
Citation:

Long, J (2018) Football, ethnicity and community: the life of an African Caribbean football club (Book review). *Soccer and Society*, 20 (1). pp. 189-191. ISSN 1466-0970 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2018.1525797>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/5663/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Soccer and Society* on 27 March 2018, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/14660970.2018.1525797>

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Football, Ethnicity and Community: The Life of an African Caribbean Football Club Paul Campbell (2016), Oxford: Peter Lang. ISBN 978-3-0343-1905-8

Long, J.

As I started reading this book I was also reading a growing number of press articles about the injustices meted out to 'the Windrush Generation'¹ as collateral damage from the UK government's hostile environment for 'illegal' immigrants. Campbell is primarily concerned with what he calls 'the second generation of African-Caribbeans', his generation. The focus of his detailed study is Meadebrook Cavaliers (not their real name), a football club in Leicester. While Campbell's primary ethnographic research was conducted from 2009 to 2011, his analysis, using historical records alongside his respondents' recollections, extends back to the founding of the club in 1970 and earlier to the arrival of the Windrush Generation. Like Williams (1994) Campbell offers us the particular story of a football club set within the context of the wider socio-political terrain. Unlike Williams, crucially Campbell is African-Caribbean himself, though as he realised at one stage, not quite the insider he thought.

Despite providing that socio-political context and reviewing the literature, in the section where he sets out his research methods Campbell worries that his findings may be dismissed as peculiar to the players of Meadebrook Cavaliers. However, for those like ourselves (e.g. Long et al. 2000) who have done research on race and ethnicity in grass roots football over any similar period, Campbell's interpretations are likely to appear perfectly plausible, resonant with experiences elsewhere. With this book Campbell seeks to illuminate the cultural norms, expectations and hegemonic practices which shape the kind of black spaces represented by the football club. For me, though, his strongpoint is in considering the individual club, community and societal changes over 40 years, and in demonstrating the differences within an ethno-racial (Campbell's preferred term) community often simplistically homogenised by academia and the media. His recording of changes over time at Meadebrook is matched by a particular interest with inter-generational differences and the significance of history in shaping identity and experience.

When Cavaliers started in 1970 it was without the support of established black organisations or parents uninterested in football. It was a club born partly of the barriers to participation in the white game and in the face of considerable racism. Such experiences, Campbell suggests, forged a Caribbean identity among people who had previously seen themselves as being from separate island groups. They started as the lowest of the low on local parks pitches and Campbell records their meteoric rise through the divisions², fuelled by Black exclusion from the professional and elite non-league clubs which allowed Cavaliers to get access to better quality players. They repeatedly won the highest league they could play in without having their own ground.

This success led to tensions between those for whom the club was the talisman of the local community and those who wanted to acquire a ground to pursue their footballing aspirations. Keen to encourage integration in the wake of the urban riots of the early 1980s, Leicester City Council offered them a ground that was four miles away from Meadebrook. While Campbell discusses this spatial dislocation not just in terms of cost of travel, but in terms of community identity, there is little mention of it when in later chapters he addresses the community development role the club pursued more directly from the 1990s onwards.

From the outset the symbolic value of Cavaliers' success may have had developmental consequences, but community development became a more formal function of the club because of two converging forces. One was the need to find sources of revenue to pay for the facilities the club

had become responsible for, which led to a diversification of activities, recreational, social and educational. The other was a growing public belief in the power of sport to secure a range of social benefits and a preparedness to direct money to initiatives run in disadvantaged areas

While keen to celebrate the achievements of the club, this is no hagiography. He explores difficulties and tensions, particularly ones that relate to the meaning of the club, what it is about. These are reflected in a series of issues, but Campbell is assiduous in exploring their roots in terms of community, class and generation. As they 'integrated' and became successful in their careers some of the originals moved away, but wanted to keep alive what Meadebrook meant to them, which didn't necessarily coincide with what those still living locally wanted. As the team became more successful, coaches were drawn from the ranks of former (semi-)professional players from the wider area and the emphasis came to be on adopting 'professional' attitudes to their football rather than allowing the club to be a mechanism for including local youth.

And as the team became more successful and moved up the leagues the nature of racial contestations changed, from direct abuse to more covert forms, though all serving to exclude. Although one of Cavaliers' founding members observed that 'we didn't know we were challenging racism', Campbell imagines the club as a space of counter hegemony, a site of resistance, representing a community otherwise widely disparaged and denigrated in the city. Interested as he is in issues of identity, he observes how some BAME groups use sport to 'challenge the wider forces which shape their social realities', thereby 'circumventing a routinely ghettoised social existence' (p185).

In recent years it has not been unusual to hear and read about 'Asian' sports clubs and leagues being berated for pursuing a separatist agenda. So I was interested in Campbell showing how Cavaliers was a response to the racism and exclusion encountered by African-Caribbeans and offered not just solidarity but cultural maintenance. In due course the club also contributed to African-Caribbean 'integration and assimilation... into mainstream life in the region' (p232); indeed, to such an extent that 'subsequent generations no longer feel the same cultural compulsion or obligation to play for their local black club' (p234).

Campbell presents the journey of the second generation, African-Caribbean founders of Cavaliers as having started out by breaking into white organised football in the early 1970s, resisting marginalisation in employment and social life in the 1980s, eventually becoming middle class in the new millennium, no longer excluded by the local authority, no longer excluded from living in certain parts of the city and without their own separate Caribbean space as a consequence. With the loss of other Caribbean markers in Leicester, Cavaliers has come to have an inflated significance for some, especially the diaspora wanting an avenue to connect themselves and their children to their Caribbean heritage. Recognising the forces of change Campbell suggest that 'post blackness' might be a more useful descriptor than 'black identity' or 'black community' as the meanings ascribed to these by different black individuals is fractured, matched by different experiences of racism. This is based on the generational and class based divisions/discontinuities within black social identities he charts through his empirical work.

In light of the inclusion of white and South Asian players, Campbell ponders the nature of sporting blackness and concludes that it 'often can include more than common background, ethnicity and skin colour' (p125). In line with that, I would have been interested to learn more of the position of white and South Asian members of Cavaliers, just as I would have liked to see some of the nods to the significance of gender pursued in more detail. The book does not really consider either the implications of demographic changes which mean that by almost any measure the African-Caribbean

communities have long since ceased to be Leicester's most significant BAME grouping (and this despite an acknowledgement that the African-Caribbean and South Asian communities have remained largely parallel and apart). I would also have liked to know more about Leicester's reaction to these upstarts. Of course, Campbell's perfectly reasonable rejoinder might be, "Well come on then, Jonathan, why don't you do some more research".

I enjoyed the book. I actually read it in its entirety, which, I have to confess, I don't always do when writing a review. Campbell establishes the relationship with previous literature and addresses theory, but does not write in an overly complicated style, which I welcomed as it gave pause for thought and the space to develop my own ideas.

References

Long, J., Hylton, K., Welch, M., & Dart, J (2000) *Part of the Game: an examination of racism in grass roots football*. London: Kick It Out. <http://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/887/1/KickItOut.pdf>

Williams, J. (1994) "Rangers is a Black Club". In, Giulianotti, R. and Williams, J. (1994) *Game Without Frontiers: Football, Identity and Modernity*, pp.153-184. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Jonathan Long, Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure, Leeds Beckett University (UK)

¹ In 1948 HMS Windrush brought the first of those who responded to Britain's call to its colonies to fill a post-war labour shortage.

² Unfortunately, this year (2017/18) they finished 16th out of 17 in their league.