

Sheffield is the definitive home of football, new study confirms

July 26 2022



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A University of Sheffield study has demonstrated once and for all that Sheffield is the home of the beautiful game—sporting the oldest clubs, grounds, trophies and even many of the rules that shaped the way

football is played today.

Despite plenty of other sports having defined 'homes'—cricket has Lords, golf and St Andrews, and tennis with Wimbledon—football has been culturally homeless... until now.

New research from Dr. John Wilson at the University of Sheffield's Management School has identified objective authenticity indicators that can be used to find the cultural home of sports, and applied these to football.

A review of literature was carried out to identify which place has the highest number of original football artifacts and corroborated these with works from scholars, historians or legal authorities. The study also examined objective firsts, such as the first stadium, first trophy and first derby—Sheffield FC v Hallam FC in 1860.

The review revealed that Sheffield has a huge number of original artifacts and objective firsts—including the two oldest existing football clubs in Sheffield FC and Hallam FC, and the oldest professional football ground in the world; Sheffield United's Bramall Lane.

Sheffield is also the home of the two oldest cup competitions which were held in 1867 and 1868, four years before the FA Cup, which is the oldest national football competition in the world. Some of the rules which shaped the modern game were also born in Sheffield—the Sheffield Rules, which were created in 1858, set out laws such as not kicking and tripping opponents, 'kick outs' after the ball goes behind the [goal line](#), and only allowing goals scored from kicking. Other innovations included: corner kicks, the introduction of crossbars, heading the ball, free kicks for rule breaking, having 11 players on each team and playing 90-minute matches.

In addition to the firsts that Sheffield has, there is also agreement amongst academics and organizations that the steel city is the home of football. FIFA refers to Sheffield as "football's first city", and both BBC and Sky Sports referred to the city as the "home of football" when Sheffield United were promoted to the Premier league in 2019.

Dr. John Wilson, from the University of Sheffield's Management School, conducted the study. He says that "Sheffield's unique football heritage has made it a popular destination for football fans and competitions. In addition to the Women's EUROs it has hosted the men's EUROs in 1996 and World Cup matches in 1966."

"This love of football in the city dates back to the mid-1800s and it is fantastic that this joy has spread around the world. Every football supporter should visit Sheffield at least once in their life to experience the beautiful game in the home of football."

Football is the most popular sport in the world by a significant margin. According to FIFA, 3.5 billion people worldwide consider themselves football fans. Additionally, an analysis carried out by Ernst & Young financial services found that the sport added £7.9 billion to the UK GDP in the 2019-20 season alone.

The sport is only becoming more popular as well. Women's football has seen a huge surge in funding and fans in recent years, and the Women's Euros are currently being played in England. In Sheffield records are being broken—the match between the Netherlands and Sweden at Bramall Lane on Saturday 9th July recorded the highest attendance for a Women's Euros group stage match which didn't involve a host nation. This was then broken again a week later for the Netherlands v Switzerland game.

Dr. Wilson is now working with Sheffield city council to explore how

the city can make the most of its footballing heritage. The [economic impact](#) for other towns and cities which can claim to be the home of sports is huge, and in the North West of England [football](#) is the largest form of tourism.

The research was published in the *Journal of Sport & Tourism*.

More information: John P. Wilson, Homes of sports: a study of cultural heritage tourism and football, *Journal of Sport & Tourism* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/14775085.2022.2094993](https://doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2022.2094993)

Provided by University of Sheffield

Citation: Sheffield is the definitive home of football, new study confirms (2022, July 26) retrieved 11 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-07-sheffield-definitive-home-football.html>

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