rods' design
1968	USA	3574350	old design revived
1968	U.K.	1134464 ✓	Edgar Boulters Lilliput coin mechanism

LANSDOWNE LEARNING RESOURCES CENTRE

BOURNEMOUTH & POOLE COLLEGE OF F.E. 1968 continues.....

THE LANSDOWNE

BOURNEMOUTH, HANTS BH1 3JY

✓ = PHOTOCOPIED (1992)

LANSDOWNE

LRC

Tel: Bournemouth

205801/3

TIM RASER

Continued...

YEAR	COUNTRY	PATENT No.	SUMMARY
1968	USA	D211259	flash design of table
1969	USA	3627322	helmeted man
1970	UK	1288656 ✓	removeable colours
1970	USA	3653661	penalty goal spaces idea
1970	USA	D217372 ✓	man
1970	USA	3870303	penalty goal table
1971	USA	3724851	Cechetti removeable bearing
1971	UK	1274427	removeable bearings
1972	UK	1344808 ✓	electro magnetic ball return & scorer
1973	UK	1448673 ✓	cheap free range rod table
1973	USA	D229324 ✓	Michelin type man
1975	USA	3920244 ✓	Kaijers silly foot
1975	USA	3926432 ✓	bumpy surface & balanced men
1975	USA	3931970	sloping surface (SAME as 3724851)
1974	USA	3976296	magnetic random undertable effect
1973	USA	4025073	ball drop opening for biased roll
1975	USA	4042239	rod-push/kick type man
1976	USA	4046286	tamper proof ball dispenser
1976	USA	4046378 ✓	man and surface design
1975	USA	4065128	longitudinally moving electric man
1975	USA	4076244 ✓	The famous Peppard foot design
1975	USA	4078797 ✓	Graphite rods (several citations)
1977	USA	4127269	shock absorbers
1977	USA	4138110	man design
197(7)	UK	1427793/4	Ball server
1978	UK	1497660 ✓	Removeable bearing
1980	USA	4307884	Remmlers electronic solenoids
1980	UK	2049444 ✓	Remmlers electronic solenoids
1982	USA	4382598	bearing housing
1984	USA	D276631 ✓	man design

LANSDOWNE LEARNING RESOURCES CENTRE
BOURNEMOUTH & POOLE COLLEGE OF F.E.
THE LANSDOWNE
BOURNEMOUTH, DORSET BH1 3JJ

(1992)
✓ = AUTHOR
TIM CASE
LANSDOWNE
LRC
Tel: Bournemouth
205801/3