

Feudball – A short history

Ball games of varying sorts had been played on the mainland and in Brython for centuries prior to the creation of feudball. One such game, colloquially known as Village Ball, was played between the adult males of neighbouring villages in Brython twice yearly, normally at the start of autumn, and at the start of summer. The object of the game was quite simple. The teams would start the game at a mutually approved mark roughly half-way between the opposing villages at dawn, and the first team to get the ball (depending on the various local customs at the time, the “ball” could've been the head of a sheep, dog, goat, an executed criminal, or in rare circumstances, a sacrificial victim) into the opposing village's square would win the game. It didn't matter how it got there, with players being allowed to use any means necessary (without using weapons), to make sure that they scored. Some games took all day and resulted in numerous casualties and fatalities before someone succeeded. The actual scorer rewarded with generous amounts of alcohol, money, livestock, land, and/or women, depending on the locality. The winning village generally got bragging rights for six months, though in some cases, grazing or farming territory was also won. Games did end in a draw, due to all of the participants of both sides collapsing from injury or exhaustion, or with the sun having gone down with no point having been registered.

It is believed that the first actual instance of feudball being played was in the far west of the Imperial States, between an army of orcs, and a besieged group of Imperial State soldiers in 1510, the game itself barely rating little more than a couple of lines in the history books. *After six months, the siege of the Butzmann reached a surprising conclusion, with the local garrison defeating the orcan host in an unusual ball game, somewhat similar in format to the ancient game played by villagers, which was played on a field in front of the town.*(1) The orcs, despite losing, were apparently so impressed with the game that they did not press home the siege, convinced that they had picked up something more valuable than land or gold.

However, the first detailed record of a game of feudball, occurred in 1540 as a result of a feud. Two warring clans, one on each side of the border of the Imperial States and Bourbon, after months of futile fighting, upon the recommendation of a veteran from the Butzmann siege (whose name is lost to history) decided to end their dispute of the territory by a sporting contest, the winner claiming the territory. A neutral referee was assigned, and a set of rules were agreed upon (an original hand-written copy signed by both captains and the referee can be found in the Feudball Hall of Fame in Brandenburg), the winner taking the territory in a “best of three” contest. Though much like the original game, where the teams could use any means necessary to get the ball to the other end of the field, a rule was added, limiting the ball to *...only being kicked when play was to commence or re-started after a side registered a point.*(2) If the ball was deliberately kicked during play, the referee was allowed to stop play, and *give possession of the ball to the non-offending side.*(2) When the ball went out of bounds, it was simply thrown back into play by whomever was nearby. When a player went out of bounds, he had to wait *until the count of five*(2) before he could return to the field, and injured players could be substituted as *soon as they could leave or be carried from the field.*(2) The size of each team, was restricted to twenty players on the field at any one time. The field was considerably large. In the original rules, the length of the playing field was determined by *the lobbing of a stone from a catapult*,(2) and the width by *the chucking of a spear.*(2) The ball, in this instance, was actually a round leather ball stuffed with rags. Play commenced after the midday meal, and lasted until dusk, with the side from Bourbon winning the match 2-1, *thanks to a long throw, slung like a stone, which was caught by an unguarded player, who ran the*

ball to the other end of the field as the sun descended beyond the horizon.(2) Both sides were, to a point, satisfied with the outcome, and vowed to have another contest in six months time. To show there were no hard feelings, the victorious Bourbons invited their opponents to a large banquet with both sides *feasting until the break of dawn.*(2)

News of the game spread across the mainland, thanks to recent advances in printing, with a number of local towns and villages issuing challenges to each other once they had received a copy of the rules. A Brython merchant by the name of Doultan Moorcroft, who had witnessed a game played outside a Bourbon port between an army and a naval side, informed business partners of the event when he had returned home. They liked the idea so much, that they trained up two teams of players, with the intent of putting on a public spectacle in Lowden, but with the additional rules being that *the sides were restricted to twenty players, with only eleven being on the field at any one time*(3), and the pitch, which was to become oval shaped, being greatly reduced in size, so that it would be easier for *spectators to view and officials to control.*(3) The length of the field, including the goal areas, was to be *130 paces, whilst the field at its widest no more than 100 paces.*(3) The game was also given a time period of one hour, divided into two equal halves, with a break in-between, with the winner being the side that scored the most points during that time. It was also determined, that players who had been forced off the playing field were *not entitled to return to it until after a point had been scored, or at the start of the second half.*(3)

So, in August 1545, the first game of feudball was played in Lowden, with five thousand curious spectators looking on as Team Red defeated Team Blue 5-3 at Hastings Park, a public area in the centre of the city. The two sides would play four more exhibition games before the year was out, with crowds increasing in size for each match. In December, Doultan and his associates advertised in the local press for *interested groups to form the Feudball League of Lowden(FELL).*(4) In March 1546, the first ever official feudball competition kicked off, with eight teams participating. Sides were given two competition points for a win, and one for a draw, and teams played each other twice. Team Red became North Lowden with Team Blue becoming Lowden Port. The winner of the inaugural competition though was the Lowden Royal Marines, who still play in the Lowden city league. Due to a lack of fields (with the rapid expansion of Lowden at the time, a pitch may be there one week, and be a construction site the next), *it was not uncommon to have three matches played on the same pitch on the day.*(5) At the end of the season, the side with the most competition points won the league. If teams were on equal points at the end of the season, the winner would be decided on net for and against. If this couldn't decide a winner, a match would be *played and played again, if need be, to determine a winner.*(5) Despite opposition from various members of the public, who felt the games would just *attract all manner of riff-raff*(6) and would *incite inappropriate behaviour,*(6) by the start of the 1551 competition, the league had doubled in size, and had its first fully professional players. Each club had its own field, administrators, and dedicated supporter groups and matches were even being attended by members of the royal family.

On the mainland, the game was still being played as a means to settle disputes, and by local sides in challenge matches. These games still had no time limits, and were still played to the original 1540 feudball rules. With public interest growing in the spectacle, in 1550, representatives of various commercial and academic organisations met in Lafayette, the capital of Bourbon, to sort out a comprehensive set of rules for the match, based on the Brython version of the game. It was determined, after a week of passionate discussion, that sides would have *two types of players –*

attacking players, known as “strikers” and defending players, known as “trenchers”,(7) the logic being that they would spend most of their time in the middle of the pitch, which was colloquially known as the “trench” or “ditch”. The playing area would be reduced in size, from 130 to 110 paces long, and from 100 to 70 paces wide.(7) The number of players allowed on the field at any one time would be kept at 11, but the team could only have a maximum of 14 players, of which, only 6 of them were allowed to be strikers.(7) It was also determined that the game be played with a ball that was oval in shape, rather than round. Points (or “goals” as they were often called) could only be scored if the person with the ball was upright. Simply falling over the line with the ball was no longer considered to be sufficient enough. It was also determined that players, teams and officials be registered with a central body, and that match officials were also entitled to remuneration, a cost which was to be shared jointly by the two teams playing the game. Furthermore, each club was to provide a suitable person who would be schooled in the art of refereeing and would go into an available pool of officials for weekly matches.(7) Under these rules, the first organised mainland competition commenced in Lafayette in 1552, and in the Imperial States the following year.

In 1555, at a second rules conference, this time in Altstadt (in the southern Imperial States) a third position was created – the fielder. These were players specially trained to *...elude their opponents with speed or guile, and present themselves as a means of speedily advancing the ball to their opposition's goal-line, by the ball being thrown to them.(8) Foulings, or attacking players whilst they were on the ground, was now forbidden. The referee being permitted to send the offending player from the field for the remainder of the match(8) if he caught anyone fouling another player. To assist him in his deliberations, he was allowed two assistants, (commonly known as “flagmen” or “linesmen”) who would watch the game from the side-lines, advancing with the play when necessary who would alert the referee if they had spotted an infringement, verbally or by waving a flag(8) and were also entitled to be paid for their time. It was also determined that if a result was needed from a game, a third period of play would be allowed, which would continue until one side broke the dead-lock.(8) These rules were adopted across the board on the mainland for 1556, the third period rule being put to the test in the Lafayette district final of that year, with the match lasting just over two hours before the winner, the Lafayette Gaolers, was determined.*

Though competitions in Brython accepted having two extra officials, with all of them being paid, they were divided about the reduction in size to the playing fields, the creation of specialised positional players, the extra period of play, and the player having to be on his feet when scoring. Instead they opted for a “minimum” and a “maximum” field length and width, with the mainland measurements being the minimum. Clubs could, if they wanted to, use the optional positional players rules, though many sides still consisted of twenty trenchers, believing in a simplistic approach to the game. The extra period of play though was adopted by a majority vote of club officials, as was the rule of being players having to be upright to be able to score. However, the three things the Brython clubs were overwhelmingly opposed to, were *the reduction of playing strength from 20 to 14 players, the banning of fouling, and the adoption of the oval ball.(9)*

In 1565, the first competitive matches were played between international sides, with a Brython representative team invited to play in Bourbon. Before the series of four matches could be played (two with an oval ball, and two with a round ball), a compromise about team sizes was reached. Each side would be limited to 16 players on their roster, with the limit for fielders increased to four, but strikers reduced to the same numbers. The Brython side didn't have any fielders, opting to stick with four strikers and twelve trenchers in their playing squad. As for fouling, they conceded to abide with the local rules, though it didn't stop either side from *throwing a sly punch, or giving a*

fallen player a swift kick whenever possible during the match.(10) For neutrality's sake, all four matches were managed by three Imperial State officials, who could speak both languages.

When the Brython side won the second of the oval ball games, resulting in a two games to one series win (with one drawn), they were finally convinced about the game being played with the oval shaped ball, and the need of having fielders in a side. Before departing, they suggested that *seeing there was a player specialised in catching, there should be one specialised in throwing.*(11) This led to the creation of the “slinger” position, which was capped at two per side and adopted in 1567.

Whilst the creation of positional players was then readily accepted by Brython teams playing the game, there was still considerable opposition to the ban on fouling, and the oval ball. Competitions across the country played under varying sets of rules. (Three hundred years later, some amateur clubs still play the “traditional” rules.) However, by the time the first tournament in the country, the Brython Cup, started in 1583, practically all of the district and academical competitions were already towing the line. By then, a fifth position had been created - the “ruckman” who was considered *to be more senior than a trencher, and a supporting player for the striker, fielder and slinger.*(12) Like the striker and fielder, each side could only have a maximum of four players rostered in this position.

As for the tournament, which was the first of its kind either in Brython or the mainland, and was generally played in Spring after the completion of the district autumn/winter competitions, twenty teams from across the country, split into four groups of five teams, contested the major prize, with the top two teams in each group *randomly paired off in elimination matches, until a winner was decided.*(13) The two losing teams in the semi-finals (where the last four teams battled it out), were invited to play a third place play-off, a fixture practically all major tournaments include in their schedule. The initial tournament was won by the Lowden Lions, a club that had been formed in 1580 as a result of two inaugural 1546 clubs having merged. The following year would see four foreign teams being invited, *one from the Imperial States, one from the Lowlands Confederation, one from Bourbon, and one from Iberia,*(14) making it the first international feudball tournament ever held. In 1589, despite many efforts not to permit them to play, the first all female team, The Shieldmaidens (from the Lowlands), contested the tournament, surprising many by winning the third-placed play-off.

The tournament, today, is considered to be second in stature only to the Imperial Championships (first held in 1602) which is held every two years in the Imperial capital of Brandenburg, where sides battle it out for the Inter-Continental Cup in the latter weeks of Spring. The Brython Cup would be played regardless of the political climate, though when the country was invaded by the Lowlanders in 1800, with Lowden itself being besieged, the tournament was postponed for the first time in its history. However, due to the commencement of the Brython Super League, the 1842 tournament would not be run, due to a restructuring of the sporting calendar. Starting in 1843, the tournament was to be run prior to the commencement of the Super League season. Although it didn't clash with the Imperial Championships, teams appearing in both events found it quite taxing, as the gap between the end of one and the start of the other was usually less than two weeks.

In over three hundred years, the game has gone from strength to strength. Dozens of tournaments and leagues have sprung up across the globe, and the game is played by a number of races, both

living and dead. Feudball is considered a big business these days, with clubs earning income from not just match receipts, but from merchandise, scyre broadcasting contracts and the players as well. Clubs, such as the Brython Cavaliers, have created a training academy and have formed a second club where the next generation of players can hone their skills, both on and off the pitch. A career in the game, which was laughed at in 1551, is now considered quite appealing, with professional players, coaches, managers, doctors, even administration staff earning large salaries being employed by professional clubs. Medical colleges and universities, realising the need for professional staff, even created degree courses in Sports Injury Management and Sporting Club Administration. Even match officials earn enough to concentrate full-time on the game, with good referees being able to adjudicate in lucrative foreign tournaments for higher payments. Some, after retiring, even formed or joined nationally accredited training colleges to teach those wanting a career as a match official.

The game has come a long way from the days of villagers kicking a sheep's head across a paddock. There is hardly a corner of the globe that hasn't heard of the game. You can find tribesmen playing it on a tropical beach, improvising with a large coconut; shuffling zombies and skeletons battering each other on a bloody pitch; hairy ratmen racing around a dimly lit cavern; forest elves acrobatically leaping and dancing around a forest clearing; or two champion human teams battling it out in front of 100,000 people. The game is watched and enjoyed by millions, be they die-hard local fans in the rain at their local pitch, promoters viewing from a luxurious private viewing box in the stands, or the hoi polloi down at the local viewing it on the scyre with a mug of ale or cider after work.

1: A Brandtner, M Hoffman, R Moser – *Official history of the Eastern Territories*, Vol 2, Ch 5 The orc invasions 1480-1515.

2: V Paradis & J Reno – *Bourbon Border Conflicts*, Ch 7 1500-1550.

3: E Moorcroft – *My illustrious father*, Ch 5 Establishing Feudball in Brython.

4: *Lowden Times*, December 3, 1545.

5: J Elgar – *The history of Feudball in Brython*, Vol 1, Ch 2 FELL commences.

6: Letters to the Editor, *Lowden Weekly Examiner*, February 7, 1546.

7: W Klink & H Schulz – *Findings of the First Conclave on Feudball*, August 10-15, 1550.

8: A Burkhalter, W Klink, H Schulz – *Findings of the Second Conclave on Feudball*, January 7-12, 1555.

9: J Elgar – *The history of Feudball in Brython*, Vol 1, Ch 3 The Effects of the Conclave Rulings.

10: *Lowden Times*, September 25, 1565

11: J Elgar – *The history of Feudball in Brython*, Vol 1, Ch 5 The First International Matches.

12: J Elgar – *The history of Feudball in Brython*, Vol 1, Ch 6 The Beginning of the Brython Cup.

12: I Botham & M Gatting – *The first fifty years of the Brython Cup*, Ch 2 The First Tournament.

13: I Botham & M Gatting – *The first fifty years of the Brython Cup*, Ch 3 The First International Tournament.

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