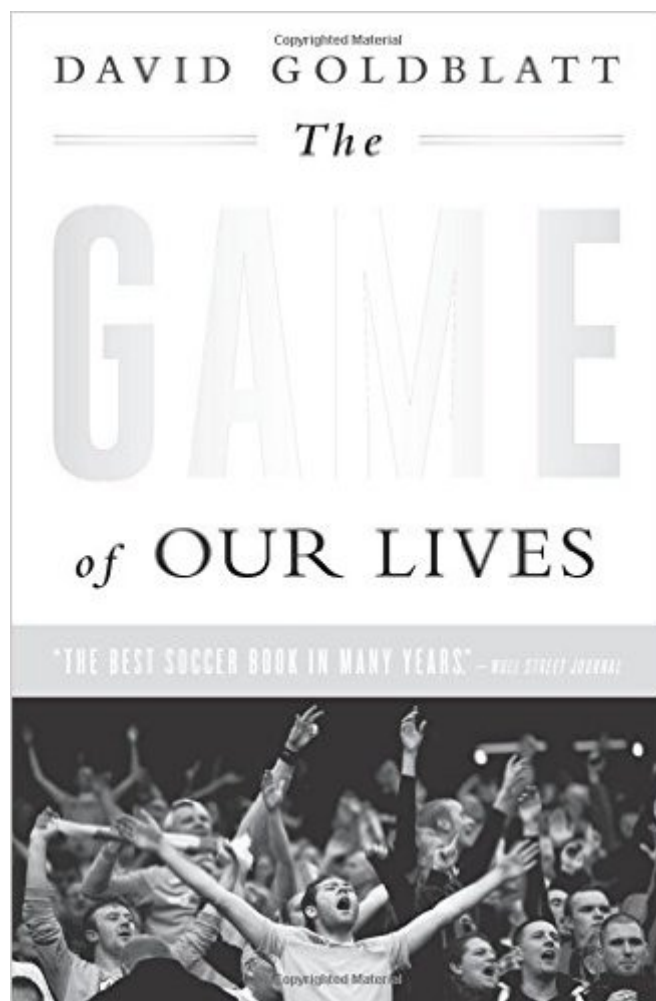


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# The Game Of Our Lives: The English Premier League And The Making Of Modern Britain



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2015 William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award *The Game of Our Lives* is a masterly portrait of soccer and contemporary Britain. Soccer in the United Kingdom has evolved from a jaded, working-class tradition to a sport at the heart of popular culture, from an economic mess to a booming entertainment industry that has conquered the world. The changes in the game, David Goldblatt shows, uncannily mirror the evolution of British society. In the 1980s, soccer was described as a slum game played by slum people in slum stadiums. Such was the transformation over the following twenty-five years that novelists, politicians, poets, and bankers were all declaring their footballing loyalties. At one point, the Palace let it be known that the queen—like her mother, Prince Harry, the chief rabbi, and the archbishop of Canterbury—was an Arsenal fan. Soccer permeated the national life like little else, an atavistic survivor decked out in New Britain flash, a social democratic game in a cutthroat, profit-driven world. From the goals, to the players, to the managers, to the money, Goldblatt describes how the English Premier League (EPL) was forged in Margaret Thatcher's Britain by an alliance of the big clubs—Arsenal, Liverpool, Manchester United, Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur—the Football Association, and Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV. Goldblatt argues that no social phenomenon traces the momentous economic, social, and political changes of post-Thatcherite Britain in a more illuminating manner than soccer, and *The Game of Our Lives* provides the definitive social history of the EPL—the most popular soccer league in the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I started following the EPL when I studied in London in 1994. I acquired tickets through my school to see the US Men's National Team, fresh off a surprise run as hosts of the World Cup, play England in the old Wembley. Of course, I rooted for my national side, but I was deeply impressed by several English players, especially Ian Wright, and my love affair with the EPL, and specifically Arsenal, was born. As a long time fan, the general topics and themes of Goldblatt's book are familiar to me, so I hope the serious EPL follower doesn't expect to be surprised by the ground covered. However, the exhaustive nature of his explanations, the myriad examples he provides, and the manner in which he connects the development of football with the social and economic forces external to it, deepened my understanding of this world. At the heart of his assessment is how association football--fairly recently seen by some in British society as the brutish sport of the working class--grew into a global phenomenon and economic powerhouse while the industrial England that had sustained it faded out of existence. There are also insightful sections on football's delayed progress in racial integration and on the incompetence and glacial evolution of the FA. Certainly worth a read for any fan of the English game.

I enjoyed this since I am an American fan of English football. I didn't want a detailed blow-by-blow discussion of the League results year-by-year. Rather, correlating the goings on in the Football Leagues with British society was very interesting. I really enjoyed the section comparing English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish football history.

I found this very unevenly written, lurching from slangy references ("blokes", "dolly birds", "the never-never") to some paragraphs that seem to require a doctorate in socio-economic theory to make any sense. I think you need to be REALLY interested in the history of English football to wade through it. The chapter dealing with the origins of the clubs in the Premier League was very interesting (although slang-ridden); the other chapters very dry. A better editorial pencil would help (there is no such team as the "Tampa Bay Bucks" in the NFL) and a more consistent stylistic tone to even out the narrative would be welcome. I think Stefan Szymanski's "Soccernomics" (cited in this book) does a much better job of explaining the financial implications of the football world, the Premier League included.

I was a little disappointed in this book. I really enjoyed his hefty global history of soccer, but as others have likely pointed out this one veered to far into the graduate seminar analysis of race/gender/class and has very little fun in it. I am perfectly fine with spending time pondering those

questions, but Goldblatt does it here... ponderously... and doesn't offset it with enough enthusiasm for other aspects of the 21st century game. If you want to spend a few hundred pages getting depressed about English football, this is the book.

While directed at fans of soccer, it is really probing analysis of English society since the 1990s. I follow soccer because its broadcast in the US the Premier League, but even if you don't care about the sport, or the English version of it, the soccer-related material isn't so dense as to make Goldblatt's commentary inaccessible.

Not what I was hoping for. Not enough about the game itself. Some very good history, and excellent descriptions and observations on the effects of Premier League football on its towns and its fans. However, far too much extrapolation of the imprint of the game onto British society, and vice versa. Clearly a Leftist / Socialist agenda in which I was not interested. His deploring of how money has changed the nature of player-manager and player-fan relationships makes it sound as if English football is the only sport so affected. (He should study any professional sport in the U.S., and, I imagine, almost anywhere.) I wonder how this admitted fan of the game can enjoy a game with all the cynicism about the sport running around in his head.

A wonderful introspective look into the relationship behind football and British culture during the modern, so-called "Premier League" era. Goldblatt conveys a thorough understanding of business, fan culture, and on-the-field performance of British teams and how they have been shaped by the post-imperial, globalized Britain of today.

Interesting perspective on English football, with historical details that made me view the game in a new light. Worth reading, for sure.

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