European Football's Greatest Grounds

ONE HUNDRED MUST-SEE FOOTBALL VENUES

Foreword by Simon Inglis

Leon Gladwell

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Feldstraße

HAMBURG // GERMANY // FC ST. PAULI & SC HANSA 11

We begin our countdown in shadows cast by the rear end of Millerntor's Nordkurve stand. Beloved home of Europe's original and most recognisable cult football club, FC St. Pauli, Millerntor itself is a delightfully unrefined stadium. Cloaked in the club's iconic brown and white colours, it is patinated by years of peeling fan stickers and murals honouring club legends. Our focus however lies barely two metres away. Next door is Feldstraße, a sports ground used by the club's abundance of amateur teams and Hamburg's historic SC Hansa 11 club. To all intents and purposes it is a largely unremarkable and archetypal inner-city setup with two artificial pitches and a lively clubhouse owned and operated by SC Hansa 11.

By beginning here we not only widen the parameters of this project by looking beyond 'just' the football ground itself, we highlight a key element and recurring theme; the concept of the 'football landscape'. What surrounds, abuts or neighbours a football ground will often define its identity and character. An adjacent church spire or distant mountain will in time become as familiar to the regular supporter as their own front door. As such they become an integral piece of that particular football experience, a focal point to lose oneself during particularly tedious matches perhaps. There are many outstanding footballing landscapes across Europe but none quite as immediately gargantuan as Flakturm IV, the Second World War bunker looming over Feldstraße.

In the early years of Hamburg football there were numerous pitches on the vast Heiligengeistfeld exhibition space next to where Millerntor would be built in 1961. FC St. Pauli themselves trace their origins back to the 'Holy Ghost Field'. On a pitch devoid of grass adjoining the original gymnasium of the St. Pauli Turn-Verein, a club named St. Pauli TV entered competitive football in Hamburg's Kreisliga in 1910. That pitch would become the home of FC St. Pauli upon their formation in 1924 and eventually be laid with a grass surface. Meanwhile, the Hansa 11 club had emerged as far back as May 1911 from the Wandervogel hiking movement popular at the time. They too played on the Heiligengeistfeld which in those early days would have resembled London's Hackney Marshes on matchdays. FC St. Pauli soon began to develop their ground but would not have what could reasonably be described as a stadium on the site until after the Second World War.

In 1940 Adolf Hitler had ordered the construction of three colossal flak towers to defend Berlin from air attack. With Allied bombing intensifying over northern Germany, instructions were then sent to build two similar blockhouse towers in Hamburg. Flakturm IV went up on Heiligengeistfeld in 1942, its muscular design consistingof a large gun tower (G-Tower) and a lead or command tower (L-Tower). The L-Tower was quickly demolished at the end of the war but its counterpart would stand empty for many decades, a troublesome and ominous reminder of the past. In 1961 the entirety of Heiligengeistfeld was appropriated by the Hamburg government for the IGA Expo 1963, an international horticultural exhibition that would be visited by 5.4 million people. This forced St. Pauli into relocating a short distance west to land directly in front of the bunker where they would begin modelling the first Millerntor stadium.

Two secondary pitches were laid out in the arrangement we see today. Until recently both still had the original cinder surfaces, replaced in 2009 by artificial grass. When the Nordtribüne was rebuilt in 2015, it concluded a nine-year project in which Millerntor was entirely rebuilt with a new capacity of 29,546. St. Pauli's amateurs, women's and youth teams were given new changing rooms in the recesses of the Nordkurve and a small bar for supporters was opened on matchdays. The presence of FC St. Pauli next door to such a stark fascistic monument is jarring. But in their continued coexistence and the club's great successes on and off the pitch, there is an irony worth celebrating. St. Pauli are a club that since the 1980s have garnered a reputation as a home for those without a home in football. Drawing fans from alternative subcultures and minority groups, their booming fanbase share ideologies centred on social inclusion and political activism. Matchdays are greeted unanimously with raucous abandon. Flakturm IV has recently served as a live music venue while a project to turn the upper section into a public rooftop garden is nearing completion. For the first time the bunker will also receive a memorial for the victims of the Nazi regime and the Second World War. And as far as footballing backdrops go, there are none quite as astonishing as Feldstraße.

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Stadion Hristo Botev

BLAGOEVGRAD // BULGARIA // OFC PIRIN BLAGOEVGRAD

Our next journey takes us to a land that time forgot, a country whose three-decade free-fall from the footballing spotlight has left behind a landscape of creaking concrete bowls, haunted by the ghosts of Asparuhov, Kostadinov and Stoichkov.

Failure to capitalise on 1994's World Cup success, oblique attempts to build stable infrastructures and endless rumblings of corruption have all contributed to leaving Bulgarian football in an apparently permanent state of retrograde. For regular fans, the creeping disillusionment of the early 2000s gave way to a full-blown abandonment of the game, huge numbers opting for the comfort of living rooms and matches broadcast from England, Germany or Spain, countries whose own upsurge in popularity during this time represents the very antithesis of Bulgaria's. Those who remained were often the hooligan elements: tribalistic and intolerant of minorities, tarnishing Bulgaria's footballing reputation yet further. On the field, the football declined to virtually unwatchable levels. Low in quality and tactically primitive, the acquisition of unknown African and Brazilian hopefuls whose poor wages were often matched by their abilities proved a cheaper alternative to investing in youth development programmes.

With the national team now knocking around with Honduras and Gabon in the FIFA rankings, funding for the game is virtually non-existent. Communist-era club stadiums from Pleven to Plovdiv stand at the mercy of nature, permeated by the melancholy of the no longer there. Neglected and dangerous, they are often shorn of their seating as rows of rusted brackets point skywards. Austere and without frills when built, they now make great playgrounds for the urban explorer whose photographs become Instagram hits in the realm of dark tourism. Football nostalgists visit from far and wide, seeking an experience redolent of a simpler time where the most elementary act of standing on a terrace is a given. For the outsider, Bulgarian football has become almost exotic, a budget flight away from stepping through a portal into a lost world.

In Blagoevgrad in the south-western corner of the country, OFC Pirin's Stadion Hristo Botev is tucked between the western foothills of the Rila mountains and grey socialist modernist apartment blocks at the edge of the city. A shamrock-green semi-oval built in 1934, tidy, well-maintained and on matchdays spine-tinglingly atmospheric, it is a stadium which bucks Bulgaria's trend of footballing ruin. With a dash of funding and cooperation from the Blagoevgrad municipality, ongoing improvements have kept one of the country's oldest stadiums looking resplendent as it approaches its 100th anniversary. This is where Dimitar Berbatov first played football and while it may only be half the stadium it once was, the quiet modernisation and considered capacity trimming has led to it becoming a blueprint for how to bring the dilapidated eastern European stadium in line with the requirements of the 21st-century game.

In 2008, the old wraparound southern tribune, whose wooden benches and timber framework shook so violently as 17,000 squeezed in for a match against Slavia in 1973, was demolished and the entire side levelled to become a parking area for visiting team coaches and television crews. Situated in the narrowing back streets of Blagoevgrad, years of matchday congestion were at once eliminated while the magnificent vista over to The Cross on its hillside was opened up further, framed by two sky-tickling floodlights. With the capacity dropped to just 7,500, Pirin's regular fanbase of three or four thousand were forced to group together on the northern tribune creating a togetherness which has gone on to serve the team well. This stand, carved into the forested slopes, was built in 1973 to accommodate Pirin's growing legion of fans as the club reached the top division for the first time. A facelift in 2001 saw the wooden benches replaced with green plastic seating, the name 'Pirin' picked out in Cyrillic in white and the gangways painted yellow, further enhancing the unity with the verdant landscape. To the left of this, a buffer zone and an away section for 500 which remains the only terraced area left, complete with crush barriers and above, a curious enclosed gantry for reporters.

Standing guard at the entrance steps leading up into the arena are a pair of typically bombastic communist-era statues, modelled as muscle-bound footballers, one bearing the faint graffiti of a swastika on his chest that no amount of scrubbing has removed. Such reminders of Bulgaria's social and economic problems are, however, few and far between in Blagoevgrad, a provincial city suffused with the liberal dynamism of its university population. On matchdays this carries to the stadium a respectful boisterousness, deafening when the Sofia teams come to town, but safe and enjoyable, much like Stadion Hristo Botev itself.

Sportismuscenter

PFARRWERFEN // AUSTRIA // SC IKARUS PFARRWERFEN

With less focus, the pages of this book could easily have been full of images of players kicking balls beneath snow-capped peaks. During its making, I was regularly asked which country's football grounds I enjoyed visiting most. With little time between trips to consider Europe's enormous variety, I would usually babble on about the atmospheres in Polish and Turkish stadiums or the rich history of those in Scotland and Belgium. Only as the project neared its end did I begin to ask myself the very same question. Of course there were experiences I enjoyed more than others.

The warmth of the Portuguese at matches was without exception and always left a lasting impression. Similarly, Germany's affordable football in an assortment of exceptional new stadiums ranks highly. But ultimately, I found the answer to be the same as it always had been.

For ten years and more, Austria had been providing me with football weekends like no other. The deeper into its amateur game I had gone, the more it would give up its charms. In Vorarlberg, Tyrol and Salzburg, there are communities competing in Alpine wonderlands, in small stadiums occupying positions on sky-high plateaus, thousands of metres up in the mountains. The reverse too, football fields worked into the impossibly green carpeted floors of deep valleys surrounded by slopes of edelweiss. Many are equipped with delightfully eccentric modernist buildings, a clubhouse or grandstand perhaps, sympathetic with the notion of Alpinism and designed to coexist harmoniously with the landscape. For the amateur game's supporters, it is about gathering with friends on sunlit summer evenings, halfway up a hillside, quaffing lager and belting out club songs as if in a demented version of *The Sound of Music*.

In Vorarlberg in the west, football grounds are often visible from roadsides as green rectangles among gently undulating meadows, dotted with the onion domes of village churches and a thousand woodsheds. Meanwhile, in the state of Tyrol, the landscape becomes increasingly dramatic with the explosion of the Bavarian Alps. In Tyrolean mountaineering villages, any flat space for football will have been dug by man. But it is in Salzburg that the best elements of both come together to create a network of idyllic valleys and sleepy dead-end offshoots, many overlooked by spectacular snowcapped peaks. Bisecting the state is the Salzach River, travelling in a west-east direction from Kitzbuhel to the pretty market town of St. Johann im Pongau. From here, it turns north and winds through a series of small towns and villages which, as a result of their close proximity to Salzburg, have a much younger demographic than those further south. Here football life is positively teeming. Very few communities in the northern stretch of the Salzach Valley are without a team, an area that in old-world football parlance would have been described as a 'hotbed'. About halfway up, a cluster of clubs play within a few miles of one another in the verdant foothills of the Tennengebirge Massif, its rugged Dachstein peaks creating a majestic backdrop to each humble football home.

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SC Pfarrwerfen's relatively short football history began on 1 October 1972. A year later the club began competing in the Salzburger 2. Klasse Süd, eight levels below the Austrian Bundesliga in the pyramid on a field which still exists ten miles away in the village of Hüttau. During this time, the first incarnation of Sportismuscenter in the centre of Pfarrwerfen was dug, levelled and developed at a cost of around €100,000. Officially opened on 21 June 1974, here the club competed with little success until two successive championships in the early 1990s. This acted as a catalyst for quadrupled spectator presence at games and the need to accommodate them in an environment more suitable for the higher level of football. While the second version of Sportismuscenter was constructed with a spectator grandstand and two new pitches for the flourishing youth teams, the club decamped down the valley to neighbouring Werfen for what was supposed be a six-month arrangement. The scale of the project, however, which involved creating an artificial plateau using hundreds of tonnes of sand, meant Pfarrwerfen stayed on for almost two years.

On 1 January 1999 they returned home, shortly after adding Ikarus to their name in reference to the eight-person mountain gondola lift of the club sponsors Freienweng Railways. Still under the chairmanship of Alois Lottermoser, the club then began extensive negotiations with the community for a brand new clubhouse. Opened during a ceremony on 9 June 2007 for which most of the villagers were present, Pfarrwerfen's home was finally complete after 33 years. Much like the houses and gardens of villages in the Salzach, Sportismuscenter is an immaculately maintained stadium. Located high above the village centre, the views from here are as astonishing as they are far-reaching; to the north, the medieval rock castle Burg Hohenwerfen stands in spectacular isolation and to the south, the spindly spire of the Pfarrwerfen's 12th-century St. Cyriak church. But of course it is the Tennen Mountains which tower over Sportismuscenter that gives us one of Europe's most stunning footballing landscapes. All over Austria there are a hundred others like it. But only at Pfarrwerfen are the mountains close enough to feel like you can reach out and touch them.

For a million Generation X schoolboys, a rubber-banded stack of sticker swaps depicting footballers with appalling hairstyles was a first introduction to a world beyond their chosen clubs. In 1982 the Panini company released their fourth World Cup collection for the tournament held in Spain. This album had two 'special' sections, one focusing on the extraordinary array of stadiums selected (17 – a record number until 2002's 20) and another on the 14 artworks commissioned to represent each host city. Unwittingly those artworks lured myself and doubtless thousands of other pre-teen collectors into a world of fine art, their 'Spanish-ness' giving that tournament another layer of feeling. Heavyweights such as Joan Miró, Antonio Saura and Antoni Tàpies (an artist who years later I would write my dissertation on) were all commissioned but it was Jiří Kolář's design for Elche that was my favourite and still is.

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Estadio San Mamés

BILBAO // SPAIN // ATHLETIC BILBAO

To represent Bilbao, Basque artist Eduardo Chillida (record price at auction £4.1m) offered a drawing of a single clenched fist raised to meet a football. Within the ball, the words 'Bilbao 82' are repeated countless times. The starkest of all the images produced, the fist represents the Basque people's struggle, the monochrome colour palette that of the city's history of heavy industry. When I eventually made my first visit to Bilbao's original Estadio San Mamés in 1996, that image was what I mentally carried with me. It wasn't much but in those pre-internet days, Panini had given me something.

On 26 May 2010, a piece of turf from the San Mamés pitch and a brick removed from its facade were handed along a chain of people composed of Athletic Bilbao greats, the club's oldest and youngest supporters and members of the youth and women's teams. At the end they were laid on the adjacent construction site where three years later a very different San Mamés would be opened. This simple symbolic gesture was not only characteristic of the Basque, it defined the people's almost unsurpassable pride in the club. Anyone who has been to Bilbao will tell you that very few window balconies are not strung with red-and-white-striped flags, an image repeated with different colours in San Sebastián and Eibar as we will see later on. Indeed, the original San Mamés didn't get its nickname, La Catedral, by accident but rather from its reputation as Bilbao's centre of sporting worship.

From its beloved original red and white wooden grandstand to the majesty of 1953's arched double-decker main stand, until 2013 the San Mamés was revered across Spain as a traditional, intoxicating nest with an appearance more Goodison than Bernabéu. Knowing its loss would register a devastating blow to its people and send poignant ripples out across the continent, only a world-class, 'Elite category' replacement would suffice. By announcing in 2006 that the new stadium would be built on the site of the old Bilbao International Trade Fair, next door to San Mamés' prominent position at the end of the city's main thoroughfare, the Basques were to some extent placated.

However, as the site became an antecedent of the arrangement at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium – Athletic playing in a stadium slowly being reduced as its all new partner grew up around – fans remained unconvinced. When the time came to move the 100m or so on 16 September 2013, 102 days after the final game next door, the capacity was still only 35,686 and one end remained completely unbuilt.

Whether by design, accident or more likely through necessity, that gap left at the eastern end offered Athletic fans for a season a heart-rendering view on to what remained of their old home. During the following year everything was neatly joined up and the San Mamés was soon being filled to its new capacity of 53,331. The brief but thorny issue of the roof not reaching to cover spectators closest to the pitch was resolved, the extension even winning a structural engineering award in 2017, leaving the San Mamés complete and ready for appraisal.

With a cost of €211m (€57m less than Marseille's similarly sized new Stade Vélodrome constructed at the same time), funding came largely from public institutions including the Basque government, Bilbao City Council and Athletic themselves. Architectural needs were met by IDOM, a Bilbao-based company with a finger on the pulse of what makes the city tick. Such was the success of the new San Mamés, it won the title of 'World's Best Sports Building' at the 2015 World Architecture Festival, and soon afterwards Barcelona integrated IDOM into their own design team for the redevelopment of the Camp Nou. From the wavy, titanium clad façade of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum (one of Europe's most iconic buildings just a few streets away) to Munich's Allianz Arena's night-time illuminations, the San Mamés respectfully borrows but manages complete originality. Hovering above the banks of the steel-grey Nervión, filling the sky at the end of Poza Lizentziaturen or seen up close and personal from the vast eastern concourse, its greatest success lies in its visual connection to the city, something many new stadiums struggle with.

Covering the facade, twisting panels of ETFE plastic creates the impression of rhythm and repetition against the fixed individuality of the old buildings in its shadow. The three giant LED screens, surrounded by chunky red frames, break up the pattern on the exterior and serve those outside without tickets while intensifying the lighting as night falls and the stadium is illuminated. Inside everything is pleasingly steep, the stands tilting towards the pitch creating the feel of the old stadium and the sensation of being 'on top of the pitch'. The new San Mamés is a triumph. Athletic have performed an act of delicate surgery. By carefully evaluating the club's relationship to the city, its people and the landscape, they have taken the heart from their home of 99 years and 11 days and successfully transplanted it into their new one. For most fans, it beats just like the good old days.

Ballstad Stadion

BALSTAD // NORWAY // BALLSTAD UIL

On the ferry from Bodø, the Lofoten Islands loom into view as a dark, menacing wall of geological brutality known as Lofotveggen. Uninviting, it is a landscape straight from Jurassic Park.

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Anyone voyaging beyond Vestfjorden must eventually reach the wall as it arcs out into the Norwegian Sea like a single demonstrative finger. This first impression of the archipelago, especially on days of squally Arctic rain and low visibility, is however deceptive for beyond the Lofotveggen lies a paradisiacal landscape of golden beaches, jagged mountains and majestic fjords.

Just 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle, one could be forgiven for thinking that this is where football in the Northern Hemisphere ends. But of course football stops for no man. A few hundred miles up the road is Tromsø, city to one of Norway's top clubs; 300 miles north of Tromsø, towns and villages in Finnmark are dotted with football pitches and small stadiums. And even beyond continental Europe, on Svalbard in the Barents Sea there are football pitches: in Ny-Ålesund, a village with a population that fluctuates between 35 and 117, there is a pitch believed to be the most northerly in the world. Further proof then that football is indeed the global game.

In the Lofoten Islands, football has been a mainstay of its fishing communities for over a century, a pastime allowing fishermen to unwind on dry land at weekends with their families watching.

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In the Lofoten Islands, football has been a mainstay of its fishing communities for over a century, a pastime allowing fishermen to unwind on dry land at weekends with their families watching. With a population of just 24,500, it is surprising that across its seven main islands there are ten teams playing and that one of them, FK Lofoten, actually competed in Norway's second tier in 1999. Nowadays Lofoten's teams are spread between the regionalised fourth and fifth divisions of the Norwegian football league system where they will often meet their second 11. Ballstad UIL currently play in the fifth division.

In the centre of the archipelago lies the island of Vestvågøya, its landscape strangely prairie-like as the E10 winds through its centre. The village of Ballstad is located on a tiny island off its more mountainous south-western tip. Enveloped by the spectral Skottinden mountain to the west and rolling hills to its east, its mild waters, warmed by the Gulf Stream, have always proved fruitful for its fishermen. In the centre of the village stands the enormous Ballstad Slip, a covered shipyard upon which is painted one of the world's largest murals and appropriately sponsors of the local football team. Since the club's inception in 1923, football has always been played on the same piece of land just to the north of the bridge which links the village. In those early days, the pitch was grass which over time was patched up with gravel. By the end of the 1960s, so much patching had been done that the surface was entirely covered in gravel, a situation which left players and officials with enormous preparatory tasks before each game.

But in the summer of 2008, Ballstad Stadion's pitch was finally replaced with a high-quality artificial surface, similar to the one at Aspmyra Stadion in Bodø back over the water. The relief among the players and supporters was overwhelming as it signalled an end to the pre-match trips to the village shipyards to gather sawdust to mark the lines. No more trench-digging around the pitch to drain surface water. And on icy days, no longer would players need to get their boots spiked at the local car workshop using the same nails used for winter snow tyres. Such scenarios, played out all across the islands, reflect the Nordic spirit, unshakable in the face of extreme weather and hardship.

Across the world, amateur football has always been a community effort, its survival dependent on levels of great will and resource. When over 1,000 people saw the first game on the new pitch, a friendly against professional side Bodø/Glimt, it was a just reward for the people of Ballstad's 85 years of effort. Over the next five years, various buildings were erected: a new kiosk, fencing and changing rooms. In the south-eastern corner of the pitch, a decommissioned lighthouse was placed. It is hard to escape Nordic mythology in Lofoten with its population of fjord trolls and mountain beasts and from the little lighthouse, Ballstad's club mascot Stormåsen emerges from his home on matchday, punching the air to the tune of 'Gje mæ en B!', the club anthem. A row of flares are then lit and the valley fills with orange smoke, the colour of the fishermen's raincoats adopted as the club colours in the 1950s. In this landscape of such staggering beauty, it is a hypnotic scene – all the trimmings of matchday experience at a much larger stadium but in miniature. Ballstad finally has its 21st-century stadium. It may be modest but it will give its people many memorable afternoons for years to come.

The Stanks

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED // ENGLAND // BERWICK CHARITIES CUP

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In 21st-century black American pop culture, the word 'stank' has been appropriated to describe music of a particularly funky nature, a 'stankface' the expression on the face of someone grooving hard on it. In old Scottish and northern English dialects, however, a stank is a pool or a pond. In the old garrison town of Berwick-upon-Tweed there are many of these long-drained moats set below its 16th-century defensive ramparts built to keep out marauding Scots. As football seasons across the continent draw to a close, Berwick's The Stanks becomes home to one of Europe's most idiosyncratic and public-spirited football tournaments.

With the unique status of being a competition that brings teams from England and Scotland together, games in the Berwick Charities Cup are played with an old-world sense of spontaneity. Raffle prizes sit on the embankment, an ice-cream van arrives at half-time and teams with the names of outlying villages and pubs come up against those with the downright preposterous, Murder-On-Zidancefloor a particular favourite. As it has done for over 100 years, everything takes place on a single pitch which justifiably lays claim to being one of the most remarkable in existence.

Berwick's walls were largely rebuilt during the reign of Elizabeth I in a style borrowed from Italy. Bastion towers with walls up to 6ft thick were constructed at regular intervals allowing gunfire between each stretch. It is possible to walk a section of the Lowry Trail along the very top of the walls, a roughly circular route of one and a quarter miles which passes above the four entrance gates into the town. During his stays at the Castle Hotel, L.S. Lowry painted over 30 scenes of Berwick-upon-Tweed. But for an artist synonymous with football scenes of yesteryear, only one known sketch of The Stanks was produced and never developed into a painting. It remains unknown as to whether he sat upon the grassy earthwork on top of Brass Bastion to make his drawing. Certainly it is the preferred spot for younger spectators nowadays. Regardless, watched by a crowd upwards of 500 as most games were back then, it is reasonable to assume Lowry would have been wholly enraptured by the scene in front of him.

In 1915 the *Berwick Advertiser* reported on a tie between Berwick Rovers and a Royal Scots regimental team. Its words evoke not only a sense of the time but the importance of the role the Berwick Charities Cup played in people's lives, 'Without doubt a larger crowd has never gathered at The Stanks.' It continued, 'The excellent sum of £8 10 shillings was raised (for the Berwick Queen's Nurses).' Fundraising for health services continued throughout the 1920s and 30s as teams competed for the Berwick Infirmary Cup, this despite the threat of bans from the Football Association for playing 'unofficial football'. In the North East Film Archive at Teesside University there is grainy footage of the 1929 final being played in front of thousands of spectators. Sat on the embankments and stood along the touchlines, moustachioed men wearing oversized caps play up to the camera as ladies in cloche hats turn away bashfully. Infants in perambulators are lined up on the flat space next to the pitch. The football is largely played in the air, the pitch with enormous grassless areas not conducive to the passing game. It is likely that The Stanks had been recently used to drill Berwick's army reservists or to host an educational travelling show popular at the time.

Although the tournament may have lost much of its appeal in the modern world, it is still organised each year with the same benevolent principles it began with. Clubs from across the border still compete but with the radius for entrants now limited to a maximum of 20 miles, the once thrilling Anglo-Scottish angle has been diluted to become virtually non-existent. As for The Stanks, nothing has changed. Players continue to enter the field through an ancient gateway under the walls, a strong candidate for football's original player tunnel. On the western touchline space between the pitch and 6m-high stone wall is still so tight that even now it poses problems for any player attempting a run-up for a throw-in. Behind the northern goal the Brass Bastion continues as a bulwark against wayward shots in the same way it has for over a century. In a town that is one of the most disputed in Europe, there can be no dispute that The Stanks is one of the strangest and most delightful football fields on the continent.

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Arena Garibaldi - Romeo Anconetani

PISA // ITALY // PISA SC

Over 30 years since the circus left the peninsula, shadows cast from the 1990 World Cup continue to darken the corridors and boardrooms of Italian football, haunting its progress. From Palermo to Verona, Italy's football stadiums are lived in and worn out, more decrepit as the seasons roll by and the halcyon days of Maldini and the San Siro, of Gascoigne and *golazzo* recede further into memory. Italia '90's legacy is such that it weaves its way into several stories in this book plus a thousand others that are not. Its persisting weight has both crippled Italian football while simultaneously ushering in a nostalgia for days of untethered Ultras and shoulder-to-shoulder terrace camaraderie. As Italian football flounders and falls behind its peers, its playgrounds have become magnets for visitors from across the world, lured by a grubby glamour lost from the game elsewhere.

With few exceptions, Italian stadiums are municipally owned, built with public money at a time when the fashion was to create simple elliptical stadiums for an assortment of sports. Italia '90's stadium renovation programme may have left us with a handful of the boldest and most iconic stadiums in world football, but it came in 84 per cent over budget in a decade in which Italy had one of the highest levels of public debt in the world. The subsequent salad days of Italian club success only served to mask the impending collapse which in the 21st century is here for all to see: in 2019, the matchday revenue of Spain's big three was 138 per cent greater than that of Juventus, Inter and Milan in Serie A, while England's top trio brought in as much as 114 per cent more. Italian clubs have become suffocated by their stadiums, crying out for help while municipalities, many still burdened by debt, remain fearful of repeating the same mistakes.

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On the face of it, Pisa Sporting Club's Arena Garibaldi is on a different plane altogether to those used for Italia '90, having more in common with the bygone stadiums of fellow drifters Ascoli and Vicenza. Had it been upgraded from its status as 'reserve stadium' for the tournament, we would have been talking about a very different ground today. Instead, it remains unsightly and unkempt having altered little in over 60 years. Its design is as simplistic as its neighbour over the road is ornate. Across Europe, modern arenas dominate skylines yet Pisa's version is lost in the city's backstreets, obscured from view by modest apartments and stone pines. If you weren't looking for it, you'd likely miss it altogether. First-time visitors to the Leaning Tower can often be heard grumbling over its height having believed it to be taller than it is. Those coming for a look at Arena Garibaldi, especially if harbouring memories of Dunga, Vieri, Simeone or Tardelli, are just as likely to be overcome by Paris Syndrome too when faced with its jumble of peeling doorways, liberally stickered by Ultra groups, its damp-streaked concrete and coils of barbed wire.

So just how has Arena Garibaldi found its way into a top 100 of the greatest grounds? It's all about its matchday transformation cooked up by the small provincial cult the club have become. Even the most basic platform can become a theatre in the right hands and when Curva Nord fills, Arena Garibaldi becomes the aural equivalent of pouring popping candy into your ears. Filthy and outmoded maybe but few Italian stadiums carry the noise and colour of the 1990s kicking and screaming into today quite like Arena Garibaldi.

A mere 250m from Piazza dei Miracoli's four UNESCO wonders, the spot which would eventually become Pisa's primary football ground had already been home to a miscellany of Pisani entertainment for over 100 years. A photograph taken from the tower in the early 20th century shows an amphitheatre surrounded by high walls beyond which Tuscan vineyards roll off towards the horizon on as yet undeveloped land. It lays dormant awaiting its next chapter, the grass field within the oval worn bare from a century of horse racing and open-air theatre events. At the same time on the banks of the Arno River, Pisa had been playing matches since their formation in 1909 at Piazza d'Armi, the city's army barracks where a ghostly oval-shaped imprint of the ground still exists to this day, partly covered by military buildings a stone's throw from the Guelph Tower. It is worth mentioning that across the railway line from here, squeezed in between the ancient crenellated walls of Cittadella Vecchia, ASD Freccia Azzurra's fabulously historic Campo Sportivo Abetone represents another branch of Pisa's footballing family tree.

The club purchased the abandoned hippodrome in 1919, playing a test match on 4 May against eternal rivals Livorno where its shortcomings as a football ground were immediately laid bare. Devoid of any spectator facilities, thousands jammed the touchlines, necks craned for the merest glimpse of the action yet it would take a further 12 years before the arena acquired its grandstand. By 1931, Italy was under Mussolini's rule and the stadium, now known as Campo del Littorio in reference to Stile Littorio, an architectural language developed under the fascist regime, had become the property of the municipality. Federigo Severini, dilettantish dabbler of the arts and the architect who would have the single greatest impact on the appearance of modern Pisa, was drafted in to design a simple, single-tier structure with wooden steps which was opened to the public on 8 October 1931. Other than the postwar name reversion back to Arena Garibaldi on 13 July 1947, little changed for almost three decades; the Curva Nord went up in the late 1950s and was soon followed by its opposite number. Then, in keeping with stadium fashions across the country, all existing structures were joined in 1978 to return the stadium to its ovate shape while expanding its capacity to 35,000. Finally, under the ownership of Romeo Anconetani in 1982, Severini's old grandstand was renovated and reroofed as Pisa ushered in another stint in Serie A, one which would begin a golden era of six of the next nine seasons at the top.

Plans to reconstruct Arena Garibaldi have been floated over the years, including one in conjunction with a takeover by an American billionaire. It reimagines the old girl as a clean, white, contemporary cube capable of holding 18,000 in four single-tiered stands. The design cleverly juxtaposes a modernity with Piazza dei Miracoli's white stone and grey marble facades and would undoubtedly suit the club's size and status as yo-yoers between Series A and B. Yet for the thousands who wave their Republic of Pisa flags there is an ambivalence, a deep-rooted loyalty to their threadbare home conflicting with the club's desperate need to update. A familiar story for many fans whose club have moved on to pastures new of course but for the Pisani and their sense of independence, it is felt particularly acutely. Something will have to give in the coming years but before that sorts itself out, Arena Garibaldi still gives us the opportunity to party like it's 1999.

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Newlandsfield Park

GLASGOW // SCOTLAND // POLLOK

From a pool of over 20 historic Scottish Junior football homes, we arrive at a spot three miles south of Ibrox and four and a half south-west of Celtic Park. Glasgow's Southside swims with footballing history. Nestled in a leafy suburban cul-de-sac less than two miles east is the Hampden Lawn Bowling Club, where Scottish football's original home once stood.

A few streets south of there are the ghostly remains of the Third Lanark club's Cathkin Park and then Hampden, that unsightly cathedral of the Scottish game. Newlandsfield Park was until recently urban Glasgow's greatest surviving bastion of the Junior game, a ground feared by visiting fans and cherished by traditionalists. In over a century of football in the Junior ranks Pollok had developed a reputation as one of its strongest sides, three times holders of the prestigious Scottish Junior Cup and winners of numerous league championships. Through their successes on the pitch the club built an enviable fanbase from the neighbouring suburbs of Pollokshaws and Shawlands, supporters that continue to come despite Pollok's 2020 defection into Scottish football's pyramid system.

As a plethora of Junior parks fall further into decline, Newlandsfield gracefully succeeds in straddling the old world and the new. Quirks are bountiful within its tight confines and you may just spot a palimpsest of a long forgotten advertisement abutting the all-new Lok's Bar. The 21st century catches up with all football grounds eventually, however, and inside the Lok's Bar function room, the picture window overlooking the pitch nowadays has a curtain pulled across it during matches. Sold off and redeveloped as a private concern (a telling reminder of the hardships faced by small football clubs in an era of cheap High Street drinking chains), the owners work with the club on matchdays and help with catering provisions. But the agreement is that curtains remain drawn and no one gets a free view!

Pollok arrived at Newlandsfield having secured a lease for just £10 per year in time for the start of the 1928/29 season. Adjoining the site's western boundary at the time was the Newlands Tram Depot, which had stood since replacing the Newlandsfield Bleach Works in 1910. The tram depot and subsequent Corporation bus garage would remain the club's closest neighbour until Glasgow's cessation of tramcar operations in the early 1960s led to its closure in 1968. Nowadays the ubiquitous supermarket occupies the site. Before settling into Newlandsfield, however, Pollok had led a somewhat nomadic existence but one always within a stone's throw of their ultimate destiny. From their foundation at a meeting of the Pollokshaws Working Lads Club on 1 July 1908, they began life at a ground named Haggs Park set within the estate of Pollok House. Then the seat of the Stirling-Maxwell family, the football club took not only its name from the house but its black and white colours from its coat of arms.

Sir John Stirling-Maxwell's influence during Pollok's formative years is immeasurable. Gifting the land to the club he then found them a new home when the club were left homeless following the requisition of Haggs Park by the Glasgow Education Authority towards the end of the 1926/27 season. Stirling-Maxwell arranged for use of a pitch in Auldhouse on the proviso that the club take up amateur status. Pollok accepted and while nothing came of it they were able to begin the next season at the Queen Mary Tea Gardens in Spiersbridge. Spending 1927/28 hopping between Spiersbridge and Shawfield Juniors' Rosebery Park, Pollok finally moved in to Newlandsfield on 3 August 1928.

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Of all the club's former and temporary homes, only Haggs Park remains in use for football, now under the name Nether Pollok Playing Fields. Such is their spiritual attachment to the place, in 2018 Pollok returned to use the facade of Pollok House as a photographic backdrop for the online unveiling of their new crop of summer signings. The Spiersbridge ground made way for a fitness centre on the edge of Rouken Glen Park while Rosebery Park became another of Glasgow's finest Junior enclosures until Shawfield's demise in 1960. Close to Cathkin Park, Roseberry Park limped on into the 1990s when after the discovery of chrome contamination from nearby factories it was demolished. The site is now covered by the 2011 extension of the M74 motorway.

Pollok took ownership of Newlandsfield in 1946. The Bleachers Association had named a price of £4,850, a cost met through a loan of £4,000 from the Pollokshaws Co-operative and club members paying a £1 levy in addition to their fees. To swell the coffers further, clubs from across the UK were contacted for help. Those who replied include Alloa Athletic, Motherwell, Hibernian and Portsmouth. A donation was even received from the Shawlands branch of the Communist Party. By the end of the 1940s a pavilion had been constructed and in Newlandsfield's north-west corner it still serves as a storage unit for the groundskeeping equipment. The pitch was until 1958 a surface of black ash which according to a report in the *Evening Times* on 12 July 1958 left players looking like 'miners just off a shift'. Behind the terraced enclosure, the notorious and only accessible gents public toilet was until 2020 a brick wall next to where the pie hut queue formed. With no handwashing facilities it was a place of dubious hygiene but good humour.

The wisecracking and witticisms are what make the non-league game in Scotland so special and under Newlandsfield's corrugated iron enclosure there is always an abundance on offer. It is both a time capsule and a home for the future, beautifully maintained and an attractive alternative for those falling out of love with the professional game on their doorstep.

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Yahya Kemal Spor Kompleksi

ISTANBUL // TURKEY // YAHYA KEMAL 1976 & ÇELIKTEPE ÜMITSPOR

For the fan of the urban football landscape, nowhere offers quite the same scope as Istanbul. As the most-populated city in Europe it has long since exhausted its once plentiful open spaces forcing the northern half especially to expand vertically towards the heavens. So densely packed are ten of Istanbul's 39 districts that their combined population is larger than those of 22 European countries including Denmark, Croatia and Slovakia. Far from the madding crowds of the Blue Mosque and Galata Tower, in northern neighbourhoods minarets scuffle for space with brightly painted mid-rises. Dilapidated *gecekondu* houses sit in shadow beneath new skyscrapers of mirrored glass and steel. Stir into the mix Istanbul's topography of having been built across seven hills, and the crowded up-and-down streets can dizzy the senses to the point where ducking into a coffee shop for some respite is sometimes the only option.