

## **A Continuation of Warfare by Sportive Means:**

### **Settling Conflicts Through Football in the Eastern Highlands of Colonial New Guinea**

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# **A Continuation of Warfare by Sportive Means: Settling Conflicts Through Football in the Eastern Highlands of Colonial New Guinea**

This ethnohistorical study of football games from the mid-1940s to the 1970s in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea explores the potentials and limits of using sport as a conflict-settlement measure. Football was introduced by Australian colonial officers as a peacebuilding exercise, and local communities quickly adapted it to settle conflicts that otherwise could have escalated to war. It was a new mechanism to redress perceived violations and injustices but culturally shaped by pre-existing experiences and understandings. The game, similar to warfare, only came to a conclusion when both sides were exhausted, and the scores considered even. Football thus served a useful purpose to settle conflicts peacefully and efficiently – within limits. Tensions and emotions ran high on the football pitch, resulting in instances where games led to the renewed outbreak of inter-village wars, especially when the underlying ethos of equivalence was breached, and one side dominated the match.

Keywords: football, soccer, colonial sports, conflict settlement, Papua New Guinea

## **Introduction**

Football was a popular sport in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea during the colonial period. Under the Australian colonial administration, football played an important contributing role in containing conflicts that, in pre-colonial times, would have turned into full-fledged inter-village warfare. In this article, I present recollections of football games in different villages of the Fore, Auyana, and Tairora ethnic groups in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, and look at differences and similarities, and the successes and failures in the use of football as a conflict-settlement measure.

Data on this topic was collected through archival review of patrol reports and oral history interviews with older informants in the Okapa and Obura-Wonenara districts of the Eastern Highlands Province between 2004 and 2006. I will first start with some deliberations on the connections between conflict, violence, ritual, and sport that set out the theoretical argument of the article. Afterwards, I present a short history of the introduction of football to the Highlands of colonial New Guinea and describe the peculiar rules of the game before tackling whether football was indeed a peaceful replacement of warfare, and in what way it contributed to settling conflicts between villages.

### **Sport as Ritualised Conflict**

Sports in general and football in particular have always had a strong connection with conflict, violence, and even war. In the social sciences, there are two distinctly different views when it comes to looking at the relationship between sports and conflict.<sup>1</sup> One theory holds that sports, particularly competitive team sports like football, are a form of ritualised *conflict* and therefore prone to outbreaks of real violence. It was George Orwell that penned the often-quoted dictum that sport is ‘war minus the shooting’.<sup>2</sup> Michael Lombardo, an evolutionary biologist, has argued that sport itself began as a means to develop skills necessary for hunting and warfare, and then turned into an arena where male spectators could evaluate the qualities of their potential allies or rivals.<sup>3</sup> One of the precursors to modern football in England was often marred with violence when on Shrovetide whole populations of neighbouring towns and villages would engage in a no-holds-barred and often brutal game of mob football, in which a pig’s bladder had to be kicked or carried onto the market square of the opposing village. It is speculated that one of the surviving games of this type, the Royal Shrovetide Football in Ashbourne, initially started to play out enmities that arose from the English Civil War.<sup>4</sup>

Modern football with its passionate fans often has served to symbolise or exacerbate ethno-nationalist and confessional tensions or conflicts, be it in a game between Celtic and the Rangers in Glasgow or Real Madrid and Barcelona in Spain. Football clashes at times have even foreshadowed actual wars, for example in Yugoslavia, where in May 1990, a game between Dynamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade erupted in rioting, drawing up the battle lines a year before the start of the Yugoslavian wars.<sup>5</sup> And in the so-called Football War between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969, political tensions between the two countries over issues of immigration of thousands of Salvadorans to Honduras and a land reform disadvantaging these migrant settlers came to a boiling point when the two national teams met in a series of games in the qualifying round for the 1970 World Cup, triggering a 100-hour war leaving 3'000 soldiers and civilians dead and 300'000 Salvadorans displaced.<sup>6</sup>

With such a strong connection between sports and violence, it might be surprising then, that other social scientists hold quite the opposite view: they argue that since sports are a form of *ritualised* conflict, sports are perfectly suited to serve as a means to overcome conflict and bring divided societies together.<sup>7</sup> Sport, in their view, is a cathartic alternative to war, allowing distinct communities to express rivalry and competition in a peaceful manner. Norbert Elias, for example, has argued that sports exerted a civilising influence beyond the playing field, by allowing the socially approved arousal of moderate excitement, which gradually led people to more strictly control their public behaviour.<sup>8</sup> And the founder of the Olympic games, Baron de Coubertin, envisioned sport to be a harbinger of peace; his Olympic games should bring nations together to compete peacefully with each other.<sup>9</sup> To quote him directly:

Wars break out because nations misunderstand each other. We shall not have peace until the prejudices which now separate the different races shall have been outlived. To attain this end, what better means than to bring the youth of all

countries periodically together for amicable trials of muscular strength and agility? The Olympic games, with the ancients, controlled athletics and promoted peace. It is not visionary to look to them for similar benefactions in the future.<sup>10</sup>

Probably the best illustration to this connection between football and peace are the highly mythologized accounts of at least one, maybe several spontaneous football matches (or at least kicking a make-shift ball around) that were played along the Western Front on Christmas 1914, between German and British troops that agreed to a truce for the day in the middle of one of the most dehumanising wars in history.<sup>11</sup>

Since the mid-1990s, this possibility to use sports to overcome conflict and contribute to peacebuilding has been taken up by the UN, the IOC, the FIFA, UEFA, and numerous NGOs, who have since sponsored a variety of projects under the Sport, Development and Peace (SDP) paradigm. A first high point was reached in 2005, the year that the UN declared as the International Year of Sports and Physical Education, with peace and development being the main focal point. A whole SDP sector has sprung up, developing programmes that focused on sport as a means to reduce tensions and overcome conflict in post-conflict societies, to counteract racism and prejudice, and to support health education and gender equality.<sup>12</sup>

One noteworthy example of this use of sports in overcoming conflict is a sports project in western Sri Lanka that aims to lessen tensions between Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims. A small NGO called Asian-German Sports Exchange Programme has built a multi-purpose sports facility, and then invited community representatives of the surrounding, ethnically separated communities to plan and organise an inter-community sports weekend for 8-16-year-old children and their families. Children were then organised in ethnically mixed teams, and the competitiveness was tuned down to keep the level of fun high. This event was relatively successful in allowing intercultural contacts to form and in creating a feeling of togetherness among all the participants

across ethnic lines.<sup>13</sup> Another even larger-scale example is the initiative Football for Peace in Israel. This initiative intends to help build bridges between Jewish and Arab towns and villages within Israel by involving children in football training programmes. From humble beginnings, this programme has until 2009 grown to include 50 volunteer coaches in 40 different Jewish and Arab communities, attracting about 1000 children.<sup>14</sup> A number of other initiatives have since followed all over the world, most of them focusing on football as the sport of choice.<sup>15</sup>

Most of these initiatives, however, do not describe in detail their assumptions about why the playing of football should automatically lead to peaceful behaviour. Critics, therefore, call for more critical reflection and point out the more negative aspects of sport, for example, that competition can foster exclusionary tendencies.<sup>16</sup> Some explicitly question the suitability of football, an invasion game, as a means to overcome antagonisms, as it is based on the mechanisms of attack and defence, physical strength and mental toughness, and of overcoming opposition. They argue that football behaviour is not necessarily predisposed towards tolerance, friendliness, and compassion, and might, in the end, do more harm than good.<sup>17</sup>

My article intends to investigate these connections between ritual, violence, and football at the hands of a slightly unusual subject matter: the spread of football in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. I will compare pre-colonial warfare with colonial-era football matches and demonstrate that the use of sport to further peace is not a recent development, but has been employed already in colonial times, to varying effect.

### **The Arrival of Football in the New Guinea Highlands**

When the first Australian colonial officers (commonly called *kiap*) explored the Highlands of the Territory of New Guinea in the 1930s, they found, to their surprise, wide, densely populated valleys. Like most small-scale, non-state societies, the various

ethnic groups in the Highlands lived in a constant state of warfare, meaning that war was not necessarily a continuous occupation, but a continual threat. In the Eastern Highlands, wars took the form of armed clashes between neighbouring local groups (consisting of nucleated villages or hamlets) or alliances of local groups. Triggers for the outbreak of warfare were usually some kind of real or perceived slight or injury of one group perpetrated against another, most often in the form of deaths attributed to sorcery, or the theft of pigs or arguments about rights over women.<sup>18</sup> Warfare consisted either of relatively ritualized open field battles, in which loosely stretched out lines of warriors armed with bows and arrows and protected by wooden shields faced each other over some distance, or then stealthy raids against enemy settlements or hit-and-run attacks against enemy individuals working in gardens or travelling on footpaths.

The *kiaps* strove to curtail this warfare with the help of a police corps composed of indigenous policemen. They set out to slowly extend the state's monopoly of violence onto these newly discovered areas, setting in motion a colonial process of pacification. They made contact with the villagers, proclaimed a ban on warfare, arrested and imprisoned those that continued to wage war, appointed local officials, offered themselves as mediators in conflicts, and introduced new judicial institutions.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, villagers confronted with this incursion into their previous lifeways adapted their ways of settling conflicts, sometimes giving up warfare within a few years, due to a combination of the threat of reprisals and the desire to access goods and services that the representatives of the colonial government offered, at other times resisting actively and continuing to wage war amongst themselves, and even attacking government patrols. The villages mentioned in this article all lie in the Upper Lamari River Basin to the south of the Kratke mountain range. They were administratively part of the Kainantu sub-district and only came under government control after the first

exploratory patrols reached this area between 1948 and 1950. The Auyana and Fore, within a few years, acceded to the demand of the government to end armed confrontations between villages once and for all, while the Tairora area remained a ‘trouble spot’ in the eyes of the administration until the mid-1960s. Pre-contact conditions, such as modalities and intensity of warfare, patterns of leadership, and alliance, as well as traditional institutions of peace-making, all shaped the process of pacification to a significant degree and led to these different trajectories.<sup>20</sup> Wherever and whenever warfare was given up, however, conflicts still arose and needed to be settled. While *kiaps* and colonial courts were effective in curtailing or resolving some of these conflicts, local leaders in some areas also took up the idea of courts. They introduced their own unofficial village courts to stop disputes from evolving into full-fledged violence.<sup>21</sup> Another local option to settle conflicts was through football, as I will explain in this article.

In their effort to eliminate warfare, the *kiaps* introduced football as a peacebuilding measure, in order to keep the former warriors occupied and entertained after pacification and to provide a peaceful outlet for inter-village competition and antagonisms. *Kiaps* actively distributed footballs and, on occasion, organized inter-village games. A patrol report by Assistant District Officer Skinner, who in 1946 wrote to district headquarters to send him more footballs to distribute, is the earliest document mentioning football in the Kainantu sub-district:

There is a keen demand for footballs in the area and it would be an excellent thing if we could supply, free, footballs as a reward for civic worth - on a village basis. A few bladders are available but covers are not.<sup>22</sup>

The introduction of football and other sports as a replacement for warfare has a long history in Papua New Guinea. Already Sir Hubert Murray, the Lieutenant Governor

from 1906 to 1940, and F. E. Williams, the Government Anthropologist from 1922 to 1943, both advanced the idea ‘that sport (principally football and cricket) should be encouraged among Papuans as an “effective working substitute” for headhunting raids and tribal warfare’.<sup>23</sup> They followed a basically functionalist understanding of culture, informed by the works of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, which held that even ‘bad customs’ might have an integrative function in village societies and that the abolition of warfare thus needs to be replaced by a ‘functional surrogate’, lest there be dire consequences to the fabric of the local society.<sup>24</sup>

The ban on warfare enforced by the Australian colonial administration did indeed have repercussions, and they were mostly felt by men. While villages in the Eastern Highlands were not constantly involved in armed conflicts, conflicts could nevertheless break out at any moment. Men consequently spent much time in preparing for eventual war by constructing palisades around their hamlets, crafting bows and arrows as well as shields, and guarding the women who work in the gardens in times of tension. Adding together the total amount of days that the men of the Auyana village of Asempa spent with actual fighting and warfare, Robbins arrived at a total of about three years over a twenty-five-year history, roughly one-eighth of the time, with not a single year going by without some armed altercation.<sup>25</sup> With pacification, the men’s most important occupation and their sense of purpose had thus suddenly disappeared, and with warfare gone, most of the rituals and ceremonies – closely connected to war – became redundant. Not surprising, then, that many men were complaining about the lack of excitement in their lives and showed signs of apathy and boredom.<sup>26</sup>

The *kiaps* after World War II, many of them having taken a few courses in functionalist anthropology at the Australian School of Pacific Administration, realized that this ‘unemployment’, especially of the younger generation, would most likely

create problems in the long run and sought ways to canalise all this pent-up energy, lest there be other, less desirable outlets.<sup>27</sup> They made the men construct roads and bridle paths, as well as rest houses for *kiaps* and police on patrol, but they also introduced football as a new form of competition, in which men could ‘let off steam’, as the *kiaps* put it:

Our problem now is to supply them with some worthy substitute for the fighting which hitherto formed such a big part of their life. Sorcery has a strong hold now but, with fighting stopped and no substitute provided, it will become a much more powerful force. The supply of the much needed footballs and the organisation of inter-village and inter-group competitions, later leading to inter-Sub-district matches, will provide but a partial and temporary substitute. But as a first step it is highly desirable.<sup>28</sup>

The *kiaps* believed football might be an excellent way to overcome pre-colonial antagonisms, since rivalries between villages could be acted out on the football ground, bringing all sides together in friendly competition. Even in the mid-1960s, when Local Government Councils (L.G.C.) were already operating in the Okapa area, and after this region has been experiencing more than a decade of uninterrupted peace, the *kiaps* still saw promises in football for reducing inter-group suspicion and latent hostility:

The president of the OKAPA L.G.C. – KEGE – has shown some interest in this pasttime [football] and has expressed desires to organize some form of competition. If this idea realises and the enthusiasm channelled, it could well mean fears of outside groups and sorcery could be broken down a little more quickly.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the ideas brought forward by these two *kiaps* in their patrol reports, no organised form of competition in the form of tournaments ever eventuated. And while it was the *kiaps* who introduced football, it was mainly the local intermediaries, the mission evangelists, the interpreters, and the police constabulary, who were responsible for spreading the game throughout the Eastern Highlands and adapting it to its ultimate

purpose of a conflict-settlement measure. The villagers of Purosa in the South Fore area first came into contact with football through the first mission evangelists visiting their village, who used it to attract people, just as they played recordings on a phonograph for the same purpose. Some men from Bibeori in the Southern Tairora area first saw a game of football being played while serving a prison sentence at the sub-district headquarters in Kainantu. The government interpreters were also crucial in spreading the knowledge of the game. In Bibeori, the government interpreter living in nearby Nompia was for a long time the only person who owned a real football, and he loaned it to those groups wanting to play a match. The rules were very rudimentary, and all that was needed was a more or less even pitch, two poles stuck in the ground on both sides of the field, and where there was no ball, banana leaves and parts of the stem could be tied to a bundle and used instead. Elsewhere, people with a bit of money earned from carrying cargo for the *kiaps* went to Kainantu and bought small footballs at the trade stores there.

### **The rules of the game**

Once introduced, the people quickly adapted football for their purposes. After the Australian administration banned warfare, people were in dire need of alternative institutions to settle conflicts peacefully, as conflicts between and within villages still arose from time to time (and sometimes led to renewed outbreaks of violence, subsequently attracting retribution from the *kiaps* in the form of arrests and imprisonment). The *kiaps* put in place colonial courts under their direction to deal with conflicts. Still, while these courts were generally accepted, it meant having to wait until the *kiap* came by on his yearly or bi-yearly patrol or travel to the patrol post in Kainantu more than a day's walk away. Local solutions were needed, and the people of the Eastern Highlands started to use the introduced game of football in novel ways to settle conflicts that could no longer be decided on the battlefield. Instead of going to war, a

challenge of football would be issued whenever a group felt another group had slighted it. As such, football indeed served as the functional equivalent to the prohibited warfare.

The classical description of colonial Highlands football comes from Kenneth Read's 'The High Valley' on the Gahuku-Gama near Goroka in the Eastern Highlands.<sup>30</sup> His short discussion of the subject was not only cited by Levi-Strauss in 'The Savage Mind', who sees Gahuku-Gama football as an instance of a game treated as a ritual,<sup>31</sup> but it also shows up in anthropology textbooks<sup>32</sup> and has even inspired a legal commentary.<sup>33</sup> It is worth citing in full what Read observed among the Gahuku-Gama between 1950 and 1952:

These football "games" were not mere sport but a substitute for feuding (...) Under the government-imposed peace feuding was proscribed, but groups that had been injured frequently issued a challenge to "futbol", meeting their opponents in a contest that adhered to traditional rules of redress. The game was modeled loosely on rugby, but during the encounter, which occasionally lasted several days, the numbers of the opposing teams fluctuated sharply: at critical moments, as many as thirty men on each side might face each other. The team representing the offending group entered the field with a score of one in its favor, standing for the act that had to be redressed. Its opponents, representing the wronged group, aimed to even the score – not to win by amassing a greater number of points but simply to "back" the goals its rivals gained. In the heat of the encounter careful scoring was almost impossible. The game invariably degenerated into something closer to hand-to-hand combat than organized competition, yet eventually the ideal was upheld. For the contest ended when the elders of both groups, watching its progress from the sidelines, decided that the scores were even, and honor satisfied, the challengers left the field.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the football described by Read, in which arms and legs were equally important in trying to put a hard ball made of bark cloth between the wooden posts of the opponents' goal, the game played in the colonial Kainantu sub-district was more modelled on football proper (or soccer) than rugby, in that the ball could only be moved

across the field and into the goal with the legs. Indeed, the restriction on touching the ball with the hands was the one rule observed throughout the area, and breaking it resulted in a free-kick to the other party. Other than that, there were hardly any rules. In the village of Bibeori, kicking the ball out of the field past the goal line would result in a corner kick, but among the North Fore, for example, something like a goal-line was non-existent, and goals could even be scored from the ‘wrong’ side of the goalposts.

Without proper rules governing the behaviour of players, it was an extremely rough and physical sport. Ori Ilaku of Okasa village in the Northern Fore area recounted with glee how, when attacking an opponent in ball possession, he would always kick his opponent’s legs first and only afterwards go for the ball. And if he were hard-pressed by a pursuing opponent while driving the ball forward, he would perform a mule kick to get rid of his pursuer.<sup>35</sup> Elbows, hands, knees, and feet were all used to keep the opponent at bay, and two players could easily get locked in hand-to-hand combat while the game went on elsewhere on the field. Some people stressed that in order to score goals, a team had to be quite disciplined, in that players should always pass the ball to an unguarded player as soon as they get attacked. Nevertheless, injuries were common and, on occasion, quite serious. A patrol report on the Keyagana-Kanite just west of the Fore shows this succinctly:

Any time, any day, apparently regardless of work to be done, groups of people of up to one hundred can be seen kicking a soccer ball back and forwards. No organisation is apparent and looking at the number of casualties with injuries varying from broken bones to abrasions, this craze should not last long.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to the Gahuku-Gama and the example of the Keyagana-Kanite cited above, the Auyana, Fore, and Tairora did have a limit on players on the field at any given time – the most often stated number was twelve; therefore, football was also commonly known as ‘twelve-kick’. One player was tasked with guarding the goal, two or three

more were usually in the back defending, and the rest of the players tried to attack the enemy goal or defend their own, depending on the course of the game. After one set of players was exhausted, or if a goal was scored, replacements were sent onto the field. There was no limit on replacements, and with the game usually lasting a whole day from morning until dusk, among the Northern Fore occasionally even several days, they were sorely needed. All able-bodied men participated in the sport, from the newly initiated young men to the fight leaders in their prime.

The arrival of football as a game seems to predate the adoption of football as a mechanism for settling disputes. Catherine Berndt remarked about the football games that she witnessed in the villages of the Usurufa between November 1951 and May 1952 immediately after pacification:

Occasionally they play a haphazard kind of football – arranging a few posts on the dancing-ground, and kicking a ball to and fro with intervals of noisy clapping. The game is not organized according to fixed rules, and is not used as a means of settling disputes as it is in and near Kainantu.<sup>37</sup>

This seems to have changed over time. Just a few kilometres to the south among the Northern Fore of Okasa, football was used as a means of settling conflicts in the mid- to late 1950s. In the areas where I collected interviews, football was usually only played if there was indeed a conflict that had to be settled. Only among the Auyana did people say that they sometimes played for fun. The causes most mentioned for issuing a challenge to a football match were the same ones leading to pre-colonial warfare: theft of pigs, adultery, or the elopement of women. Challenges could be issued between different local groups, but there were also matches played between factions within a local group, especially over adultery and conflicts over garden land.

The close association with pre-colonial warfare goes even further: just as in warfare, allies were often called upon to support a team on the football field. The people

of Amaira village in the Auyana language group thus went as far as Arora, at the opposite end of their valley, to help them in a match against their rivals over a disputed piece of land. These allies functioned as replacement teams when the home team was exhausted, and they were amply rewarded with a feast when the game was over. Especially gifted players and their teams were actively courted by other groups and promised special cuts of meat if they would support a specific team in a match against their rivals. Ori Ilaku from Okasa thus recalled that he spent several weeks each year playing football for other villages, being hosted, and feasted by them in turn.<sup>38</sup> This closely corresponds with the patterns of alliance in pre-colonial warfare in the area: alliances were often made on an ad-hoc basis and had to be affirmed by an advance payment of local valuables. Groups specifically strived to gain the support of renowned and feared warriors and their local group segments.<sup>39</sup> Allies were then again compensated for their effort and their losses in war by a big feast in which several pigs would be killed and distributed to them.<sup>40</sup>

This close association between football and pre-colonial warfare has been observed in other parts of Papua New Guinea and for other sports such as cricket and rugby as well. Among the Avatip in the Sepik, antagonisms that would previously have been expressed in warfare and war ritual can still be found in today's football matches.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, rugby league and canoe racing among the Gogodala in Western Province are activities that demonstrate masculinity and clan solidarity and are closely linked with ideologies located in the ancestral past.<sup>42</sup> And then there is the famous example of 'Trobriand Cricket', the topic of an anthropological film with the same name,<sup>43</sup> that shows how the Trobriander adapted the game of cricket to their own culture, incorporating various pre-colonial warfare activities into the game.<sup>44</sup> In Trobriand Cricket, there is no limit on the number of players on the field, the home team always

wins, and the focus lies more on celebratory dances and ritualized movements than on actual competitive gameplay.

### **An effective means of settling conflicts?**

As mentioned by Read,<sup>45</sup> the scoring during football matches among the Gahuku-Gama was based on the principle of ‘equivalence’, meaning that no group should dominate the game. That the offending team entered with one goal in their favour into the match was apparently not the case in the Kainantu sub-district. But the old Tairora and Fore men I interviewed stressed the fact that a game could only come to an end when both teams had scored the same amount of goals. The total amount of goals scored was not even recorded in many instances; instead, it was the goal difference that was crucial. Like in warfare, every goal had to be ‘avenged’, and in the Fore area, people kept tally of the score by tying a knot on a length of string for every goal received and untying the knot again after successfully scoring an equalizer.

Football was thus a means to avoid an escalation of a dispute into open warfare. Instead, it allowed the aggrieved party to exhaust their anger by challenging and confronting the offending party on the football pitch. ‘We played football to make peace’ was how No’e E’ito of Bibeori village explained the purpose of the football matches, ‘we played and fought on the football field, and the anger we felt was gone’.<sup>46</sup> The root cause of the conflict was not actually addressed, nor was there ever compensation paid for the wrong done. But the challenge in itself and the effort shown on the football ground was an adequate response to the affront, and it allowed both sides to save face and re-establish friendly relations with each other, without challenging the status quo.

Nevertheless, there was always an element of competition in these football matches, and they were far from being just a ritual with a predetermined outcome.

There apparently also were considerable regional variations, as can be shown by the report of Patrol Officer Haywood, who focuses on the competitive side of football when describing a game that he witnessed in the Gadsup area nearer to Kainantu:

Quite a few disputes are now settled on the football ground. At AKUNA there was a dispute over the killing of some pigs belonging to IKANA. Both villages decided to have a game of soccer. In this way the side that scored the most number of goals would bring about the same effect as having killed or wounded their opponents. While this may seem strange to us it is quite a reasonable thing to the natives. It allows them all to let of [sic] steam. Of course on many occasions the game gets really heated and results in an all-in-fight.<sup>47</sup>

From this report, it is unclear how the game ends, but the emphasis is clearly on one side scoring more goals than the other. Among the Auyana, the group closest to Kainantu, similar accounts were presented to me. People told me how they mostly fought about garden land or women with several suitors, and that it was the ‘winning side’, meaning the side that scored more goals, that would then receive the piece of garden land or the woman in dispute. As Ofa Nana pointed out regarding the games he participated in in the 1960s:

We saw that it was a good way to prevent fights, so we did it like that. Because if there was an argument about land, and it got heated, fighting might start. But with soccer, it was an easy way to solve the conflict, giving the piece of land to the winning team.<sup>48</sup>

This apparently was a somewhat successful arrangement, and the way it was presented to me indicated that people in most cases abided by the outcome of the match, which was played for the length of a day, ending at nightfall. In one case, however, in a game between Amaira and Avia over a disputed piece of land, things got out of hands. There was a good deal of violence already on the field, and when Amaira finally won the match at the end of the day, the people of Avia ambushed the young men of Amaira as

they returned from the game and bashed them up with sticks and stones, bloodying heads and limbs.

But even in the Southern Tairora area, where games were supposed to end in a tie at all times, I collected accounts of at least two games that did not end in a tie but instead escalated to actual warfare. In January 1958, after almost a decade of continual contact with government patrols, and at a time when the area was already considered nominally pacified by the colonial government, the people of Dosara challenged the people of Bibeori to a football match. The reason for this challenge was a grudge held by some Dosara men against two young men of Bibeori, who enticed two young women from Dosara to marry them. Both women were students at the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) mission school in Omaura. On their way home for the Christmas period, they stayed at the SDA church compound in Bibeori, where they became involved with the two Bibeori men. Since both women were already betrothed to men from Dosara, the menfolk of Dosara took offence. They asked the government interpreter living in neighbouring Nompia to help them settle this conflict, for he was the only man in the area in possession of a football.

The football match took an unexpected turn when the Bibeori team scored five goals in succession without allowing a single goal to the Dosara side. The Dosara men became enraged, accusing the Bibeori team of not only stealing their womenfolk, but also of not allowing them to score goals, and the football match escalated into a fisticuffs brawl. The Dosara men quickly grabbed their bows and arrows that they had hid behind the playing field just for such an event, and the Bibeori men retreated in haste, while a few foresighted men defended their retreat with the bows and arrows that they had brought and hidden near the playing field. The arrow fighting continued the next day, with some people from Nompia supporting the Bibeori side until both sides

were exhausted. Seven people were wounded in the incident. The village officials informed a government patrol that was in the area about the altercation. As a result, several people were arrested and served three-month prison sentences for their participation in the fight.<sup>49</sup>

What led to the renewed outbreak of armed conflict in this and another recorded instance two years later was that the offending party (Bibeori) heaped insult upon injury by not adhering to the basic rule that the match should ultimately be all about equivalence and end in a tie. They instead played (too) competitively. Football thus had a double edge. There was always a tension inherent in football matches as a settlement procedure since the competitiveness of the game was slightly at odds with the goal to reach a settlement.

Read described a similar contradiction between two antithetical principles governing inter-group relationships: 'strength' and 'equivalence'.<sup>50</sup> Groups always tried to demonstrate 'strength' by outdoing each other, as best exemplified in warfare, dancing and gift-giving. In order to remain on friendly terms, however, this demonstration of strength should be reined in by the principle of 'equivalence', and no single group should be allowed to dominate others. Even in this regard, football was similar to warfare, in that in both instances, there was restraint needed to transform the war or the game of football into friendly relations with the adversary. Among the Auyana, this meant, for example, that groups that wanted to maintain some degree of friendship did not ambush each other but restricted war to 'challenge fights' in open terrain.<sup>51</sup>

## **Conclusion**

With warfare and other forms of violence attracting punitive retribution by the *kiaps* and the police, local groups in the Eastern Highlands turned to alternative ways of conflict

settlement that were less violent. As colonial courts were difficult to access more than a day's walk away in Kainantu, football was introduced and accepted as an alternative to warfare. Football matches were a form of restorative justice that enabled both groups to confront the tensions resulting from a dispute and to restore normal relations between them. They did not actually solve or decide the dispute in question, but ideally cooled off the tempers enough for both sides to come to an agreement regarding the wrong. At the same time, they allowed for a rough physicality and even violence on the football pitch that did not attract the attention of the *kiaps* in the same way as a full-fledged brawl or a fight with arrows would. The use of football as a conflict-settlement measure had its limits, however, precisely because the underlying principles of how football was played were still very much the same notions that were guiding the conduct of warfare. And just like warfare, football matches could and did sometimes escalate, especially when one side was playing too competitively and would score too many goals in close succession without allowing any equalizers. In contrast to the football game played among the Gahuku-Gama, of which Lévi-Strauss thought it was a game treated as a ritual, it was thus the non-rituality, the unpredictability, and open-endedness, which limited the effectiveness of football as it was played in the Kainantu sub-district as a conflict-settlement and peacebuilding measure.

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## **Endnotes**

1. Bar-On, "Three Soccer Discourses"; Hough, "Make Goals Not War."
2. Beck, "'War Minus the Shooting.'"
3. Lombardo, "On the Evolution of Sport."
4. Curry, "Up'Ards, Down'Ards and Derbies," 646.
5. Mills, "'It All Ended in an Unsporting Way.'"

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6. Anderson, *War of the Dispossessed*.
  7. Hough, "Make Goals Not War."
  8. Elias, "Fussballsport im Prozess der Zivilisation"; and Giulianotti, "Civilizing Games," 149–52.
  9. Spaaij, "Olympic Rings of Peace?"
  10. de Coubertin, "Olympic Games," 53.
  11. Adams, "A Game for Christmas?"
  12. Giulianotti, "Sport, Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution," 208–11.
  13. Schulenkorf, "Sport Events and Ethnic Reconciliation."
  14. Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism."
  15. Dyck, "Football and Post-War Reintegration"; Krasniqi and Krasniqi, "Sport and Peacebuilding"; and Sobotová, Šafaříková, and González Martínez, "Sport as a Tool."
  16. Donnelly, "War Without Weapons."
  17. Rookwood and Palmer, "Invasion Games," 190–93.
  18. Berndt, "Political Structure," 392–395.
  19. Schwoerer, "Red Flag of Peace."
  20. Schwoerer, "Ending War."
  21. Schwoerer, "Mipela Makim Gavman"; and Schwoerer, "Ending War."
  22. Schulenkorf, "Sport Events and Ethnic Reconciliation."
  23. Young and Clark, *Anthropologist in Papua*, 29.
  24. *Ibid.*, 9.
  25. Robbins, *Auyana*, 193–213.
  26. Berndt, "Socio-Cultural Change," 119.
  27. But see Sipes, "War, Sports and Aggression," for a critical discussion of what he calls 'drive discharge model', the idea that combative sport can act as a safety valve for aggressive tendencies.
  28. Skinner, "Kainantu Patrol Report," 10.
  29. Anglin, "Okapa Patrol Report," 7.
  30. Read, *The High Valley*.
  31. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 30–31.
  32. Robbins, *Cultural Anthropology*, 26.
  33. Schelly, "Interpretation in Law."
  34. Read, *The High Valley*, 190.
  35. Interview with Ori Ilaku, August 21, 2004, Okasa.
  36. Anglin, "Okapa Patrol Report," 6–7.
  37. Berndt, "Socio-Cultural Change," 119.
  38. Interview with Ori Ilaku, August 21, 2004, Okasa.

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39. Berndt, "Political Structure," 393; and Watson, "Tairora," 238.
  40. Glasse and Lindenbaum, "South Fore Politics," 367; and Hayano, "Marriage, Alliance and Warfare," 62–64.
  41. Harrison, *Mask of War*; and Harrison, "Transformations of Identity," 90.
  42. Wilde, "From Racing to Rugby."
  43. Kildea and Leach, *Trobriand Cricket*.
  44. Foster, "From Trobriand Cricket to Rugby Nation"; and Weiner, "Review of 'Trobriand Cricket.'"
  45. Read, "Leadership and Consensus," 429.
  46. Interview with No'e E'ito, May 23, 2006, Bibeori.
  47. Haywood, "Kainantu Patrol Report," 10.
  48. Interview with Ofa Nana, April 4, 2006, Amaira.
  49. Wiltshire, "Kainantu Patrol Report."
  50. Read, "Leadership and Consensus," 427–30.
  51. Robbins, *Auyana*, 186–87.

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