

Football was the winter game at Uppingham School, throughout the headmastership of Edward Thring. The rules of play were never static for they evolved under pressures from boys, former pupils, masters, and the headmaster, until its abandonment by his successor in 1889. Uppingham football was played on an oval pitch that tapered towards goals at each end; each goal was about twenty feet wide and seven feet high, the top marked by a rope; a large leather covered oval ball was used. The object of the game was to kick the ball through the opponents' goal. A strict off-side rule demanded that all players had to be behind the ball, and the ball could only be handled if it had been caught cleanly or off its first bounce. The catcher could run with the ball or kick it but he was forbidden from passing it by hand to a team-mate. Long fly-kicks, rather than lengthy dribbling of the ball along the ground, were a notable feature of the game. Play was concentrated along the line from goal to goal: the tapering of the pitch funnelled play towards the goals and discouraged movement to the wings. Prolonged 'bullies' resulted when a player was tackled by the opposition; these were similar to the modern Rugby football scrum, with players stooping to drive the opposition towards their own goal, except that the ball could not be heeled backwards. A bully could result in a goal if the ball was forced under the rope.



Uppingham School Football team - 1862

The 1857 edition of the Committee of Games Rules resolved that at least one game of football should be played each week in the winter and that non-attendance on declared 'field days' should be punishable by a fine. The Rules also contained the first printing of Thring's code for Uppingham Football:

- (I) The game is commenced by one side having a fair kick off at quarter distance.
- (II) Off-side. – A player is off his side immediately he is in front of the ball, and must return behind the ball as soon as possible. If the ball is kicked by his own side past a player when off-side, he may not touch or kick it or advance, until one of the other side has kicked it again when in front of him.

- (III) If any player kicks off-side, the opposite side may claim a fair kick from the place where it was kicked off-side.
 - (IV) No player being off his side may catch the ball and run, or touch the ball behind the goal-line or in touch.
 - (V) If the ball is touched behind the line of goal by one of the side to which the goal belongs, there is a fresh kick-off at the quarter flag.
 - (VI) When the ball is kicked into touch, the player who kicked it must go after it and bring it towards play, level with the spot on which it entered touch, and kick it straight into the middle of the game.
 - (VII) The goal posts must be six paces apart.
 - (VIII) A goal can be won in the open field by the ball being kicked under the cross bar and between the upright poles.
 - (IX) If the ball is touched by an enemy behind the line of goal, a bully may be claimed five paces in front of goal.
 - (X) Three bullies are equal to one goal; and if the ball is forced through goals from a bully, it counts as one goal.
 - (XI) If whilst the ball is in the bully any one of the players fall down, the bully must be stopped at once, and begin again from the place where the ball is. No kicking is allowed in the bullies.
 - (XII) The discretion of sending into goal, or giving any other orders, rests with the Heads of sides or the deputies appointed by them.
 - (XIII) If any player kicks the ball behind his own goal and his own side touch it, the opposite side may claim a bully at the place where the ball was kicked, but if the opposite side touch it, it counts as an ordinary bully.
 - (XIV) Any player who catches the ball in the air, or at first bound, may either kick it as best he can, or run with it towards the enemy's goal: provided that he is liable to be stopped by any means except tripping up; and if stopped or held, he must at once kick or put down the ball.
 - (XV) A player may not, in any case, run with the ball in or through touch.
 - (XVI) No player to be held unless he is himself holding the ball.
 - (XVII) No use of hands or elbows to stop or otherwise impede players allowed. No tripping up ever allowed.
 - (XVIII) No charging allowed, except when your adversary is running directly at the ball, or to catch one of your own side whilst running into the ball, according to Rule XIV. In this latter case you may not charge, unless you were behind the player when he caught the ball.
 - (XIX) No charging allowed when a player is off-side; that is, immediately the ball is behind him.
 - (XX) No ball is ever to be struck or thrown with the hand, or lifted from the ground. Stopping the ball alone allowed.
 - (XXI) No ball ever to be kicked during play whilst in the air.
 - (XXII) No player ever to kick except directly at the ball.
 - (XXIII) No player may wear projecting nails or iron plates on the heels or soles of his boots or shoes. No padding allowed.
 - (XXIV) No kicking with the heel or above the knee is fair.
 - (XXV) No player to stand within six paces of the kicker when he is kicking out of touch, or kicking off.
- In a departure from the 'hacking' game played at Rugby, Rules XIV, XVII and XXII outlaw kicking at an opponent's legs to bring him down.

Charles Thring had been a 'renowned kicker and dribbler' in his youth and once at Uppingham he set about modifying his brother's rules for Uppingham football to bring them more in line with the Cambridge Rules. These were published by Hawthorn, the Uppingham printer, in 1862 as the Simplest Game, and were probably the most streamlined set of rules for football ever produced.

- (I) A goal is scored whenever the ball is forced through the goal and under the bar, except it be thrown by hand.
- (II) Hands may be used only to stop a ball and place it on the ground before the feet.
- (III) Kicks must be aimed only at the ball.
- (IV) A player may not kick the ball whilst in the air.
- (V) No tripping up or heel kicking allowed.
- (VI) Whenever a ball is kicked beyond the side flags, it must be returned by the player who kicked it, from the spot it passed the flag-line, in a straight line towards the middle of the ground.
- (VII) When the ball is kicked behind the line of goal, it shall be kicked off from that line by one of the side whose goal it is.
- (VIII) No player may stand within six paces of the kicker when he is kicking off.
- (IX) A player is out of play immediately he is in front of the ball, and must return behind the ball as soon as possible. If the ball is kicked by his own side past a player, he may not touch it, or advance, until one of the other side has first kicked it, or one of his own side, having followed it up, has been able, when in front of him, to kick.
- (X) No charging allowed when a player is out of play – i.e. immediately the ball is behind him.

Running with the ball in the hands was now eliminated, there is no mention of scrums or bullies, and with the maintained absence of hacking the game has veered away from that played at Rugby and by Old Rugbeians at the universities, and towards what in 1863 would become Association football.

Football games were played twice a week from 1863, on the Tuesday and Saturday half-holidays. Each boy had to have a copy of the printed rules (2d), and was compelled to attend one game a week: a 6d. fine was imposed for non-attendance.

The two football clubs were maintained: the Upper for boys in the top three forms, and the Lower for the remainder. After 1863 membership of the Upper Club was limited to boys taller than 5 foot 3 inches. Red and white caps were introduced for the opposing sides (before this date boys often played wearing their mortar boards) and the teams began to change into 'jerseys and flannel trousers' before play. Almost all the masters played, never changed out of their ordinary dress. Early goal posts were not particularly rigid; the 'inconvenience of the cross-bars coming down when the posts are violently pushed against' eventually led to the rejection of this recent innovation and the re-adoption of the rope.

The Uppingham football game was exchanged for Rugby football in July 1889; the acceptance of a national football code was probably both inevitable and sensible. Such a change had nearly happened in 1876, only then it would have been Association football: now the conversion was made to the recognised public school code.

Reference:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338386421_'Imitating_the_epic_battles_of_old'_Uppingham_football_1853-1889