

CULTURE COURSE

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

10 Chapters

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Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · What Are Les Bleus? Scope & Sources

In France football is the most widely played team sport and the one that, on a good night, can fill the streets with flags. The national team, Les Bleus, is for many people the most visible symbol of the country. This first chapter explains what the name means, how French football is organised, the vocabulary needed to follow it, why the course treats the game as culture and not only sport, and where to find reliable sources. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Football in France in Outline

The team

Les Bleus ("the Blues") is the nickname of the men's national team, from the colour of the shirt. The women's team is Les Bleues. The shirt carries the badge of the French Football Federation, a cockerel (*coq*), and since 1998 a star above it for each World Cup win (check).

The federation

The French Football Federation (*Fédération française de football*, FFF) governs the game from amateur clubs to the national teams. It has been the national association since 1919 (check), and the sport's international body, FIFA, was founded in Paris in 1904 (check).

The league

The professional top flight is Ligue 1, with Ligue 2 below it. They are run by the professional league (*Ligue de Football Professionnel*, LFP), not by the federation (check). Ligue 1 has 18 clubs (check the current number), and the main knockout competition is the Coupe de France, open to amateurs and professionals alike.

More than a game

Football in France is a good way to read the country. It arrived from Britain, was long treated as less respectable than rugby, cycling or athletics, became professional later than in England, and produced a national team whose players and fans have been the subject of arguments about immigration, class and identity. Its biggest moments, notably 1998, are remembered as political events as much as sporting ones. That is why this course treats it as a part of French culture, with its own history, myths and language.

The Pyramid

Level (check each)	What it is
Ligue 1	The top professional division. Its best-known clubs include Paris Saint-Germain, Olympique de Marseille, Olympique Lyonnais, Saint-Étienne in its past glory, Monaco, Lille and Lens.
Ligue 2	The second professional division, with promotion and relegation.
National and regional leagues	Semi-professional and amateur divisions, run by the federation and its regional leagues.
Clubs and academies	Professional clubs run youth academies (*centres de formation*) that are central to French player development.
The national centre	The federation's training centre at Clairefontaine, south-west of Paris, opened in the 1980s and a model for others (check).
The Coupe de France	A knockout cup whose early rounds include village teams, with a final at the Stade de France (check).

The Language of French Football

Term (check each)	Meaning
Équipe de France	The national team, the formal name for Les Bleus.
Sélectionneur	The national team's manager, who picks the squad.
Les Tricolores	Another nickname for French national teams, from the tricolour flag.
Le Classique	The Paris Saint-Germain against Marseille match, the biggest rivalry in French club football.

Term (check each)	Meaning
Un but / une passe / un tir	A goal, a pass, a shot.
Un gardien	A goalkeeper.
La Marseillaise	The national anthem, sung before internationals; whether players sing it has been argued about (Chapter 8).
La banlieue	The suburbs of large cities, whose clubs and pitches have produced many players and a lot of the political debate.
Le Ballon d'Or	The "Golden Ball", the individual player award created by the magazine *France Football* in 1956 (check).

Why a Culture Course?

- **It is a way into French history.** The game came from Britain, was shaped by amateur ideals and two wars, and reached the world stage through a Frenchman, Jules Rimet (Chapters 2 and 3).
- **It is a way into French society.** The players of the national team have come from every part of the country and its former empire, and the team has been used as a mirror of the nation (Chapters 7 and 8).
- **It is a mirror of sport and money.** Clubs, owners and television deals have changed the game (Chapter 9).
- **It has produced myths.** The "rainbow nation" of 1998 and the "country of artists" are stories that need testing (Chapter 10).

Scope of the Course

Part (check)	Chapters	Topics
Beginnings	2, 3	The game arrives; Jules Rimet; professionalism and the early World Cups
The first stars	4, 5	Reims, Kopa and Fontaine; Saint-Étienne and the lean years
The great teams	6, 7	Platini's team; 1998

Part (check)	Chapters	Topics
Highs and lows	8, 9	2002 to 2016; the 2018 and 2022 sides, the money and women's football
Method	10	Testing the legend

The course is about the game as a culture and a story. It is not a betting, tipping or fantasy-league guide, it keeps results and records to those needed for the story (all flagged "check"), and it deals with racism, scandal and injury factually and respectfully.

Myths to Test

Common claim	The question a careful reader asks (check each)
France was a nation of artists, not winners, until 1998.	What did the teams of the 1950s and 1980s achieve? (Chapters 4 to 6)
The 1998 team was a multicultural miracle that solved racism.	What did the team show, and what did it not change? (Chapters 7 and 8)
French football is a banlieue factory.	Where do players actually come from, and how are they trained? (Chapters 8 and 9)
Money has ruined French clubs.	What changed with new owners and television rights? (Chapter 9)
Football in France was always a minor sport.	What do attendance and participation figures show? (Chapters 2 and 3)
Women's football is new in France.	What is the history of Reims and Lyon? (Chapter 9)

Sources to Use

- **Newspaper archives.** The French national library's Gallica site has digitised runs of sports newspapers (check which are online), and the daily *L'Équipe* and the magazine *France Football* are central to the story.
- **The federation and the league.** The FFF's and LFP's sites carry records of matches and champions (check), but tell the history from the institutions' own point of view.
- **FIFA and UEFA.** Their records give World Cup and European results (check for later corrections).

- **Museums.** The French national sports museum, now in Nice, and club museums at stadiums (check).
- **Books and essays.** General histories in English and French, and sociological studies of the team and the banlieue (check which are in print).
- **Television and film.** Match footage from the national audiovisual archive and documentaries (check current availability).

A British comparison

Football came to France from Britain, and the Scottish and English associations are older than the French by decades (the Scottish FA was founded in 1873, check). An Edinburgh reader will find a direct link with Chapter 4: Hibernian were invited to the first European Cup in 1955 to 1956 and went out in the semi-final to Reims (check). Hearts and Hibs also suggest a useful comparison for the way a city's clubs and identity are bound together, as Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille are in the Classique. Scotland also opened the 1998 World Cup against Brazil in Saint-Denis (Chapter 7, check).

Check the details

Competition formats, club names and ownership change often. The figures here (clubs in Ligue 1, dates of foundation, the dates of awards) are from memory and should be checked against the federation, the league and a reliable reference. Stories about famous matches are often retold in a polished form, so check the scores, dates and names of any anecdote before you rely on it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain to a friend who has never followed French football how the pyramid works, from village clubs to Ligue 1, and who runs which level.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Write two short paragraphs describing an imaginary Coupe de France tie between a village club and a Ligue 1 side, using at least six terms from the vocabulary table.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Pick two claims from the "Myths to Test" table and say what evidence you would look for and where you would find it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Team:** Les Bleus (men), Les Bleues (women), run by the FFF
- **League:** Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 (LFP); Coupe de France; academies and Clairefontaine
- **Words:** équipe de France, sélectionneur, Le Classique, banlieue, Ballon d'Or
- **Method:** describe the story, check the figures, test the claims

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Origins: Englishmen, Amateurs and Jules Rimet

Football did not begin in France. It arrived from Britain in the late 19th century, carried by sailors, students, engineers and clerks, and it took a generation for French players and administrators to take it over. This chapter follows that story from the first British-run clubs to the creation of FIFA in Paris, the first French international in 1904 and the first World Cup in 1930, which grew from the ideas of a Frenchman, Jules Rimet. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Game Arrives

The ports and Paris

Football first took hold where Britons lived or traded. Le Havre, a port with a large British community, had one of the earliest clubs, Le Havre Athletic Club, founded in the 1870s and playing both rugby and football (check). In Paris the Standard Athletic Club, run by British residents, played from the early 1890s (check).

The schools and sports clubs

French schools and multi-sport clubs took up the game. The Racing Club de France, founded in 1882 for athletics, added football later (check). Many early French teams were part of clubs that also played rugby, rowed or ran, and the better players often moved between sports.

The first championship

The union of athletic societies, the USFSA, organised a football championship from the 1890s, and the first title in 1894 went to the British-run Standard Athletic Club (check). French clubs took the title over in the following years. The competition was amateur, and was regional before it was national.

The amateur ideal

> Most early administrators followed the Victorian idea that sport was for gentlemen and was spoiled by payment. The founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, was French and a leading voice for that ideal (check). The same attitude, in a country where football was mostly played by the middle classes in the cities, helps to explain why France was slow to allow professionals (Chapter 3). The reality was more complicated: players were often paid in secret, and clubs hired English coaches from early on.

1900 to 1904

Year (check each)	Event
1900	Football is played at the Paris Olympics as a demonstration or unofficial event, and a British club side, Upton Park, wins (check how it is classed).
1904 (1 May)	France plays Belgium in Brussels in the first match recognised by the French federation, and draws 3-3 (check the details of the official recognition).
1904 (21 May)	FIFA is founded in Paris by seven national associations, with the Frenchman Robert Guérin as its first president (check the founders).
1908	Football is an official Olympic sport in London, and France sends two teams, with heavy defeats (check).
1919	The national federation is reorganised as the FFF, and the Coupe de France takes its name (check; the cup began under a different title in 1917).

Notice that FIFA was founded in Paris without the British associations, who joined later, left, and returned (check). The British had a very large head start in the game, and many of them did not think a foreign body was needed.

Jules Rimet

- **The man.** Jules Rimet (1873 to 1956) came from a modest family in eastern France, trained as a lawyer, and was an organiser and a believer in sport as a moral force (check). He was a founder of a Paris club, Red Star, in 1897 (check).
- **The federation.** He was involved in the French federation after the First World War and was its president for a few years from 1919 (check).

- **FIFA.** In 1921 he became president of FIFA, a post he held until 1954, a very long tenure (check). He helped to bring the national associations together after the war and to settle the dispute over professionalism.
- **The idea.** He saw a world championship as a way to bring nations together and to create an event that was not tied to the Olympics, where amateurs only could compete. The idea was shared with others, notably his compatriot Henri Delaunay, the federation's secretary (check), so the credit for the World Cup is not his alone.
- **The trophy.** The first World Cup trophy was later named after him as the Jules Rimet Trophy (check).

The 1930 World Cup

Point (check each)	Detail
Host	Uruguay, who had won the Olympic title in 1924 and 1928 and were celebrating a hundred years of independence.
Teams	13 teams, mostly from the Americas. Only four came from Europe: France, Belgium, Romania and Yugoslavia, because of the long sea journey.
The French party	The French team sailed to Montevideo with Rimet, who carried the trophy with him. Lucien Laurent scored France's first goal against Mexico, the first goal in World Cup history.
Result	France lost to Argentina and Chile and went out in the group stage. Uruguay beat Argentina in the final.

The result was poor, but the tournament itself was a success, and France had gone from a young football nation to one that had helped to create the world competition.

Women and the Early Game

Women played too. A women's team, Fémina Sport, was formed in Paris around 1912 (check), and in the 1920s there were women's matches in France. In 1920 the English women's team Dick, Kerr Ladies, from Preston, toured France and played several matches against French sides, in front of large crowds (check). The English ban on women's football on league grounds in 1921

then cut short a lot of that growth in Britain (check). The women's game in France is taken up again in Chapter 9.

A British comparison

The British role was larger than usual in this story. Football arrived with British workers, the first French clubs copied British rules, and British coaches were employed in France for decades (check). The Scottish passing game, where players passed the ball instead of dribbling, was influential on the continent, and Scottish coaches and players worked in many countries (check). The Dick, Kerr Ladies' tour is another link, since Preston's women were among the strongest teams in the world in 1920 and 1921 (check). For an Edinburgh reader, it is worth remembering that Scotland played the first international in 1872, and France's first official match came 32 years later (check).

Check the details

Early football history is full of disputed dates. Clubs often claim a founding year earlier than their records show, and there are rival accounts of which match counts as "the first". Dates of foundation, scores and the numbers of teams at the 1930 World Cup should be checked against the federation, FIFA and a reliable history. Some stories about Rimet, such as the story that he carried the trophy himself on the ship, are told in a polished form.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Draw up a timeline from the first British clubs in France to the 1930 World Cup, with at least eight entries, and mark the ones you would want to check.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Test the claim "The English brought football to France and the French simply copied them". What is true in it, what is missing, and what evidence would you use?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare Jules Rimet with a British or Scottish sports administrator of your choice. What did each achieve, and how far did each depend on others?

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Arrival:** British communities, Le Havre, Paris; USFSA championship from the 1890s
- **Dates:** 1904 first international and FIFA founded in Paris; 1919 FFF; 1930 first World Cup (all check)
- **People:** Jules Rimet (FIFA president 1921 to 1954), Henri Delaunay, Robert Guérin, Lucien Laurent
- **Ideas:** the amateur ideal, the World Cup separate from the Olympics

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Professionalism and the Early Cup

By 1930 French football was popular but officially amateur, and the best players were leaving for richer leagues or being paid in secret. This chapter covers the decision to allow professionalism in 1932, the first national league, the company clubs and foreign players who shaped it, the national team at the World Cups of 1934 and 1938, and the game under the German Occupation. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Road to 1932

The open secret

In the 1920s many clubs paid their stars in cash or with jobs, a practice nicknamed "shamateurism" (check). Players moved abroad, to Italy and elsewhere, to be paid openly. The federation, the clubs and the press argued over whether to legalise what was already happening.

The decision

In 1932 the federation voted to allow professional clubs, and a national professional championship began in the 1932 to 1933 season (check). It started with a small number of clubs in two groups, and was won in its first season by Olympique Lillois (check).

The split

The change divided clubs into professionals and amateurs, and some clubs and officials were against it on principle, in the Coubertin tradition (Chapter 2). The professional clubs formed the basis of the later first division (check).

Late, not slow

France legalised professionalism in 1932, long after England (1885) and Scotland (1893) (check). But the first championship was a national league from the start, with travel by train across a large country, and the new competition quickly became popular. The delay

reflects the strength of the amateur ideal and the dominance of a few sports federations, not a lack of interest in the game.

Clubs, Companies and Foreign Stars

Item (check each)	Detail
Company clubs	FC Sochaux-Montbéliard was backed by the car-maker Peugeot, which provided jobs, housing and a stadium; it won the championship in 1935 and 1938 (check). Company support became a French model.
Port and southern clubs	FC Sète won the league and cup double in 1934, under a British coach, Victor Gibson (check).
Paris clubs	Racing Club de Paris and Red Star were prominent, with Red Star winning the cup several times between the wars (check).
Foreign players and coaches	The new professionals included many Central Europeans (Austrians, Hungarians, Czechs) and South Americans, who raised the standard. A foreign-born team of stars sometimes surrounded a few French players (check).
Raoul Diagne	Born in French Guiana to a Senegalese father who sat in the National Assembly, Diagne played for Racing Club de Paris and, in 1931, became the first black player to play for France (check).
The Coupe de France	The cup, begun in 1917, was already popular, and its final was held in Paris.

The pattern of clubs built round workers' towns, foreign coaches and players from the colonies runs through the later chapters.

Two World Cups

Tournament (check each)	France's result
1934, Italy	France played in the first round, a knockout round, and lost 3-2 to Austria after extra time (check). Italy, the host, won the title.
1938, France	France hosted the tournament, with matches in ten cities including Paris, Marseille and Bordeaux. France beat Belgium in the first round and lost to

Tournament (check each)	France's result
	Italy in the quarter-final, and Italy won the title for the second time in a row (check).

France was awarded the 1938 tournament over Argentina, which caused resentment in South America, and several countries stayed away (check). The matches were played in the shadow of the coming war. The final was held at the Stade de Colombes, the Paris stadium used for the 1924 Olympics (check).

The War Years

- **The Occupation.** After the defeat of 1940 the country was divided, and the Vichy regime supported sport as part of its programme of moral renewal (check). Professionalism was suspended in the early 1940s and the league organised in regional groups, with a "federal" championship (check).
- **The cup continued.** The Coupe de France was played throughout the war, and the 1942 final was won by Red Star, in front of a large crowd (check).
- **Exclusion.** The Vichy laws excluded Jewish players, officials and members from sport (check). The effects on individual clubs and careers are an area of continuing research.
- **The Resistance.** Some footballers joined the Resistance and some died. One example is Rino Della Negra, a young Red Star player from an Italian immigrant family, who was shot in 1944 as a member of the Manouchian group, and who is remembered by the club (check).
- **After the Liberation.** The professional league returned in 1944 to 1945 and the first post-war World Cup was in 1950, which France did not enter (check).

A British comparison

England legalised professionalism in 1885 and founded the Football League in 1888; Scotland followed with professionalism in 1893 and its league the same decade (check). France's 1932 date therefore comes nearly half a century later. The company-club model has British parallels in works teams such as Arsenal's origins at the Woolwich arsenal and West Ham's in a Thames shipyard (check), though France kept the model in the professional game for longer. A Scottish coach, Victor Gibson, helping FC Sète to the 1934 double is a typical example of the British influence continuing (check).

Check the details

The history of this period is thin in English and varies between sources. Foundation dates, the number of clubs in the first league, scores and the details of the Occupation years should be checked against the federation, club histories and scholarly work. Stories of individual players, including those who died in the war, should be checked against reliable biographies.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give three reasons why French professionalism came so late, say what evidence would test each, and say which you find most convincing.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Write a short research note on one early club (Sochaux, Sète, Red Star or Racing Club de Paris): what to find out, where to look, and what you would treat with caution.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare the legalisation of professionalism in England, Scotland and France in a table, and say what the differences suggest about the attitudes of each country.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1932:** professionalism legalised; first league 1932 to 1933, won by Olympique Lillois (check)
- **Clubs:** Sochaux (Peugeot), Sète, Red Star, Racing Club de Paris
- **World Cups:** 1934 (lost to Austria), 1938 at home (lost to Italy) (check)
- **People:** Raoul Diagne, Victor Gibson, Rino Della Negra

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Reims, Kopa and Fontaine

After the war French football found its first great club side and, with it, its first great national team. Stade de Reims reached the first European Cup final in 1956, Raymond Kopa became the first French winner of the Ballon d'Or, and Just Fontaine scored 13 goals at the 1958 World Cup, a record that still stands. This chapter follows that decade and the political context around it, including the Algerian War. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Stade de Reims

The club

Reims, the capital of the Champagne region, was a provincial city that had been badly damaged in the First World War. Its club, Stade de Reims, won the French championship in 1949, 1953, 1955, 1958, 1960 and 1962 (check), and was backed by local business, including the champagne industry (check).

The coach

Albert Batteux, a former Reims player, coached the club from 1950 to 1963 and the national team in the same years (check). His teams played fast, short-passing attacking football that was nicknamed "champagne football", a pun on the region's drink (check).

The players

Reims combined local players with stars such as Raymond Kopa, the defender Robert Jonquet and the forward Just Fontaine, who joined in 1956 (check). Many of them were also the core of the national side, so club and country shared a style.

The European Cup

The European Cup, a knockout competition for league champions, was proposed by the French sports daily *L'Équipe* and started in 1955 to 1956 (check). Reims was among the 16

founding clubs, and reached the first final, in Paris in June 1956, where they lost 4-3 to Real Madrid after leading 2-0 and 3-2 (check). They reached the final again in 1959, in Stuttgart, and lost 2-0 to the same opponent (check). Real Madrid went on to win the first five finals.

Two Stars

Player (check each)	Story
Raymond Kopa	Born Raymond Kopaszewski in 1931 in northern France to a Polish immigrant family, he worked in the mines as a teenager. He played for Angers and Reims, then for Real Madrid from 1956 to 1959, winning three European Cups, before returning to Reims. In 1958 he was the first Frenchman to win the Ballon d'Or.
Just Fontaine	Born in 1933 in Marrakech, Morocco, to a French father and Spanish mother, he played for Nice and then Reims. A prolific striker, he was an unexpected first choice in 1958 because of injuries. A broken leg ended his career in 1962.

The stories of both men, a miner's son of Polish descent and a striker born in Morocco, are examples of the mixed background of French football long before 1998 (Chapter 7).

The 1958 World Cup

Match (check each)	Result
Group: Paraguay	France 7-3 Paraguay, Fontaine scoring three.
Group: Yugoslavia	France 2-3 Yugoslavia.
Group: Scotland	France 2-1 Scotland.
Quarter-final: Northern Ireland	France 4-0 Northern Ireland.
Semi-final: Brazil	France 2-5 Brazil, with a young Pelé scoring a hat-trick.
Third place: West Germany	France 6-3 West Germany, Fontaine scoring four.

Fontaine finished with 13 goals in six matches, still the most in a single World Cup (check). France finished third, its best World Cup result until the win of 1998 (Chapter 7, check). Kopa was named the best player of the tournament and played in a deeper role behind the forwards.

Football and the Algerian War

- **The context.** The war in Algeria, a French territory, began in 1954 and was at its height in 1958, the year of the World Cup and of the return of Charles de Gaulle to power (check). It split French opinion.
- **The FLN team.** In April 1958 a number of Algerian-born players in France, including Rachid Mekhloufi of Saint-Étienne, who had been picked for the French squad, left their clubs in secret to form a team for the National Liberation Front (FLN) (check). The team played matches abroad for several years.
- **The cost.** The players lost clubs and years of their careers, and some returned to French clubs after independence in 1962, Mekhloufi to Saint-Étienne (check). It is one of the clearest early cases of football being tied to the politics of empire.
- **How it is remembered.** The episode is the subject of books and films, which should be read with care for their sources (check).

A British comparison

The Edinburgh club Hibernian took part in the first European Cup after the chairman accepted the invitation despite doubts from the English authorities, and they reached the semi-final in 1955 to 1956, where they lost to Reims (check). Scotland also met France at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, in a 2-1 defeat in which Fontaine and Kopa scored (check). The English champions Chelsea were told not to enter the competition, and Manchester United were the first English entrants in 1956 to 1957 (check). The whole competition was an example of French and continental ideas reaching Britain.

Check the details

Scores, dates and records from the 1950s are often repeated with small errors. Check the 1958 results, the European Cup finals and the details of the FLN team against FIFA, UEFA and a reliable history. The stories of the players' personal lives are often told in a polished form.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Test the label "champagne football". What does it claim, what evidence would support or undermine it, and who made it popular?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose Kopa, Fontaine or Mekhloufi and write a short profile that separates the documented facts from the stories that surround them.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain why a record such as Fontaine's 13 goals needs a careful statement, and write one careful sentence about it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Reims:** champions six times between 1949 and 1962; European Cup finalists 1956 and 1959 (check)
- **People:** Albert Batteux, Raymond Kopa, Just Fontaine, Robert Jonquet, Rachid Mekhloufi
- **1958:** third place in Sweden; Fontaine 13 goals; Kopa the Ballon d'Or
- **Context:** the Algerian War and the FLN team

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · The Wilderness and Saint-Étienne

After 1958 the national team went through two decades of disappointment, while at club level a mining and steel city in the Loire valley became the most successful French side of its era. This chapter covers the lean years, the clubs that carried French football in the 1960s and 1970s, and the story of AS Saint-Étienne, the "Greens" (Les Verts), whose defeat in the 1976 European Cup final at Hampden Park in Glasgow made them national heroes. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Wilderness

Missing the World Cups

France played in the 1966 World Cup in England and went out in the group stage. It then failed to qualify for the World Cups of 1970 and 1974, and reached 1978 in Argentina only to go out in the first round again (check). The generation of Kopa and Fontaine had retired or been injured, and no equivalent group replaced it for years.

Why

Historians and journalists give several reasons: the weakness of the national coaching and selection structure, the departure of leading players to foreign clubs, the quality of clubs' youth work, and a federation that gave little priority to the national side (check). There is no single agreed answer.

The clubs

Club football flourished while the national team did not. Nantes won the league in 1965 and 1966 and several times afterwards, with a short-passing "Nantes style" under the coach José Arribas (check). Marseille won in 1971 and 1972 (check). The most successful club of the period was Saint-Étienne.

Club and country

The gap between a strong league and a weak national team is one of the recurring themes of French football. It suggests that the quality of the clubs was not enough without a national structure that picked, trained and coached the best players, a problem the federation tried to solve with the national academy at Clairefontaine in the 1980s (Chapter 6, check).

Saint-Étienne: The Greens

Point (check each)	Detail
The city	A coal-mining, arms and cycle-making city in the Loire, which suffered economic decline. The club and its stadium, the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard, known as "le Chaudron" (the cauldron), became a symbol of the town.
The titles	Ten league titles, between 1957 and 1981, most of them in the 1960s and 1970s, a French record at the time (check).
The coaches	Albert Batteux, who coached the club briefly in the late 1960s, and above all Robert Herbin, a former player who coached it for many years from 1972 (check).
The players	Dominique Rocheteau, nicknamed the "Green Angel" for his long hair and speed; Jean-Michel Larqué, Patrick Revelli and Dominique Bathenay in midfield and attack; the Yugoslav goalkeeper Ivan Ćurković (check).
The colour	The green shirt became a trademark of the club, and Les Verts is a nickname for the club and was used for the whole team.

Hampden Park, 1976

- **The run.** In 1975 to 1976 Saint-Étienne beat Rangers in the first round, PSV Eindhoven in the quarter-finals and Dynamo Kyiv in the semi-final to reach the final of the European Cup (check each).
- **The final.** It was played on 12 May 1976 at Hampden Park in Glasgow, in front of about 54,000 people. Bayern Munich, the European champions in the two previous years, won 1-0 with a goal by Franz Roth from a free kick (check).

- **The posts.** Saint-Étienne hit the woodwork twice. Hampden's goalposts were square, unlike the round ones used in France, and the phrase "les poteaux carrés" (the square posts) became a French expression for bad luck (check). It is still used today.
- **The reception.** When the team returned to France, the players were welcomed by large crowds in Paris and in Saint-Étienne, in a celebration out of proportion to a defeat (check). It was, for many people, the first time that a French club had captured the whole country.
- **The legacy.** The side was a model for the French national team, and its players, including Rocheteau, Bathenay and Janvion, were part of the squad that Michel Hidalgo built in the late 1970s (Chapter 6, check).

The 1978 World Cup

France qualified for the World Cup in Argentina in 1978, the first time since 1966. It lost to Italy and to the hosts, beat Hungary, and went out in the first round (check). A story is told about the match with Hungary: both sides had brought white shirts, and France played in green-and-white stripes borrowed from a local club (check). It is a detail that is repeated in many accounts, and a useful case of an anecdote to check against a contemporary report.

The Black Fund

The Saint-Étienne success ended in scandal. In 1982 an investigation found that the club's president, Roger Rocher, and other officials had kept a hidden fund (*la caisse noire*) of money, and that players had received payments outside the contract system (check). Rocher was arrested and later convicted, the club's leadership collapsed, and the great side broke up (check). The case is an example of how the money in French football was often handled informally, and it came back in the Marseille affair of the 1990s (Chapter 6, check). It should be reported only to the extent that it is documented in court and press records.

> **A British comparison**
>
> For a Scottish reader the story is familiar. Celtic won the European Cup in Lisbon in 1967 with a team from one city, and Aberdeen won the Cup Winners' Cup in 1983 (check). Glasgow also hosted a final that is remembered more for the loser than the winner: Hampden's square posts are part of the Saint-Étienne legend, and Rangers were the first

opponents that Saint-Étienne beat on the way to the final (check). Hampden also hosted the 1960 final, Real Madrid's 7-3 win over Eintracht Frankfurt (check).

Check the details

Folklore grows around a famous defeat. The numbers of titles, the rounds of the 1975 to 1976 run and the story of the square posts should be checked against UEFA records and contemporary reports. The 1982 case should be taken from court and press records, and not from the many later retellings.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Suggest two reasons why a defeated finalist can become more famous than the winner, using Saint-Étienne in 1976 as the example, and say what evidence would test each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Test the anecdote of the "square posts" or the borrowed green shirts of 1978 as a source: what supports it, who told it and when, and what would you want to see?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare the rise of Saint-Étienne with a Scottish club of your choice (Celtic in 1967, Aberdeen in 1983 or another): what did each have in common and what was different?

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Wilderness:** missed 1970 and 1974; out in the first round in 1966 and 1978 (check)
- **Saint-Étienne:** ten titles, 1976 final lost 1-0 to Bayern at Hampden Park
- **People:** Robert Herbin, Dominique Rocheteau, Jean-Michel Larqué, Roger Rocher
- **Phrase:** les poteaux carrés (the square posts)

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Platini and the Magic Square

In the 1980s France, for the first time, had a national team that was among the best in the world, built round the midfielder Michel Platini. It lost the most famous semi-final in its history in 1982, won the European Championship at home in 1984 and reached another World Cup semi-final in 1986. Then it fell away, missed two World Cups, and saw the club side Olympique de Marseille win the European Cup and be disgraced within months. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Man and the Team

Michel Platini

Born in 1955 in Joeuf, a steel town in Lorraine, to a family of Italian descent (check). He played for Nancy, Saint-Étienne (Chapter 5) and then Juventus from 1982 to 1987, and won the Ballon d'Or three years running, 1983 to 1985 (check). He was a creative midfielder who scored many goals, especially from free kicks.

The coach

Michel Hidalgo, a former player, was the national coach from 1976 to 1984. He built a team round Platini and from the Saint-Étienne and Nantes players of the 1970s, with an emphasis on attacking play and a good atmosphere in the squad (check).

The carré magique

The "magic square" was the midfield of Platini, Alain Giresse, Jean Tigana and Luis Fernandez, which played together in the mid-1980s (check). Giresse and Tigana were small, quick players; Fernandez was the ball-winner; Platini the playmaker. Tigana was born in Mali and Fernandez in Spain, both examples of the mixed origins of the squad (Chapter 7).

Why it mattered

The team of the 1980s made the national side popular. It played attractively, it reached semi-finals in successive tournaments, and its star was a figure the whole country admired. It also showed that France could produce a world-class team without relying on a single club, as had been true of Reims in the 1950s.

Séville, 1982

- **The tournament.** France went to the 1982 World Cup in Spain and lost its first game to England, who scored after 27 seconds through Bryan Robson (check). It recovered to reach the semi-final.
- **The match.** The semi-final against West Germany, in Séville on 8 July 1982, finished 1-1 and then went to extra time. France led 3-1, but Germany scored twice to level at 3-3 (check).
- **The collision.** In the second half the German goalkeeper, Harald Schumacher, ran out and collided with the French defender Patrick Battiston, who was knocked unconscious and badly injured. No foul was given, and the incident is one of the best known in the history of the World Cup (check).
- **The penalties.** Germany won the first penalty shoot-out in the tournament's history, 5-4 (check). France then lost the third-place match to Poland and finished fourth.
- **The meaning.** The French public felt that the team had been unjustly beaten, and the match became a story of near-triumph. German and neutral writers tell a more balanced account, in which the failure to protect a lead and to finish chances is also stressed (check).

Euro 1984 and Mexico 1986

Event (check each)	Result
Euro 1984 group stage	Wins over Denmark (1-0), Belgium (5-0) and Yugoslavia (3-2), with Platini scoring a hat-trick in each of the last two.
Euro 1984 semi-final	France 3-2 Portugal after extra time, in Marseille, Platini scoring the winner late in extra time.

Event (check each)	Result
Euro 1984 final	France 2-0 Spain at the Parc des Princes in Paris. Platini scored from a free kick that went through the goalkeeper's hands, and Bruno Bellone scored the second. It was France's first major title.
World Cup 1986	France beat Italy in the round of 16 and Brazil on penalties in the quarter-final, after a 1-1 draw. It lost the semi-final to West Germany 2-0 and beat Belgium in the third-place match.

Platini scored nine goals in five matches at Euro 1984, still a record for a single European Championship (check). After 1986 the team aged and Platini retired from international football in 1987. France then failed to qualify for the 1990 World Cup and, after a defeat by Bulgaria at the Parc des Princes in 1993, for the 1994 World Cup (check). It also went out in the first round of Euro 1992 (check).

Marseille, 1993

Point (check each)	Detail
The owner	Bernard Tapie, a businessman and politician, who bought the club in 1986 and invested heavily.
The triumph	On 26 May 1993 Marseille beat AC Milan 1-0 in Munich, with a header by Basile Boli, to win the first Champions League under that name. It remains the only French club to win the main European competition.
The scandal	Days before the final, Marseille played Valenciennes in the league. Investigators later found that Marseille officials had tried to bribe Valenciennes players to ease off (check).
The punishment	Marseille was stripped of the 1992 to 1993 league title and administratively relegated to the second division (check). Tapie was later convicted and received a prison sentence (check). The Champions League title was kept.

The affair damaged the standing of French football and led to changes in club finance and regulation (check). It is one of the best documented cases in the sport, so the charges and verdicts can be stated from court records.

A Note on Heysel

Platini's years in Italy included the 1985 European Cup final between Juventus and Liverpool at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels, where 39 people died in a crush before the match (check). The final was played and Juventus won with a penalty by Platini. His role and reactions have been discussed ever since, and the event is remembered as a tragedy first and a sporting event second (check). It is mentioned here because it is part of the record of the period and for no other reason.

A British comparison

The British link in 1982 is the opening game: England's Bryan Robson scored the fastest goal in World Cup history to that point against France in Bilbao (check). Scotland went to the same tournament and were eliminated on goal difference (check). The 1985 Heysel disaster involved Liverpool supporters and led to the ban of English clubs from European competitions for five years (check). Scotland and France did not meet at either tournament in this chapter, so the British link is mostly through England and Liverpool.

Check the details

The Séville match, the Euro final and the Marseille affair are retold in many versions. Scores, the sequence of goals and legal outcomes should be checked against FIFA, UEFA and court or press records. The Heysel and Marseille cases should be described only from documented facts.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Write two paragraphs comparing the French team of 1982 and that of 1984: what changed, and why was one a heartbreak and the other a triumph?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Apply the six-question method (Chapter 1) to the claim "France was robbed in Séville in 1982".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Separate what is documented from what is rumour or opinion in the Marseille affair of 1993, and say what each kind of source would add.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **People:** Michel Platini, Michel Hidalgo, Giresse, Tigana, Fernandez, Bernard Tapie
- **1982:** Séville, 3-3 with West Germany, lost on penalties; fourth place (check)
- **1984:** European Championship won at home, 2-0 over Spain
- **1993:** Marseille win the Champions League, then are punished for the Valenciennes affair

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · 1998: Jacquet, Zidane and the Rainbow Nation

On 12 July 1998 France beat Brazil 3-0 in the final of the World Cup at the Stade de France and won the trophy for the first time. A million or more people filled the Champs-Élysées that night, and the team was hailed as a symbol of a new, mixed France. This chapter covers the preparation, the squad, the tournament, the slogan that came to describe it and the arguments that followed, and the victory at Euro 2000 that confirmed it. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Build-Up

Hosting

France won the right to host the 1998 tournament in a FIFA vote in 1992, ahead of Morocco (check). It was the first World Cup with 32 teams. A new national stadium, the Stade de France at Saint-Denis, north of Paris, was built for the event and opened in January 1998 (check).

The coach

Aimé Jacquet, a former Saint-Étienne player (Chapter 5), became national coach in 1993 after the failure to reach the 1994 World Cup (Chapter 6). He was criticised for years, notably by the sports daily *L'Équipe*, for his cautious approach and for leaving out stars such as Eric Cantona and David Ginola (check). He announced beforehand that he would leave after the tournament.

The doubters

Before the tournament few predicted victory. France had not won a major trophy since Euro 1984, had no obvious striker and played a pragmatic style built round a strong defence and a creative midfield. The scepticism is part of the legend (check).

A team, not a star

The 1998 side is best described as a well-organised team whose best player, Zinedine Zidane, was one of several. Its strength was the defence, which conceded only two goals in the tournament (check), a leader in Didier Deschamps (the captain) and a midfield of Deschamps, Emmanuel Petit and Zidane. This is worth remembering when the team is turned into a symbol: it won because it was a good side.

The Squad

Player (check each)	Background
Zinedine Zidane	Born in Marseille in 1972 to parents from Kabylie in Algeria; the best player of the team.
Marcel Desailly	Born in Accra, Ghana, and brought to France as a child.
Lilian Thuram	Born in Guadeloupe, in the French Antilles, and the scorer of both goals in the semi-final.
Christian Karembeu	Born in New Caledonia, of Kanak origin.
Patrick Vieira	Born in Dakar, Senegal.
Youri Djorkaeff	Born near Lyon to a father of Kalmyk and a mother of Polish descent (check).
Didier Deschamps, Laurent Blanc, Fabien Barthez, Emmanuel Petit	Born in France, in places such as Bayonne, Alès, Lavelanet and Dieppe (check).

The squad drew on Black, North African, overseas and white French backgrounds. That is a statement of fact about the players' origins. What it meant for French society is the subject of argument (below).

The Tournament

Round (check each)	Result
Group stage	South Africa 3-0, Saudi Arabia 4-0 (Zidane sent off), Denmark 2-1.
Round of 16	Paraguay 1-0, with a "golden goal" in extra time by Laurent Blanc, the first in World Cup history.

Round (check each)	Result
Quarter-final	Italy 0-0, won 4-3 on penalties.
Semi-final	Croatia 2-1, both goals by Lilian Thuram, the only two he scored for France. Blanc was suspended for the final after a sending-off.
Final	Brazil 3-0, with two goals from Zidane (headers from corners) and one from Emmanuel Petit.

Before the final there was confusion over whether Brazil's striker Ronaldo would play, after a reported seizure earlier in the day. He played, but was clearly not at his best (check). The explanation remains disputed.

Black-Blanc-Beur

- **The slogan.** The press and politicians described the team as "black-blanc-beur", a pun on the flag's blue-white-red, meaning black, white and *beur* (a slang word for French people of North African descent) (check).
- **The context.** The leader of the far-right National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, had criticised the national team in 1996 as "artificial" because of its mixed origins (check). The 1998 win was seen by many as an answer.
- **The hope.** Commentators said the team showed that integration worked, and the mood on the Champs-Élysées and in the suburbs was celebratory. Zidane's image was projected on the Arc de Triomphe (check).
- **The doubts.** Sociologists and historians noted that the effect on attitudes was short-lived: opinion polls showed a brief rise in positive views and then a return to earlier levels (check). The 2002 presidential election, in which Le Pen reached the second round, and the riots in suburbs in 2005 are cited as evidence that a football win did not remove social divisions (check).
- **What can be said.** The 1998 team was a source of real national pride and showed the diversity of French society. It did not by itself change employment, housing or discrimination. "Miracle" is a word to test, not to repeat.

Euro 2000

Under Roger Lemerre, Jacquet's assistant, France went on to win the European Championship in 2000, held in Belgium and the Netherlands. It beat Italy 2-1 in the final in Rotterdam, with a late equaliser from Sylvain Wiltord and a golden goal from David Trezeguet (check). France was then the world and European champion at the same time, as West Germany had been in 1974 (check). The team's tournament record in the following years, however, was poor (Chapter 8).

A British comparison

The opening match of the 1998 World Cup was Brazil against Scotland at the Stade de France, and Scotland lost 2-1 in a game remembered for John Collins's penalty and Tom Boyd's own goal (check). The Tartan Army's good-humoured presence in Paris was widely reported (check). England went out to Argentina on penalties, after the sending-off of David Beckham (check). The British parallel for the "team as symbol" idea is perhaps the 2012 London Olympics and the Team GB story of Jessica Ennis-Hill, Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford (check), another case where success was read as proof of a national mood.

Check the details

The 1998 story has been told so often that a polished version has replaced the record. Check the group scores, the minute of each goal and the numbers of the crowd on the Champs-Élysées against FIFA's records and contemporary reports. Statements about the effect on social attitudes should be checked against opinion-poll and academic sources.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Apply the six questions (Chapter 1) to the claim "The 1998 team was a multicultural miracle that changed France".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Draw a one-page map of the 1998 tournament (group, round of 16, quarter, semi, final) with the scores and note the three results you would check first.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

List the kinds of sources you would use to test whether 1998 changed French attitudes, and say what each can and cannot show.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1998:** France 3-0 Brazil at the Stade de France; Zidane two goals, Petit one (check)
- **People:** Aimé Jacquet, Didier Deschamps, Zinedine Zidane, Lilian Thuram, Roger Lemerre
- **Slogan:** black-blanc-beur, and the debate about it
- **2000:** European champions, beating Italy with a golden goal (check)

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Highs and Lows: 2002 to 2016

The fifteen years after Euro 2000 were the most dramatic in the history of Les Bleus: a first-round exit as world champions, a World Cup final lost on penalties after the most famous red card in football, a squad that went on strike at a World Cup, a row about racial quotas and a European Championship final lost at home. Alongside the matches ran a debate about what the team said about France. This chapter is written from the record and flags every date, score and claim that should be checked. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Fall of 2002

The tournament

France went to the 2002 World Cup in Korea and Japan as world and European champions and the favourites. Without the injured Zidane for the first games, it lost 1-0 to Senegal, a former French colony, drew 0-0 with Uruguay and lost 2-0 to Denmark, and went home without scoring a goal (check).

The reasons

Commentators gave several reasons: the injury to Zidane and to Robert Pirès, the tiredness of players from a long club season, a team that had aged, and a strong Senegal side made up of players from French clubs (check). No single explanation has been agreed.

After

Roger Lemerre left. Jacques Santini took over and the team went out to Greece in the quarter-finals of Euro 2004, a tournament Greece went on to win (check). Raymond Domenech became coach in 2004 and stayed until 2010.

Holders out early

The 2002 exit is a reminder that the 1998 victory (Chapter 7) was not a sign of permanent dominance. It was followed by a short period of success and then the same

unpredictability as other national sides. France was not the first holder to go out in the first round, but at the time the manner of it, with no goals, was a shock (check).

Berlin, 2006

- **The return.** After a poor qualifying campaign, Zidane, Makélélé, Thuram and Vieira were persuaded to come back, and France reached the final in Germany (check).
- **The final.** Played in Berlin on 9 July 2006 against Italy, it finished 1-1 after extra time. Zidane gave France the lead with a chipped penalty that bounced off the bar and over the line (check).
- **The red card.** In extra time Zidane headbutted the Italian defender Marco Materazzi in the chest, was sent off and left the field past the trophy. Italy won the penalty shoot-out 5-3 (check).
- **The explanation.** Zidane later said that Materazzi had insulted his family. Materazzi has given his own account, and the two have said different things about the exact words (check). Zidane apologised to children who had watched, but said he did not regret the act itself.
- **The response.** The incident was turned into a statue, a song and a film (check), and opinion in France was divided between those who saw a hero betrayed by his temper and those who saw an unprofessional act that cost the team the Cup. Both views can be held.

Anger in the Suburbs

In October and November 2005 there was a wave of rioting in suburbs across France, starting after two teenagers died in a power substation while running from the police in Clichy-sous-Bois (check). The unrest, the longest in modern France, was widely discussed in connection with the national team's mixed origins and with the "black-blanc-beur" idea (Chapter 7). Some commentators said that 1998 had shown a hope that 2005 had broken. Others said that the two events were unrelated. The Marseillaise was also whistled by part of the crowd at the 2001 match between France and Algeria at the Stade de France, which was abandoned after a pitch invasion, and in other matches since (check). Politicians called for punishment, while sociologists pointed to the context of the suburbs and the colonial history (check).

Knysna, 2010

Point (check each)	Detail
Qualifying	France reached the World Cup through a play-off against Ireland in November 2009, in which Thierry Henry handled the ball before a goal was scored. The handball was not seen by the referee, and the result caused an international row.
The tournament	France drew 0-0 with Uruguay, lost 2-0 to Mexico and lost 2-1 to the hosts, South Africa, finishing bottom of its group.
The Anelka incident	After a half-time dispute with Domenech in the Mexico game, the striker Nicolas Anelka was reported to have used an insult to the coach and was sent home.
The strike	The players then refused to train in protest. The captain Patrice Evra was involved in a row with the fitness coach, and the team's training session at the team's base in Knysna became a worldwide story. A statement read by the coach, to the press, announced the refusal to train.
The aftermath	The federation's president resigned, the players received bans of different lengths from the federation, and the government and parliament discussed the episode (check).

The reasons are still argued. They include the coach's weakness, the divisions in the squad, the role of the press, and the federation's lack of preparation (check). The case is often used as a lesson in sport management.

The Quota Affair, 2011

In 2011 the investigative website Mediapart published notes of a federation meeting in which officials were reported to have discussed limiting the number of young players of dual nationality or of African and Arab origin who were admitted to the national academies (check). Laurent Blanc, then national coach, said that his remarks had been misinterpreted and that he had no wish to discriminate. The federation suspended the technical director, and an inquiry did not find evidence of an official quota (check). The affair is described fairly only from the published documents and the findings of the inquiry. It shows how the question of "who is French" can enter the management of the sport.

Euro 2016 at Home

- **Deschamps.** The captain of 1998, Didier Deschamps, became national coach in 2012, and led France to the quarter-final of the 2014 World Cup, where it lost 1-0 to Germany (check).
- **November 2015.** During a friendly between France and Germany at the Stade de France on 13 November 2015, suicide bombers detonated explosives outside the stadium, as part of coordinated attacks across Paris which killed 130 people (check). The match was completed to avoid panic. The attacks changed the security of the tournament and the mood of the country, and it is a subject to be treated respectfully.
- **The tournament.** France hosted Euro 2016 and reached the final, with Antoine Griezmann the top scorer (check). In the final at the Stade de France on 10 July 2016, Portugal won 1-0 after extra time with a goal by Éder, after Cristiano Ronaldo had been injured and replaced early on (check).
- **The meaning.** The defeat was a national disappointment but the tournament had gone ahead safely, and the squad of young players, such as Paul Pogba, Griezmann and Kylian Mbappé's generation, was the basis of the next success (Chapter 9).

A British comparison

The British link is in the clubs and the matches. Thierry Henry was the star of Arsène Wenger's unbeaten Arsenal side of 2003 to 2004, and Wenger himself, an Alsatian, did more than anyone to change the English game's view of French coaching (check). In Euro 2004 France beat England 2-1 with two goals from Zidane in stoppage time, a match remembered in England for its ending (check). Scotland, under Walter Smith, beat France 1-0 in Paris in 2006 through a long shot by James McFadden (check), one of the national team's best results in this period. The 2010 Knysna affair was discussed in Britain as a warning for England's own squad.

Check the details

This is the most recent period in the course, and the sources are still contested. The Knysna reports, the Zidane exchange and the quota affair exist in several versions, many of them from the press. Stay with documented facts, and be careful about attributing motives to named people. The 2015 attacks should be described only from official sources.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose Knysna 2010 and write a one-page account that separates what is documented, what is disputed and what is opinion.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Test the claim "Zidane's headbutt cost France the 2006 World Cup" with the six questions.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Summarise fairly the two sides of the argument about whistling the Marseillaise at matches, and say what evidence each side would use.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **2002:** out in the first round without a goal (check)
- **2006:** final lost on penalties to Italy; Zidane sent off
- **2010:** Knysna strike; 2011: the quota affair
- **2016:** Euro final lost 1-0 to Portugal at home (check)

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Champions Again: 2018, 2022 and Women's Football

In 2018 France won a second World Cup, this time with a younger team under the captain of 1998, and in 2022 it came within a penalty shoot-out of a third. Meanwhile the clubs were changing, as Paris Saint-Germain became rich under Qatari ownership, and women's football, which had a longer French history than most people realised, grew in Lyon and in the national team. This chapter covers all three strands. Names, dates and scores are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Russia 2018

The squad

Didier Deschamps (Chapter 7) built a young, fast team round Antoine Griezmann, Paul Pogba, N'Golo Kanté and the 19-year-old Kylian Mbappé, with Hugo Lloris in goal and Olivier Giroud as the centre-forward (check). It was an unusually young squad, though its style was defensive and pragmatic.

The path

France won its group with a win over Australia and Peru and a 0-0 draw with Denmark, then beat Argentina 4-3 in the round of 16 (Mbappé scoring twice), Uruguay 2-0 and Belgium 1-0 in the semi-final (check).

The final

In Moscow on 15 July 2018 France beat Croatia 4-2. The goals were an own goal by Mario Mandžukić, a penalty by Griezmann, and goals by Pogba and Mbappé (check). Deschamps became the third man to win the World Cup as player and as coach, after Mário Zagallo and Franz Beckenbauer (check).

1998 and 2018

The two wins are often compared. In 1998 France was the host, the team was seen as a surprise winner and the victory was read as a social event (Chapter 7). In 2018 France was among the favourites, the team had a more cosmopolitan outlook with players raised in the suburbs of Paris, and the reaction was more cautious about big claims for what the win meant. A South African comedian's joke that "Africa won the World Cup", and a protest by the French embassy in the United States, prompted a new debate about how France describes its players (check).

Qatar 2022

Stage (check each)	Result
Group	Australia 4-1, Denmark 2-1, a 1-0 defeat by Tunisia with a reserve team.
Round of 16	Poland 3-1, with two goals by Mbappé.
Quarter-final	England 2-1, with goals by Aurélien Tchouaméni and Giroud; Harry Kane missed a penalty.
Semi-final	Morocco 2-0, the first African team to reach a World Cup semi-final.
Final	Argentina 3-3 after extra time, lost 4-2 on penalties. Mbappé scored a hat-trick, the first in a final since 1966, and Lionel Messi scored twice.

The final in Lusail on 18 December 2022 is often called one of the best of all time (check). Mbappé won the Golden Boot with eight goals. After the match some of the French players, including Kingsley Coman and Tchouaméni, were the target of racist abuse online (check). The tournament was also controversial because of Qatar's record on migrant labour and human rights, which was widely reported (check). Deschamps stayed as coach, and in 2025 it was announced that he would leave after the 2026 World Cup (check).

Money and Paris Saint-Germain

- **The takeover.** In 2011 the Qatari state fund Qatar Sports Investments bought Paris Saint-Germain, a club founded in 1970 (check). Within a few years it was winning the league almost every season.
- **The stars.** In 2017 the club bought Neymar for a world-record fee of 222 million euros and signed Mbappé, who was born in Paris and grew up in the suburb of Bondy (check).

- **The league.** Ligue 1's dependence on one dominant club raised the question of whether a league with a single wealthy owner was competitive. Television rights have been a continuing problem, notably after the collapse of a broadcaster deal in 2020 (check).
- **The European record.** PSG lost the Champions League final in 2020 to Bayern Munich, and won the competition for the first time in 2025 (check), becoming the second French club to do so after Marseille in 1993 (Chapter 6).
- **The other clubs.** Olympique Lyonnais won seven league titles in a row from 2002 to 2008 (check). Lille, Monaco and Lens have won or challenged in other years, helped by their own academies and by selling players.

The French model, which relies on developing and selling players, is a contrast with the English one of buying them, and it is one reason why the national team has so many players at foreign clubs (check).

Women's Football

Period (check each)	Story
1910s and 1920s	The Paris club Fémina Sport and women's matches with English teams, including the Dick, Kerr Ladies tour of 1920 (Chapter 2).
1941	The Vichy regime banned women's football, a ban that was lifted after the war but whose effects lasted (check).
1970	The federation took women's football under its wing. Stade de Reims set up a women's team and played in the unofficial World Cup in Mexico in 1971, in front of large crowds (check).
1970s and 1980s	Reims and other clubs won the national championship, and the national team began to play regularly (check).
2004 onward	Olympique Lyonnais Féminin was founded in 2004 and became the leading club in Europe, winning the Champions League eight times, including five in a row from 2016 to 2020 (check).
2019	France hosted the Women's World Cup and reached the quarter-final, losing 2-1 to the United States in Paris (check). Television audiences were high.

Players such as Wendie Renard, Eugénie Le Sommer, Amandine Henry and Sarah Bouhaddi were at the centre of both Lyon and Les Bleues. The women's game still has less money and media

coverage than the men's, but the gap has narrowed, and the history shows that "women's football is new" is a claim that does not stand up (check).

A British comparison

The British link with the women's game is closer than with the men's. Scotland qualified for its first Women's World Cup in 2019, in France, and played its group matches in Nice, Rennes and Paris, losing to England and Japan and drawing 3-3 with Argentina (check). Lyon's rivals in Europe have often been English clubs such as Arsenal and Manchester City (check). On the men's side, French players such as Kanté, Giroud and Pogba have played for English clubs, and the English model of buying players is in contrast to the French one of selling them (check).

Check the details

This is the freshest part of the course, and some details may have changed since it was written. Check the latest results, ownership and contract details against FIFA, UEFA, the federation and the clubs. Statements about racism and migrant labour should be taken from reliable reports. The history of women's football is less well documented than the men's, and its dates vary between sources.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Compare the 1998 and 2018 wins in a short table (setting, style, reaction) and say what the comparison suggests about the way the team is understood.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Test the claim "Money has ruined French clubs" with the six questions, using PSG and Lyon as examples.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Test the claim "Women's football is new in France" and say what evidence supports and undermines it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **2018:** France 4-2 Croatia in Moscow; Deschamps champion as player and coach (check)
- **2022:** 3-3 with Argentina, lost on penalties; Mbappé hat-trick
- **Clubs:** PSG under Qatari ownership from 2011; Lyon's seven titles in a row
- **Women:** Reims in the 1970s; Lyon's Champions League wins; the 2019 World Cup

Les Bleus: The History of French Football

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Testing the Legend

Football is a sport of stories: of miracles, curses, golden generations and national character. This last chapter pulls the course together: a timeline, a table that tests the claims from Chapter 1 against what the course found, a six-question method for testing any claim about the game, and some advice on reading football history as a source. Dates are from the earlier chapters and flagged "check" where they were.

A Timeline of Les Bleus

Period	Strand (see chapter)
1870s to 1930	British clubs, the USFSA, the first international (1904), FIFA, Rimet and the first World Cup (Chapter 2, check)
1932 to 1945	Professionalism, the first league, the 1934 and 1938 World Cups, the Occupation (Chapter 3)
1950s	Reims, Kopa, Fontaine and third place in 1958 (Chapter 4)
1960s and 1970s	The wilderness; Saint-Étienne and Hampden Park in 1976 (Chapter 5)
1982 to 1993	Platini, Séville, Euro 1984, 1986, the missed World Cups and Marseille (Chapter 6)
1998 to 2000	The World Cup at home and Euro 2000 (Chapter 7)
2002 to 2016	Collapse, Berlin, Knysna, the quota affair and the Euro 2016 final (Chapter 8)
2018 onward	The 2018 win, the 2022 final, the money and women's football (Chapter 9)

Myths and Evidence

Claim from Chapter 1	What the course found
France was a nation of artists, not winners, until 1998.	Misleading: France won the 1984 European Championship, reached World Cup semi-finals in 1958, 1982 and 1986, and Reims and Saint-Étienne reached European Cup finals. But it did not win a World Cup before 1998 (check).
The 1998 team was a multicultural miracle that	False as stated: the team reflected the country's diversity and produced a moment of unity, but attitudes and conditions did not

Claim from Chapter 1	What the course found
solved racism.	change lastingly (Chapters 7 and 8).
French football is a banlieue factory.	Partly true: many players come from the suburbs of Paris and other cities, but the claim ignores players from other regions and the role of the academies and the federation (check).
Money has ruined French clubs.	Too strong: PSG has reduced competition at the top, but Lyon, Lille, Monaco and others have won titles, and French clubs still develop and sell players (Chapter 9).
Football in France was always a minor sport.	False now, and only partly true of the early decades, when rugby, cycling and athletics competed with it and the amateur ideal held back the game (Chapters 2 and 3).
Women's football is new in France.	False as a history: women played in the 1910s and 1920s, in the 1970s Reims played in a world tournament, and Lyon has dominated Europe since 2004. True of the professional and televised game (Chapter 9).

Testing a Claim: Six Questions

1. Who says it?

A federation, a club, a coach, a player, a journalist, a politician or a fan? Each has an interest.

2. What exactly is claimed?

Pin down the words: "best", "robbed", "miracle", "first". Define them before looking for evidence.

3. What would count as evidence?

Results, records, match footage, court judgments, financial accounts, polls. Decide before you look.

4. Compared with what?

Other teams, other eras, other sports. A claim of superiority needs a comparison.

5. Which period?

The game of 1904, 1958, 1998 and 2022 differ so much that a claim about "French football" needs a date.

6. What would change my mind?

State in advance what finding would count against the claim.

Worked example: "France wins only when it has a genius playmaker"

1. It is said by fans and commentators who like the idea of the star. **2.** "Genius" and "wins" need defining: a World Cup or European title, and a player of Platini's or Zidane's rank. **3.** Evidence: the squads and key players of the winning teams, and the results of the teams with and without such players. **4.** The comparison is with the unsuccessful teams and with other countries. **5.** The claim covers 1984, 1998, 2000, 2018 and the failures of 2002, 2010 and 2022. **6.** A winning team with no such player, or a losing team with one, would count against it. **Verdict:** partly true, since Platini in 1984 and Zidane in 1998 were central, but the 1998 and 2018 teams were also built on defence and organisation, Zidane's France lost in 2002 and Mbappé's in 2022, so the claim is too simple (check).

Football History as a Source

- **It records results,** which are the hard facts, though even these have been corrected after the fact (a late goal credited to a different player, a title stripped).
- **It records stories,** such as the square posts of Hampden Park or the borrowed shirts of 1978. They are valuable for the sport's image but unreliable as facts (Chapters 5 and 6).
- **It records money and power.** Ownership, television deals and scandals show who had influence at the time (Chapters 6 and 9).
- **It records what is left out.** Women, players from the empire and the banlieue appear late or in particular ways, and the sources must be read for their silences (Chapters 4 and 9).
- **Method.** Use the official record for results, court and inquiry documents for disputes and scandals, and the cultural works and press for the image. Say which is which.

A British comparison

The same method works on British football legends: "the Scots invented the passing game", "Scottish fans are the best in the world", "the Hampden Roar", "the English Premier League is the best league in the world". Each can be broken down in the same way (who says it, what exactly, what evidence, compared with what, which period, what would change my mind). An Edinburgh reader might try the method on a local legend, such as claims about the oldest football club in the city or the rivalry of Hearts and Hibs (check).

Check the details

The timeline and tables summarise the earlier chapters, and their "check" items still apply. The verdicts are conclusions from the sources used in this course, not proof, and a different set of sources might shift the emphasis. Results, records and ownership change each season.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose one entry from the myths-and-evidence table and apply the six questions to it in a short paragraph for each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Take one famous anecdote from the course (the square posts, the borrowed shirts of 1978, or Rimet and the trophy on the ship) and test it as a source: what evidence supports it, who told it and when, and what would you want to see?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Apply the six questions to a legend about a British or Scottish football event and say what you conclude.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Six questions:** who, what exactly, what evidence, compared with what, which period, what would change my mind

- **Verdict on the legend:** a real and remarkable history whose claims need careful wording
- **Sources:** official records for results, court and inquiry documents for disputes, cultural works for the image

Course complete

You have finished *Les Bleus: The History of French Football*: the national team and its structures, the British origins, Rimet and the first World Cup, professionalism, Reims, Saint-Étienne, Platini's team, 1998, the years of crisis, the recent champions, the money and women's football, and a method for testing the legend. Related courses include *French Film & Television*, *French Literature*, *French Music*, *Jeux Sans Frontières*, *Franco-Belgian Comics: Bande Dessinée*, *The Tour de France* and *The Bundesliga: A History*.