
How Should Sport
Remember?

A British Future essay

Authors: Sunder Katwala
and Matthew Rhodes



British
Future...

INTRODUCTION

The largest collective acts of commemoration this 2012 remembrance weekend will take place at sporting events. Cardiff Arms Park, Murrayfield and Twickenham will fall silent ahead of the rugby internationals, and more than half a million supporters will pay their respects at club grounds, large and small, around Britain. The red poppies embroidered into football shirts in the English and Scottish premier leagues, a relatively recent development, symbolize how remembrance has become more prominent, not less over the last decade, in sport as in society.

This year's remembrance weekend should also be a chance to begin a public conversation about how sport will mark the centenary of the Great War, the year after next. Should national civic activities to mark 2014 include specific activities of sporting commemoration?

Not everybody will instinctively think it should. Some may prefer sport and remembrance to be kept apart, perhaps feeling that military engagement in sporting events may be more suited to US than British sporting culture. Some may prefer that the Great War centenary should be marked in national ceremonies at the Cenotaph and Westminster Abbey, and educational exhibitions in military museums, but doubt that our national games offer as appropriate a forum for solemn remembrance.

Those who know our sporting history can find in it a powerful, persuasive counter-argument: that sport has a special responsibility to commemorate and remember the Great War, which goes beyond its contemporary role as a prominent gathering place in our modern civic life. For nobody could sustain the argument that sport kept its distance from the war as it broke out a century ago. Rather, especially in the first two years of the war, before conscription was introduced, an appeal through sport was among the most effective recruiting sergeants in persuading men to go to the trenches.

That story is told powerfully by the number of great sportsmen who were among those who died – or it would be if their names were still familiar to us, as they could be again by the time the centenary arrives.

Those who fell included: four-time Wimbledon champion Tony Wilding (the only man to achieve that feat until Bjorn Borg); dashing England Rugby captain Ronnie Poulton, whose four tries in Paris had clinched a Grand Slam in the final pre-war rugby international; Sandy Turnbull, who was top scorer with twenty-five goals as Manchester United clinched their first ever league title; and Colin Blythe, the greatest spin bowler of cricket's golden era, whose fifteen wickets in one Test against South Africa in 1907 set a record which was to stand for half a century. Seek a modern comparison for Wilding and Poulton, Turnbull and Blythe and the closest analogy would be to imagine Andy Murray and Graeme Swann, Jonny Wilkinson and Wayne Rooney today going off to war and giving their lives.

British Future's selection of a First XI of the Fallen, in which they feature alongside other sporting greats, is an attempt to begin to bring these pioneers of the pre-television era back into our national sporting consciousness. The centenary of the Great War could bring these names back into our national consciousness. Perhaps the public should choose to rename the Sports Personality of the Year award after one of these early sporting heroes.

So many others could have been included. At least 28 British Olympic medal winners died in the conflict. Who could imagine so many of our Team GB heroes today going off to fight and never returning? It was not, of course, only star players who died. In the two years before conscription was introduced, sport proved an effective way to recruit professionals and amateurs, players and professionals, for a British government which may have administered an Empire which stretched around the globe, but which had relatively few other points of connection to the working-classes at home.

So, how should sport remember this history? Remembrance Sunday in 2014 should be a special sport-

free Sunday. Most people think this would be a good idea, with 54% support in a YouGov poll carried out for British Future. The minor administrative inconveniences of organising the fixtures, and scheduling televised games, should not trump the chance for a powerful symbol of public reflection, but it may take public pressure to avoid that. This weekend could offer a good chance to ask managers and players, wearing poppies on their shirts, whether they would add their voices to this way of honouring those who gave their lives.

But sporting commemoration in 2014 should not just be a one-day affair. Each sport should use the major events of the sporting calendar to find the right time, and more space, to tell its own stories of wartime service and sacrifice.

No fewer than eleven of the thirty England and Scotland players who took to the field for the 1914 Calcutta Cup rugby match were to die in the conflict. The 2014 fixture should remember them, perhaps by today's England and Scotland rugby teams leading a joint battlefield trip to honour their predecessors.

Let the first weekend of the Wimbledon fortnight help to put the name of Tony Wilding where it belongs, in our minds when we think of Borg, Federer and Sampras, and to remember the amateur and club players who fought as well.

The Indian cricket tour to England in the summer of 2014 is probably the best opportunity to increase public awareness of the million Indian Army soldiers who fought for Britain, with 70,000 dying. Only four out of ten of us are aware of their role.

Sport is also a good arena for remembrance to promote post-war reconciliation and contemporary friendship too. In the spirit of the famous Christmas football truce of 1914, the FA and Premier League could invite Jurgen Klinsmann and David Beckham to captain teams of German and British fans to play a special football game at half-time on Boxing Day in 2014, just as the "pal's battalions" saw sports stars and fans sign-up together for the trenches.

There will be many other ideas and activities in different sports. Let a thousand poppies of sporting remembrance bloom. But sports bodies should begin the conversation about how to mark 1914 now, so that fans too can have a voice in how they want to commemorate and remember.

How sport went to war

The story of how sportsmen and fans signed-up for the war could offer an important starting point in engaging the next generation in understanding the scale and nature of the conflict.

In 1914, sport was one of relatively few points of connection to mass popular audiences, where the authorities would seek enough willing players and spectators to sufficiently swell the ranks of the battalions being mobilised.

Sports reacted differently to the outbreak of war. The patrician administrators of rugby union emphasised “duty before sport” which led, upon the war’s commencement to the suspension of its playing programme for the duration of the war. In the expectation of a short war, football and rugby league played on, sparking a storm of media and political protest aimed at football in particular. The fine example set by the rugby union players and authorities was used to persuade football players and supporters in particular to follow. Posters were used to target rugby union players and get them to enlist.

The protests about the immorality of playing football were somewhat phoney, given how much the sport was put to use as an arena of recruitment. The campaign worked. David Goldblatt, in his authoritative football history *The Ball is Round* notes that, by November 1914, *The Times* was able to report that over 100,000 men, led by professional footballers, had signed up for service through football, amounting to as much as half of the overall recruitment for the war at that point. Two fifths of professional players had signed up to fight though the authorities continued to target footballers and their ilk by using German comments about the perceived unwillingness of footballers to expose themselves to risk fighting against them!

The calls on players to “play the greater game” on posters during the war reflected a consistent propaganda theme of comparing the glory of the battlefield to the sporting field. Only the carnage of the Somme led to a shift in tone.

The first XI of the fallen

In a different and happier world, these names might form nothing more than a possible shortlist for an Edwardian Sports’ Personality of the Year contest, in a particularly good year, to be argued over in the pubs and on the terraces and in the popular prints. Instead, it is a list which reflects the scale of sporting sacrifice and service in the Great War, and the sporting careers cut short by it.

Any such list is inevitably subjective and personal. The arguments are all the harder to settle with the sports heroes of the age before television, and when the newsreel was in its very infancy. What we do have are the contemporary accounts of their exploits, and evidence of the way in which their names would resonate in the histories of their clubs and sports for several decades after 1918.

What can not be in doubt is that several of those who fell in the war belong, for their sporting achievements, in the very first rank of our sporting history, even before the accounts of how they, like hundreds of thousands of others, had their lives cut short by the war. Their names are less known to us today, though we have sought to identify at least the closest approximate analogy from contemporary sport. The centenary of the Great War is an opportunity to restore their names to the British sporting consciousness as one part of our national, civic commemoration of all of those who fell in the war.

Tony Wilding – four time winner of Wimbledon Men’s Singles (Tennis, New Zealand)

Until Bjorn Borg repeated the feat in 1980, the only man to win four successive Wimbledon singles titles before Bjorn Borg was Anthony Frederick Wilding (31 October 1883 – 9 May 1915). He won “The Championships” from 1910-1913 and was runner up in the men’s singles finals in 1914. Born in New Zealand to parents who had only moved there from England four years before his birth, Wilding also won four Wimbledon doubles titles, two Australian Opens and in total won 112 tour titles, including all 3 major titles in 1913 (equivalent to today’s Grand Slam) when he was at his peak. Alongside his pioneering approach to tennis – effectively professionalising the game with his “modern” approach to physical fitness and its role in the game, he also managed to qualify as a barrister. To this day, he is New Zealand’s only Wimbledon champion – although perhaps signalling things to come – the British press claimed him as one of their own, as he primarily lived in England, where he enjoyed socialising as a prominent member of the Cliveden set. Having signed up at the beginning of the war, Wilding was killed at the battle of Aubers Ridge near Neuve Chapelle in 1915, aged 31.

Modern day equivalent: Andy Murray

Ronald Poulton Palmer - England Rugby Union captain who scored four tries in Paris to clinch the Grand Slam in his final match (Rugby union, England)

Ronald William Poulton (12 September 1889 – 5 May 1915) is one of only three men to have scored a hat-trick the varsity match (for Oxford) – his haul of 5 in the 1909 final is still a record for the fixture. He is renowned for his captaincy of an England side which won the equivalent of a modern day Grand Slam in 1913/14 by going through an entire season unbeaten and in particular his performance in the final rugby union international played before the outbreak of war in 1914. Poulton led from the front in Paris and scored four tries as England decimated France 39-13. Less than a year later he would be dead. Considered by many of his contemporaries to be perhaps the greatest ever attacking rugby union threequarter, Poulton’s death, aged 25, at the hands of a sniper’s bullet in May 1915, when serving as a lieutenant for the Royal Berkshire Regiment in Belgium, was widely mourned and his company was said to be devastated at his loss – “almost every man was weeping”.

Modern day equivalent: Jonny Wilkinson

Jack Harrison MC VC – Rugby great who scored Challenge Cup winning try and was awarded the Victoria Cross (Rugby league, England)

John “Jack” Harrison (12 November 1890 – 3 May 1917) was one of the top Rugby league players of his era, scoring a still club record 52 tries for Hull In the 1913/14 season including a match winning try in the 1913 Challenge Cup Final against Wakefield Trinity. As a result of his endeavours he was picked to tour Australia in 1914, a tour which was cancelled due to the outbreak of the First World War. A native of Hull, he trained to be a teacher and joined the East Yorkshire Regiment and went off to war in 1915 where he soon saw action on the Western Front. He was made a 2nd Lieutenant and his leadership on the sporting field seemed to immediately translate into his war service, and he was awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry in action in March 1917. Less than 2 months later Harrison was killed in action aged 27, in circumstances which lead to him being awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice. His body was never found but his actions make him sport’s most decorated serviceman to this day. *Modern Day equivalent:*

Kevin Sinfield

Alex “Sandy” Turnbull - The first player to win the FA Cup with both Manchester City and United, and top scorer in United’s first ever league championship side in 1908 (Football, Scotland)

Sandy Turnbull (30 July 1884 – 3 May 1917) was a Scottish forward who won the FA Cup with both Manchester City and Manchester United and who went on to win two First Division titles with Manchester United. In 1907/08 his rich vein of form (he scored 25 goals in 30 appearances) helped Manchester United win their first ever First Division title and in the very next season he scored the only goal in the FA Cup Final against Bristol City. Turnbull joined the army in late 1915 and he left for the continent in July 1916 eventually rising to the rank of Lance Sergeant in the Eighth Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. He was killed in Arras, France, aged 32 - his body was never discovered.

Modern day equivalent: Wayne Rooney, Manchester United striker.

Colin Blythe - Kent and England spin bowler. His 15 wickets for 99 against South Africa at Headingley in 1907 set an English Test record which stood for 49 years (Cricket, England)

A precocious left arm spinner, Colin Blythe (30 May 1879-8 November 1917), was known as one of the leading bowlers of his generation, leading the Kent attack and going on to impress on the international stage too. He took a wicket with his first ball in international cricket and was named Wisden cricketer of the year in 1904. In total he played 439 first class matches and represented England 19 times – most notably in his 1907 appearance against South Africa against South Africa when he nearly single-handedly bowled South Africa out twice with astonishing figures of 15 for 99. His averages at county and international level were always at the top end of the scale and he ended up with 100 test wickets and over 2500 at first class level. Despite suffering from epilepsy Blythe joined the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry at the beginning of the war and served in Egypt in 1915 and was one of the few to survive service at the Somme. He was killed by “random shell fire” in November 1917 in Belgium, aged 38. In 2009 the England cricket visited the Flanders graves and laid a “stone” cricket ball at Blythe’s grave.

Modern day equivalent: Graeme Swann, England Test cricketer.

Wyndham Halswelle - Scotland’s first gold medal Olympian on the athletics track after controversial 400m triumph in 1908 (Athletics, Scotland)

Scotland’s first Olympic gold medallist on the athletics track, Wyndham Halswelle (30 May 1882 – 31 March 1915), for the 400m in the 1908 London Olympics was a transformative figure in his sport – partly because of controversial nature of his victory. After setting an Olympic record in the heat, in the final Halswelle was adjudged to have been obstructed by the outstretched arm of one of his American rivals and the race was re-run. The race was run again but the 2 other American athletes who had qualified and not been disqualified refused to run the race, leaving Halswelle to run the final alone. It is to this day the only Olympic final which has been a “walkover”. His 1908 triumph also followed a silver and bronze (400m/800m) at the controversial 1906 Athens Olympics, which were organised at short order after the perceived failure of the 1904 St Louis Olympics. Having already served in the Second Boer War, Halswelle served as a Captain in the Royal Irish Rifles and was killed by a sniper, aged 32, at the Battle of Neuve in 1915.

Modern day equivalent: Sir Chris Hoy

David Bedell-Sivright Scotland Rugby international and British Lions captain, who's no-nonsense style on the field showed why he was Scottish national amateur boxing champion (Rugby union, Scotland)

David Bedell-Sivright (8 December 1880 – 5 September 1915) was the most celebrated of the 30 Scottish Rugby internationals killed during war. A surgeon by profession, and a powerful boxer who was the Scottish Heavyweight Amateur Champion, he was legendary in his day for his pugilistic approach on the rugby field too. A leader by nature, he was chosen to captain the British Lions in Australia in 1904, controversially removing his team from the field for twenty minutes in protest at the first ever sending off of a Lions player. In total he played 22 matches for Scotland and he joined the Royal Navy as a surgeon in January 1915. He died of acute septicaemia thought to have been contracted during his time in the trenches, at Gallipoli in September 1915, aged 34

Modern day equivalent: Gavin Hastings, Scotland rugby star.

Reggie Pridmore MC - Gold-medal winning hockey star who scored a hat-trick in every game at the 1908 Olympics, and played county cricket for Warwickshire (Hockey/Cricket, England)

Reginald George Pridmore (29 April 1886-13 March 1918) was a hockey player, who won the gold medal with the England team at the 1908 Olympics in London. He played inside-left for Coventry, and represented England 19 times between 1908 and 1913. At the 1908 Olympics he was England's leading scorer with hat-tricks against both France and Scotland and he went on to set an Olympic record for most goals scored by an individual in an Olympic final in Men's hockey with his 4 goals in England's 8-1 victory against Ireland, a record which stood until the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. Pridmore was also a good cricketer, and played first-class cricket as a right-hand batsman for Warwickshire - playing 14 times for Warwickshire as a middle order batsman between 1909 and 1912. During the war, Pridmore served as a Major in the Royal Horse & Field Artillery, winning a Military Cross on the Somme before being killed in action, aged 31, in Italy.

Modern day equivalent: Sean Kerly, Olympic gold-winning hockey forward.

Tom Gracie - Legendary leading goal scorer from Hearts great table-topping 1914 team, 7 of whom died during the war (Football, Scotland)

Tom Gracie (12 June 1889 – 23 October 1915) was a centre forward who in played for Everton, Liverpool and Hearts and famously was the joint-leading scorer in the Scottish Football League in the 1914-15 season. Hearts were clear at the top of the table in the season as war broke out, when the entire squad signed up for the war effort in November 1914. Eventually the military training (which often included 10 hour nocturnal night marches) on top of their regular football training told, and Hearts disappointingly ended runners up to Celtic by 4 points. 7 members of arguably the greatest ever Hearts side died during the war, three on the first day of the Somme, after the whole squad and supporters signed up together, including 500 Hearts supporters and ticket-holders, 150 followers of arch rivals Hibernian and a number of professional footballers from other local teams. In March 1915 Gracie was diagnosed with leukemia – a fact he only shared with his then manager – and he continued to play and fulfil his duties as a corporal in the 16th Battalion of The Royal Scots unstintingly. He died in October 1915, aged just 26 – a casualty of the war as much as any man fighting on the Western Front.

Modern day equivalent: Steven Pressley, Cup-winning Hearts captain.

Walter Tull - Spurs and Northampton star who was second black professional footballer and first black army officer (Football, England)

Walter Daniel John Tull (28 April 1888 – 25 March 1918) played professional football for Tottenham Hotspur and Northampton Town, making 111 appearances for Northampton between 1911-1914. He was spotted whilst playing for Clapton FC in 1908 where he won winners' medals in the FA Amateur Cup, London County Amateur Cup and London Senior Cup. When Spurs bought him in March 1909 the Football Star called him 'the catch of the season'. It is thought that he may have agreed to go and play for Glasgow Rangers after the war. Tull was brought up in a National Children's Home orphanage in Bethnal Green, London, along with his brother, following the death of their parents. He was the second person of Afro-Caribbean/mixed heritage to play in the top division of the Football League and the first to be commissioned as an infantry officer in the British Army. During the First World War, Tull served in the "Footballers' Battalion" of the Middlesex Regiment, and fought in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 30 May 1917 despite the 1914 Manual of Military Law specifically excluding "Negroes"/"Mulattos" from exercising command as officers. Tull fought in Italy in 1917–18, and was Mentioned in Despatches for "gallantry and coolness" while leading his company of 26 men on a raiding party into enemy territory. He returned to France in 1918, and was killed in action on 25 March 1918, aged 29, during the Spring Offensive. His body was never recovered.

Modern day equivalent: Jermain Defoe, Spurs and England forward.

Basil Maclear - Irish rugby hero whose 70 yard run against South Africa was hailed as the greatest ever try of its era (Rugby union, Ireland)

Basil Maclear (7 April 1881- 26 May 1915) was born in Portsmouth to an Irish father and after being overlooked by England he became the most celebrated Irish player of his day – winning all three games that he played against England. He only represented Ireland on 11 occasions but in 1954 the Times rugby correspondent wrote of him that “the unique unrivalled Basil Maclear appeared so often on the roll of fame that one sometimes finds it hard to believe that he played in only 11 international matches... but what 11 matches they were!” and declared his run to score a try against the Springboks from inside his own 25 yard line “as about the most sensational try ever seen in an international match.” A veteran of the Royal Irish Fusiliers with whom he had fought in the Boer War (being injured on the Spion Kop), Maclear volunteered again when the First World War commenced serving as a Captain. A month before his death, Maclear refereed a rugby match between the 4th and 48th divisions at Pont de Nieppe and England captain Ronnie Poulton Palmer lead the winning team in what would also be his last rugby match before also being killed in action. Maclear died in May 1915, aged 34, at the second battle of Ypres - his body was never found.

Modern day equivalent: Brian O'Driscoll, Irish rugby hero.

There were many more who went to war and never came back – many of whom could stake a strong claim of getting into our First XI too.

Football's recipient of the Victoria Cross, Donald Bell, who fell at the Somme and was a full back for Bradford Park Avenue; and Jimmy Spiers, Scottish footballer who scored the winning goal for Bradford City on the only occasion that the club has won the 1911 FA Cup; Harry Wattie, a team-

mate of Gracie's at Hearts, who fell on the first day of the Somme who has been described as Scotland's best inside-forward of his era would also have a strong claim.

Major William Booth, Wisden cricketer of the year 1914 who played for Yorkshire and England, taking 158 wickets for Yorkshire in 1913 and scoring over a thousand runs, and who died in the arms of fellow cricketer, Abe Waddington, who was injured and survived to go on to make his Yorkshire and England debut after the war.

At least 28 British Olympic medal winners died during the war, including many of the heroes of the London Olympics of 1908, where the hosts had topped the medal table. Rowing was the sport which suffered most Olympian casualties, including Frederick S Kelly, a member of the gold-winning rowing team at the 1908 London Olympics who died at Gallipoli in 1915 and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Other Olympians who died included Harold Wilson, who had won gold in the team 3 mile event and an individual silver in the 1500 metres; William Philo who won bronze in the men's middleweight boxing in 1908; footballer Joe Dines, who was part of the British gold-medal winning side; and gymnast Charles Vigurs, a bronze medallist in the men's team gymnastics.

One of the most interesting sporting stories of wartime sacrifice is that of Richard Davies Garnons Williams, who played in the first ever Wales Rugby union international in 1881. His sporting achievements do not compare with those of our first XI: the Welsh team lost heavily to England at Blackheath, 82-0 by modern rugby scoring methods, and so Williams was one of the ten players who were not picked again. But Williams' military service stretched across four decades, having signed up in 1876, retired from regular service in 1892, and continuing to volunteer until 1906. Though he was 58 when war broke out, he joined up again, but was killed a year later and is remembered on the Loos Memorial at Calais, making him the most senior of the 11 Welsh Rugby internationals killed in the war.

What should sporting remembrance achieve?

Sport has both a special responsibility, arising from its own history of involvement with the Great War, and an important opportunity, because of its public reach, to make a significant contribution to the nation's civic activities to mark the centenary of World War I. The form which activities take will depend on what they are seeking to achieve. We would suggest that sporting commemoration should have four distinct objectives, if it is to seek to make the most appropriate and most effective contribution from within sport to broader civic project of commemoration and remembrance.

The centenary of the war is primarily a solemn moment to remember service and sacrifice, so it is appropriate to remember those for whom sport was central to their lives in that setting as well.

Remembrance in Britain also raises important funds for charities, which is the point of the wearing of poppies on shirts and special occasions and events to raise funds.

A third purpose is educational. The Prime Minister has said that making young people central to the centenary activities will aim to ensure that the commemorative activities have "an enduring cultural and educational legacy". Sport may have an important role to play here in providing an accessible entry point for the next generation, and it can, finally, play an important role in reconciliation and public diplomacy, particularly in promoting popular as well as elite participation in international links.

Sport's governing bodies and individual clubs may well find that a programme of activity during the centenary year can sometimes best achieve these different objectives at different moments, rather than seeking to cover them all in a single event.

Sporting remembrance should also reflect how public memory plays an important role in explaining why sport matters. Our society attaches meaning to sport largely because of how we place the excitement of the immediate action within sporting traditions which represent communities of identity and allegiance, to the sport as a whole, or to our club or national teams within it. The highest tribute which sports fans can possibly pay to past sportsmen is the simple act of remembering their names and deeds, so that their feats have a chance of coming up in arguments about great sporting achievements of the past in the pub or the grandstand. Commemorative activity will be most powerful and resonant when it connects to this motivation to learn and to pass on again stories, myths and legends which animate the games that we continue to love.

Beginning a civic conversation about how sport should remember

This Remembrance weekend is the ideal opportunity to begin a public discussion about how sport can mark the centenary of the Great War. Only if we begin now, a couple of years from the centenary, will there still be time for governing bodies and professional clubs to take an open, inclusive approach, which does not just announce plans in 2014 but which gives supporters a voice in how best to make the commemorations resonate.

There are three practical steps which governing bodies should seek to embark on by the end of this year, so that there is a genuine chance to act in 2014 on some of the best proposals and ideas which might be generated and debated in the first half of 2013.

Firstly, and most importantly, the governing bodies of the major sport should not simply announce

their plans for 2014 from above on the eve of the centenary, but to ensure that they seek to invite public and grassroots contributions and ideas about what supporters feel would be the most imaginative and powerful ways for sport to be a site of remembrance and commemoration. Britain's strong sporting media, from local newspapers and radio stations to the national press, should also be able to play a crucial role in providing a public forum for such a discussion, to make and encourage imaginative proposals, and to galvanise support for them.

Secondly, sporting bodies should work with government to ensure there is a good supply of practical advice to grassroots amateur clubs and supporters groups on how to approach the possible opportunity of funding for projects, where an additional £6 million has been made available for youth-led projects on local heritage of the war, with Prime Minister David Cameron citing the idea of “a series of friendly football matches to mark the famous 1914 Christmas Day truce” as an idea of how local projects could help to “make this centenary a truly national moment, but also something that actually means something in every locality in our country”. Sporting bodies helping to make sure that the opportunity is known about at the grassroots would be a further step to help enable imaginative local ideas and initiatives have the best prospects of coming to fruition.

Thirdly, sporting bodies could work alongside government to explore which approaches would see sport make the most useful contribution to educational activity. The aim should not be to coordinate or substitute lots of the local ad hoc activity which will take place, through existing local links and community outreach efforts. But government could usefully play a light-touch role, using its convening power to help sporting bodies explore opportunities to collaborate, and perhaps particularly to link up their efforts in a way that make them most useful to schools.

Much emphasis is being placed on the educational value of battlefield visits by every school. It could be valuable to seek to integrate some sporting involvement – such as members of local clubs, and national teams too – into some of these trips where relevant. The England football team's trip to Auschwitz showed how that might have an important value in communicating history and civics to very broad audiences, and so reaching some of those who may not have responded to traditional educational approaches before. Similarly, there would be value in seeking to assess how the range of activities which sports bodies and clubs will undertake might be used to produce some new educational resources about sport and the war, in a form which would be useful not only from 2014-18 but for history and citizenship teachers over a longer period, and how sporting associations might best engage with museums, academic expertise, publishers and schools to help achieve this.

Proposals for sporting commemoration in 2014

Those sports whose seasons are active during November will already mark Remembrance Sunday respectfully and prominently. They may seek to mark it more prominently in 2014 – particularly if the proposal for a special sport-free Remembrance Sunday, which a majority of the public support, gathers momentum and takes place.

But not everything needs to happen at once. There would be important advantages to there being more to sporting remembrance than that, and it would especially be good for public education if each sport looked for the right time, and more space, to tell its own story about wartime service and sacrifice. Often, the flagship moments of the 2014 sporting calendar would provide the natural focal points, while the history of sport and the Great War itself also provides several specific centenary moments, whose nature makes them suited to different types of activity, in a way which can therefore enable the different commemorative, educational and charitable purposes of Remembrance to be prominent at different times.

Here we set out some indicative ideas and proposals, not in the expectation that they could all be pursued, but so as to exemplify specific ways in which sporting bodies might think about opportunities for sporting commemoration to increase public understanding of our history, and the types of ideas which might come forward from players, supporters and the media if sporting bodies do involve them on this theme.

November 2014 – Remembrance Sunday as a special sport-free Sunday

After the arguments of 1914-15, professional sport largely shut down during the war. It would be quite hard now to conceive of several years without football, cricket, rugby or hockey being played. A century on, there is public support for the symbolism of one special sport-free Sunday for one day on Remembrance Sunday in 2014, with 54 per cent backing the idea in a YouGov for British Future poll, even before any public discussion of the idea or the broader question of how the centenary will be marked.

The logistical issues, such as Sky Sports and the Premier League agreeing on the timings of televised games, would not be difficult to resolve with an early enough discussion. Fixtures would be scheduled for the Friday, Saturday and Monday, with commemorative activities taking place. Broadcasters could also choose to embrace the opportunity with special coverage about sport and the war, and the way in which today's players and fans planned to mark the occasion.

But there will only be a will to address those issues if there is public discussion about how to do so. Otherwise, the minor inconveniences of organising the fixtures will trump and lose what could otherwise be a powerful and resonant moment of public reflection.

The sports-pages and radio phone-ins will play a crucial role in determining whether there is sufficient public debate to make this proposal a reality. This Remembrance Sunday would be an ideal chance to debate the issue and also, at a moment when poppies are being worn on club shirts this weekend, to ask players and managers like Sam Allardyce, Sir Alex Ferguson and Brendan Rodgers if they are attracted to the principle of a special sporting symbolic gesture of this kind to honour those who gave their lives.

February/March 2014 – Scotland v England in the Calcutta Cup at Murrayfield

On March 21st 1914, England won the narrowest of Calcutta Cup victories over Scotland, winning 16-15 at Inverleith. Of the thirty players who took the field, eleven were to die in the war including both national captains, Puss Milroy of Scotland and Ronnie Poulton-Palmer. The six Scottish and five England players killed who played that day were among thirty Scotland Rugby internationals and twenty-six from England killed during the war, as were eleven Wales Rugby internationals.

The Calcutta Cup game could therefore be one appropriate focal point for commemorative activities

during the 2014 Six Nations series. As part of this, the Scottish and English rugby unions could collaborate on a commemorative programme about the 1914 game, and the wartime experience of other rugby players involved in the war from other home and Commonwealth nations, with the dual aim of raising money for charity and engaging with schools, perhaps through members of the England and Scotland sides jointly leading an educational battlefield trip during the run-up to the game.

April 2014 – The boat race

The Oxford and Cambridge boat race could provide a moment to commemorate the many Olympian rowers, often with varsity links, such as the three members of the Olympic gold-medal winning Leander Crew of 1908 who died in the war. In particular, the broadcaster of this ‘Crown Jewels’ listed event might be invited to make commemorative activities involving the boat race crews, exploring the histories of some of their predecessors, a theme of their race preview.

July 2014 – Wimbledon

The opening weekend of Wimbledon might be used to celebrate the life of Tony Wilding, perhaps now the least known of all of the all-time great Wimbledon champions, and to connect it with reports and testimonies from local tennis clubs. Perhaps this could lead to a statue of Wilding and a new centenary memorial at the All England Club. Wilding’s experience as a sporting champion and soldier could also be one entry point to increasing awareness in Britain of the 100,000 New Zealanders who fought in the war, with 18,000 killed, involving relevant New Zealand and Commonwealth bodies.

June-September 2014: Indian tour of England

The five Test series between the Indian tourists and England will be taking place across the August 2014 centenary of the outbreak of war. The series will be an appropriate time to reflect on the many cricketers, at test and county level, who served in the war. The timing of the England-India series makes it perhaps the most prominent public opportunity to increase knowledge of the Indian Army soldiers in the war, the largest volunteer army in history. Their role is something which is better known than it was 25 years ago, but YouGov polling for British Future has shown that only 44% of the public are aware of it, with similarly patchy knowledge of the role of Indian troops among South Asian communities. The Imperial War Museum might usefully work with the England and Wales Cricket Board on a touring exhibition for the Test grounds and other educational materials, and perhaps to find ways to involve teachers and students in how the story is told.

August 2014 – Rugby Challenge Cup Final

In August, the 2014 Rugby League Challenge Cup final, traditionally attended by supporters from many clubs beyond the competing teams, could bring together testimonies to players and fans from across the game, while perhaps telling the story of Jack Harrison's career and his Victoria Cross as one focal point. For one year, perhaps the Challenge Cup final might be held in his name

August 2014 – The start of the football season in Scotland and in England

The Scottish government and football authorities might particularly choose to pay special attention to the opening Hearts FC game of the season in August 2014. This is one of a number of moments might be well suited to link together cultural, sporting and educational opportunities: might the National Theatre of Scotland, for example, having explored contemporary military service in *Black Watch*, put on a special performance at a packed Tynecastle, to explore the experience of the Hearts supporters and fans who signed up together?

A similar approach could be attempted by a major London-based cultural institution at Leyton Orient, the English club whose players and supporters were most likely to enlist, with 41 of the playing and club staff volunteering when war broke out. Three Orient players died at the Somme. This story could also be used to engage the changed local population of East London today by connecting that story to other routes to the war, from those whose families were not yet in East London in 1914.

Boxing Day 2014 – Centenary of football truce in the trenches

Sport has strong potential as a public sphere in which Remembrance of the Great War should involve

joint Anglo-German commemorative activities. Sport has made one of the leading contributions to Anglo-German civic relationships over several decades. There were certainly anxieties about sporting rivalry drawing too heavily on wartime enmity, so representing the type of rivalry which George Orwell characterized as “war minus the shooting”. That has changed over the years. Goalkeeper Bert Trautmann, whose signing sparked controversy, became a Maine Road legend, while sports stars such as Boris Becker and Steffi Graf becoming the most loved players of their era at Wimbledon. The miserable failure of Piers Morgan’s “Achtung Surrender” attempt to deploy wartime imagery in Euro 1996 demonstrated that, in the era of Football’s Coming Home, the England versus Germany relationship had changed, to become a fierce and cherished sporting rivalry, defined by the great football matches of 1966 and 1970, 1990 and 1996, defined not by the trenches, but the penalty shoot-out.

The spirit of the famous Christmas football truce of 1914 could be marked by the FA and Premier League inviting stars like Jurgen Klinsmann and David Beckham to captain teams of German and British fans to play a special football game at half-time during the Boxing Day matches of 2014, just as the “pal’s battalions” saw sports stars and fans sign-up together for the trenches.

December 2014 - Sports Personality of the Year

The BBC Sports Personality of the Year programme has become an important focus for looking back on the sporting year, as well as for celebrating the most popular sporting achievements. In the autumn of 2014, this could be supplemented by a special series to remember some of the sporting greats from the war years. It would also be possible to emulate the popular “Great Britons” programme by having current sports figures and writers remember individuals from the war years whose achievements resonate for them. This may not need to involve a public vote, but perhaps the public should choose to rename the Sports Personality of the Year award after one of these early sporting heroes, or for a new award to be offered in their name.

2014 will certainly be a year when sports associations, clubs and fans will want to remember our predecessors from the Great War era. If we started the civic conversation about how to do that now, sport would be able to play its part most fully in this most fully in this important national occasion.

Sunder Katwala and Matthew Rhodes

British Future

Kean House

6 Kean Street

London, WC2B 4AS

Tel: 020 7632 9069

Fax: 020 7632 9061

www.britishfuture.org

info@britishfuture.org



British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank.