

## Deaf Football

(notes based on research by Tim Northam)

Sport has always occupied a central role in the Deaf community. It is a major “place” where deaf people can come together. Deaf people travel long distances to compete and also to socialise.

Football is the earliest sport recorded. The first Deaf team was formed in Glasgow in 1871. Bristol professional teams were formed in 1897 (Bristol City) and 1899 (Bristol Rovers), and Bristol Deaf club followed shortly after in 1900.

They competed against other Deaf teams at first, but later joined the local hearing leagues.



The first photo we have is of the team in 1903.

We do not have their names with the photograph but can expect that they are mostly former pupils of the Deaf school.

The team went through many phases without ever having a manager or trainer until 1944. They had limited success in the hearing leagues and the newspaper reports make interesting reading:

From the Bristol Evening News, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1907

*“Division III: Deaf and Dumb Institute v Dominican Res*

*Dominicans lost the toss. Play ruled against the former for some time and the goalie had to save several shots, the Deaf and Dumb forwards shooting and combining well. The homesters got away on the left and eventually Bobbett scored. Corners were frequent but each was cleared. In a scramble around goal H. Coulsting notched a second point for the Dominicans. Just before half-time, Havell scored for the mutes, the Dominicans leading 3-1 at the interval. The Institute played 10-men in the second half, Knowlson being injured. H. Coulsting*

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*netted with a fine shot for the Dominicans. Stead scoring another soon afterwards The homesters had most of the play. Form halfway, Steed went through ad added sixth. The mutes were playing a sporting game but the defence proved sound and they were unable to get within shooting distance. Steed from a wing pass increased the score. .... The Dominicans won thus: 7-1”*

They lost 18 of the 22 matches played. However, in 1926, in the first national Deaf club competition, they got to the final (from the book, Deaf United by Atherton)

*“An equivalent competition was not established in England until the 1926/27 season, when the Healey Shield was contested for the first time; Leeds won the final 1-0 against Bristol ‘before a fairly good muster of onlookers’<sup>34</sup>; Leeds had the advantage of playing in their home town after several attempts to arrange a neutral venue had failed.”*

By 1944, when the leagues resumed, they performed better, winning 8 of 22 matches.

We can identify more of their players from this era:



(1948) Back: R Wyatt, F Shephard, P Jones, W Nutt, A King, Rev Hartnoll, ? ?  
Front: H Williams, ?, M Hopkins, N Allen, C Britton, ?, D Kingdon, L Wyatt

The subscription for the season was half a crown (2/6) and the registration was a shilling (1/-). There was a plan to take part in a tournament in Paris in 1945, but not enough players available to travel, Bristol had to withdraw.

Humorous episodes: in 1950, travelling to Manchester and having to change in a chicken coop as there were no dressing rooms.

When playing on the Downs in Bristol, the players usually took their belongings from the dressing room and left in a pile at the side of the pitch. One player

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had his dog and left the dog beside the pile of bags. At the end of the match he collected his bag and headed for the changing rooms. Unfortunately the dog remained with the pile of bags, guarding them and refusing to allow any other player to collect their bags.

Most Deaf clubs found that their football teams started with groups of players to choose from, then as they became older, they were not replaced and the clubs declined. The clubs had to re-form.

### Other Sports

The Bristol Deaf Cricket Club was formed in 1901 (probably with the same individuals as in the football club).

The photo is much later.

Deaf people played tennis, hockey, darts, snooker.



Ladies football was formed in the late 1970s and was very successful.

