

INDIRECT DISPERSION: NIGERIANS AS CONDUITS OF COLONIAL CULTURE

“I will tell you that (at Katsina College) they were mostly all Northerners because most of them who became leaders, like the Sardauna, went to school in Katsina...For the games (in primary school in Kaduna, 1929-1932) we played football, athletics, fives, then tennis – lawn tennis.”¹

As has been described earlier, the British believed that involvement in sports instilled their young men with the proper ideals of fair play, character and leadership necessary for ruling the vast Empire. Participation in upper class sports such as cricket at an elite Public School or university was a badge of honour, and often a means to a prime posting in the colonial service.² Part of the colonial project was to remake conquered peoples in their own image, and this the British certainly attempted among the elite of Northern Nigeria. This chapter seeks to outline the attempts by the British to create an athleticocracy in their image who would become the conduits for British rule and the spread of British culture. In addition, this chapter explores the role of colonial education in the spread of football and other games in the Northern Region.

Because of the dearth of mission schools in Northern Nigeria as compared to Southern Nigeria, education was much more limited, and also much more centralized and controlled. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus largely on the most thoroughly Islamic parts of Northern Nigeria because it is here that the British most systematically attempted to pass on their values to those who they would in future indirectly rule through. Further, it was only among the Islamic groups in the North that the British

¹ Interview with Raphael Shonekan conducted by Wiebe Boer, 18th March, 2001, Jos, Plateau State.

² A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, “Imperial Administration and the Athletic Imperative: The Case of the District Officer in Africa,” in W. J. Baker and J. A. Mangan, eds., *Sports in Africa: Essays in Social History*, London: Holmes and Meier, 1987, pp. 81-113. J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, London: F. Cass, 1998. J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

seemed most sensitive about respect for culture and training for leadership. The pagans were largely left for the missions to educate and their imposed leaders were often from among the Muslims, a legacy that is now having dramatic and often violent repercussions in Northern Nigeria.

After the conquest of Northern Nigeria, completed by 1903, no Education Department was established for the region. This is not to say, however, that there was no education going on as some 250,000 pupils were attending an estimated 20,000 Koranic schools scattered across the territory.³ The first colonial school was not opened until the Nassarawa School in Kano in 1909. In 1910 when an Education Department for Northern Nigeria was finally established under the leadership of Hans Vischer (Dan Hausa), it pursued a policy of education ‘on native lines’ – that is educating without divorcing students from local society.⁴ This approach was quite different from that of the Southern Protectorate where education – both mission and colonial – was designed to mimic British education and produce clerical and technical staff to aid in colonial administration.⁵ Those educated in the North, where education was mostly conducted in Hausa in the early days, were destined for employment in their local Native Administration (which included most local teaching positions) rather than in the actual colonial civil service. In fact, the desire of Northern leaders to catch up with the South educationally did not come until the 1950s when there were still relatively few schools

³ Keffi Old Boys’ Association, *The Story of Government College Keffi (1949-1999)*, Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1999, p. 5.

⁴ Alfred R. Allen, *The Development of Post-Primary Education in Northern Nigeria, 1916-1960*, unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, University of London, 1969, p. ii, Mss. Afr. S. 1700 (1), Rhodes House Library, Oxford University.

⁵ Alfred R. Allen, *The Development of Post-Primary Education in Northern Nigeria, 1916-1960*, unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, University of London, 1969, p. iv, Mss. Afr. S. 1700 (1), Rhodes House Library, Oxford University.

across the region.⁶ The overall aim, then, of Northern education was, “To fit pupils to serve in the existing state of society in Northern Nigeria but with greater usefulness.”⁷

Games and Character Building

In spite of some early reservations from Muslim students about sports,⁸ as would be expected from an administrative class raised in the British Public School tradition, the educational system established was one that set ‘...great store on the value of games in character building.’⁹ Why were the British so concerned about character building through sports among their subjects? The men they were training in most of these institutions were men who would one day take over leadership positions in the Native Administrations, become teachers in colonial schools, or take up clerical positions in the British colonial service, the first two being the more common in the North. In India, the early colonial education system was deemed a failure by the second decade of the 1900s because it had not been able to positively influence the quality of character among the newly educated elite who were thought to have become undisciplined and disrespectful of authority. The solution was to remodel these schools along the lines of the British Public School which included, “...the establishment of hostels and boarding-houses, the

⁶ Education in the North was so underdeveloped that the first Northerner to pursue a post-secondary education was Sa’adu Zungur of Bauchi who studied at Yaba Higher College from 1933-1936. The first Northern Medical Doctor was R. A. B. Dikko of Wusasa who completed his medical degree at the University of Birmingham in 1940.

⁷ Alfred R. Allen, *The Development of Post-Primary Education in Northern Nigeria, 1916-1960*, unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, University of London, 1969, p. 36, Mss. Afr. S. 1700 (1), Rhodes House Library, Oxford University.

⁸ James Hubbard, *Education Under Colonial Rule, A History of Katsina College, 1921-1942*, New York: University Press of America, 2000, p. 50.

⁹ S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. x.

appointment of British headmasters and of school monitors, the recognition of field sports as a part of the school training...”¹⁰

Learning from their Indian ‘mistake’, the education policy developed for Nigeria in 1915 and approved in 1916 described that “...the formation of character and habits of discipline...” should be the primary objective of education, and not the “...mere acquisition of a certain amount of book-learning or technical skills...”¹¹ Among the list of the six agencies best suited to effectively accomplish the task of character building was “...(4) encouragement of field sports...”¹² In his advice on the subject for his successors in the colonial government of Nigeria, Lord Lugard recommended that “For the purposes of field sports, so wisely recommended by the Indian resolution, it is, of course, essential that playgrounds and gymnasias should be provided. In Nigeria we have found that polo was a specially good game for the sons of chiefs and others who could afford it, while for other boys cricket, football, and ‘athletics’ bring the staff and pupils into close touch, and have the best effect in training character.”¹³

As early as 1922, the import of sport in schools could be observed at Bauchi Provincial School where “Watching the games is just like watching the playing fields of any ordinary private school in England with perhaps an added interest.”¹⁴ Further emphasizing the successors of Lugard’s belief in the significance of sports as part of the

¹⁰ Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922) London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1965, p. 427. The Blue-book discussing the crisis in Indian education, the proposed solution, and the positive results was published as *Discipline and Moral Training in the Schools and Colleges of India*, a book Lugard recommended the colonial office should place in the hands of every colonial Director of Education. Ibid., 427-428.

¹¹ Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922) London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1965, p. 431.

¹² Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922) London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1965, p. 432.

¹³ Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922) London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1965, p. 435.

¹⁴ J. M. Fremantle, Resident, Bauchi Province Annual Report 1922, p. 120, para. 118, SNP9 58/1923, National Archives, Kaduna.

educational process, in 1930 the Assistant Director of Education for the Northern Province wrote, “Great importance is attached to games for the purpose of health and character training.”¹⁵ Besides the focus on sports, as in India, other aspects of the British Public School tradition were brought to the major schools as well such as boarding facilities for students so their environment could be better controlled, dividing the school into different houses for the sake of intra-school competitions, intense discipline, having student prefects, and so on.

Royal Students, Reluctant Royals

Across the provinces most of the early students were sons of chiefs, or, if the chief in question did not see the need for Western education, or did not have enough sons, were the sons of men affiliated with chiefs. For example, Ahmadu Rabah, the son of the District Head of Rabah and the great-great grandson of Usman Dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, was sent to school because the Sultan’s family understood the value of Western education at the time. Ahmadu Rabah became Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Daura of Sokoto and the first and only Premier of the Northern Region. On the other hand, Abu Bauchi, the son of one of the household servants of the chief of Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi Province, was sent to school in 1922 because the chief’s elder two sons had already been educated and the provincial superintendent of education wanted him to send yet another. He eventually made it to Katsina College, and although a *talaka* (commoner) among princes, was chosen to give the speech at the farewell ceremony his final year in 1933.¹⁶ Abu Bauchi grew up to be Alhaji Sir Abubakar

¹⁵ G. A. J. Beineman, Assistant Director of Education, Annual Report, Education, Northern Provinces, 1930, p. 14, para. 44b, Den. 403, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹⁶ Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1991, p. 21.

Tafawa Balewa, the ‘Golden Voice of Africa’ and Nigeria’s first and only Prime Minister. Quite an accomplishment for someone with such a lowly origin.

The chief of Tafawa Balewa was not unique in sending the son of a servant for education, although his motivation may have been. There were many chiefs who sent sons of servants instead of their own princes because of the suspicion of what might happen to them at a European school.¹⁷ According to Mallam Bello Kagara, one of the first three African teachers at Katsina College, when the District Officer of Kagara asked his father to send him to school in 1910, his father, the Alkali, or Islamic leader, of Kagara was at first hesitant. Bello Kagara recounted what appeared to be a pretty common concern, “My father was unwilling to release me for one reason and that is that he was very suspicious of European schools. He thought that the idea behind them was to convert boys to Christianity. He reluctantly agreed only when he heard that almost all the Moslem Emirs in Northern Nigeria had already sent their sons to the school, and that the teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies...were among the subjects taught in the school.”¹⁸ In 1924, Hamman Yaji, the District Head of Madagali, Yola (Adamawa) Province, recorded in his diary that “...the Christian (European) Mr. Rosedale ordered me to send the boys to school.”¹⁹ As late as 1933, parents requested education officer Sidney Hogben not to place schools in their villages so that they would not lose the invaluable farm labour of their sons to the classroom.²⁰

Katsina College – the Eton of Northern Nigeria

¹⁷ Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1991, p. 9.

¹⁸ Quoted in Abdurrahman Mora, ed., *Abubakar Imam Memoirs*, Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, 1990, p. 9-10.

¹⁹ A. H. M. Kirk-Greene and James Vaughan, eds., *The Diary of Hamman Yaji: Chronicle of a West African Muslim Ruler*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 93.

²⁰ S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. xi.

Among the major problems the colonial government faced with educational institutions in the North besides finding students for them was staffing them. It was difficult finding British teachers or even other Africans to teach in all these schools, especially ones who could competently teach in Hausa. Furthermore, the more outsiders involved, the harder it would be for the British to provide quality education without interrupting the Islamic society they so respected and wished to keep intact. The solution was to establish a secondary school to train the (Muslim) elites of Northern Nigeria to become the teachers. The dream was realized with the founding of Katsina Training College in 1921, the most important educational institution of colonial Northern Nigeria. At its opening, the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Hugh Clifford, informed all the assembled pupils that upon completion of their education, they would be mandated to, "...carry the torch of learning and knowledge to all parts of the Muhammadan Emirates in order thereby to enlighten the ignorance of their countrymen..."²¹ Clifford went on to say, "...they should cherish no other desire or ambition than that of training for the great work of teaching others...they should be subjected to no influences which might tend to make them careless about the observances of their religious duties, forgetful of the customs and traditions of their fellow countrymen..."²² The athletic imperative, something initially so foreign to these sons of Muslim aristocrats, it seems was not something that in the British eyes would counter any of these points.

The school was very selective. So much so, in fact, that although he did not enroll until twelve years after the school's founding, Abdurrahman Mora was only

²¹ From Sir Hugh Clifford's opening address, quoted in S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 176.

²² From Sir Hugh Clifford's opening address, quoted in Akinjide Osuntokun, *Power Broker: A Biography of Sir Kashim Ibrahim*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1987, p. 14.

Student #233, entailing an intake of less than twenty students per year.²³ Part of the selectiveness included admitting very few Christian or pagan students throughout the school's colonial history. Christians and pagans were to school elsewhere, although a parallel institution was not created for them until Government College, Keffi in 1949.²⁴

The school motto, "Character Maketh Man" illustrates the College's roots in the British Public School tradition. At the same time, however, the Education Department also gave Katsina College a 'native' feel with its architecture and Hausa dress code. The College was transferred to Kaduna in 1938, and then to Zaria in 1949 where it exists to this day as Barewa College.²⁵ It was, however, in its days in Katsina that the College was most famous, educating young men who would go on to be the leaders of Northern Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole in the late colonial and early post-colonial period. The vast majority of leading Northern Muslim political figures – including Ahmadu Bello and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa mentioned above – were graduates of the College, Northern

²³ Abdurrahman Mora, ed., *Abubakar Imam Memoirs*, Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, 1990, p. x.

²⁴ A prime example of this colonially imposed separation was in the person of Dr. R. A. B. Dikko, the first Western educated medical doctor in Northern Nigeria. Although his name implies high Katsina Fulani birth, he was born in Zaria and raised and educated on the Christian Missionary Society compound in Wusasa. As a Christian, he was not permitted to go to Katsina College in spite of his ethnic origin, and instead attended King's College in Lagos from 1929-1931. According to Abubakar Imam, a graduate of Katsina College, a leading newspaper editor, and a parliamentarian, Katsina College was open to all and some Northern Christians did attend. It was not until a colonially derived policy in 1957 designed to separate Christians and Muslims that Christian exclusion became official. From the Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Advisory Board of Higher Muslim Education held on 5th December, 1957, Imam quotes, "Government College, Zaria (Katsina/Barewa College) should in future recruit Muslims from Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Bornu, Zaria, Bauchi, Adamawa and Ilorin Provinces. Christians from all these provinces should go to Government College, Keffi." Quoted in Abdurrahman Mora, ed., *Abubakar Imam Memoirs*, Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, 1990, p. 214. To further suggest that perhaps the Northern elites were not as discriminatory against their own Christian brethren at the time as the colonial structure implied, when the Northern People's Congress – the first Northern political party – was formed in 1949, Dr. R. A. B. Dikko was elected as the first President.

²⁵ After the 1949 move to Zaria, the school's facilities in Kaduna were occupied by Government College, Keffi, while the premises in Keffi were being prepared. The Keffi campus was occupied in 1954. Keffi Old Boys' Association, *The Story of Government College Keffi (1949-1999)*, Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1999, p. 61.

Nigeria's answer to Eton.²⁶ As described in an article in the *Nigerian Citizen* in 1965, "...just as Harrow, Rugby, Eton and others represented tradition in English education, so too Katsina College represented the tradition of education in a modern manner in Northern Nigeria..."²⁷ Another writer commenting on the College's role wrote, "...a large part of Africa's grandest country was shaped surely and unwittingly by the improbable version of British boarding school life created in Katsina."²⁸

Apart from the obvious attention to a high standard of academic excellence one would expect from a school designed for the elite, in keeping with its British Public School model, sports and discipline were an integral characteristic of College life. According to Isa Kaita, an illustrious early graduate of the College, "Discipline was Spartan...Games and sports were compulsory as were also physical exercises."²⁹ But only recognized organized games and sports were permitted, as was illustrated when Kashim Ibrahim and other students from Bornu were severely disciplined for introducing 'karta', a card game that, "...became very popular among the students and it deprived nearly all the boys of any studies or home work."³⁰

Participation in sports became compulsory for students after 1923, the school teams playing amongst themselves, against other schools in Katsina, or against

²⁶ Besides Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa, other Katsina graduates holding high level posts in the 1950s and 1960s included Isa Kaita, the Northern Regional Minister of Education; Bello Dandango, the Chief Whip of the Nigerian Parliament; Usman Nagogo, the Northern Regional Minister Without Portfolio; Aliyu Makaman Bida, the Northern Regional Minister of Finance; Kashim Ibrahim, the Governor of the Northern Region; Abubakar Imam, Member of the Legislative Council, Lagos and the Northern House of Representatives; Muhammadu Bashar, Member of the Legislative Council, Lagos and the Northern House of Representatives; and Aminu Kano, the Deputy Chief Whip of the Nigerian Parliament. Even heads of state who served much later were graduates of the school – General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975) and Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983).

²⁷ *Nigerian Citizen*, 23rd June, 1965, quoted in Alhaji Sani Lugard, ed., *Isa Kaita: Wazirin Katsina*, Katsina: Newsworld Publications Ltd., 1991, p. 38.

²⁸ Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1991, p. 12.

²⁹ Alhaji Sani Lugard, ed., *Isa Kaita: Wazirin Katsina*, Katsina: Newsworld Publications Ltd., 1991, p. 12.

³⁰ Alhaji Sani Lugard, ed., *Isa Kaita: Wazirin Katsina*, Katsina: Newsworld Publications Ltd., 1991, p. 42.

Europeans in football, cricket (*kirikit* in Hausa), field hockey, track and field, and Fives, of which more later.³¹ In the early days of the school, with few others to compete with, it was the inter-house sports rivalries that were the most significant. The biographer of Kashim Ibrahim, the prefect of East House in 1929 when ‘the hardy Easterners’ were champions in cricket and football, described the rivalry thus, “Rivalry between the four houses in sports was keen and each student was fiercely loyal to his house and did his best to maintain its superiority over others.”³²

Exhibiting the importance of games to school life, on his official visit to the school in 1924, W. Gowers, the Lieutenant Governor of Northern Nigeria, was treated to a football match between students of the College.³³ Sports were so intrinsic that it was one of the factors on which the assessment of each student was made. Isa Kaita, who would go on to hold several strategic cabinet posts in the Northern Regional Government, was enthusiastic about but not very good at games while in the College and was assessed with the following, “A better referee than player.”³⁴ In 1938, the last year the College remained in Katsina, Abdurrahman Mora led his house – Hankaka – to victory in all five of the College’s inter-house sports competitions – athletics, hockey, fives, “...the much-liked cricket and the favourite football.”³⁵

Upon graduation, these elite young men were sent back to work in the Native Administrations in the provinces from which they came, usually as teachers. Although it

³¹ James Hubbard, *Education Under Colonial Rule, A History of Katsina College, 1921-1942*, New York: University Press of America, 2000, p. 100.

³² Akinjide Osuntokun, *Power Broker: A Biography of Sir Kashim Ibrahim*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1987, p. 16.

³³ E. J. Arnett, Resident, Kano Province Annual Report, 1924, p. 46, para. 115, File 181/1925, Archives Unit, Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano.

³⁴ Alhaji Sani Lugard, ed., *Isa Kaita: Wazirin Katsina*, Katsina: Newsworld Publications Ltd., 1991, p. 13.

³⁵ A. M. Yakubu and M. M. Jumare, *Abdurrahman Mora: The Life and Legacy of a Great Teacher*, Zaria: Zaria Educational Development Association, 1997, p. 29.

was said they were not ‘Europeanized’ as were their educated Southern contemporaries in dress and custom, they did imbibe the love for sports as had their Public School trained British instructors before them.³⁶

Upon taking up their posts in their assigned Native Administrations, these young men, the first generation of Western educated elites of Northern Nigeria, did indeed take up leadership roles in provincial educational institutions. They returned as educators – or to use the Hausa term for them, ‘mallams’ – but also as sportsmen, and thus many became coaches. It is a little known fact that because of the Public School tradition they were exposed to, many of the first generation of Western educated Muslim leaders of Nigeria were also avid sportsmen and coaches. For example, three teachers from Bauchi returned from Katsina in 1926, and, according to the Provincial Resident, “Since their arrival it has been possible to widen the curriculum and games have much improved.”³⁷ In Yola Primary School, the Katsina trained indigenes who returned in 1929 to teach were said to have, “...taken up supervision and coaching with great enthusiasm, and with Mr. Babb’s assistance the athletics of the school should advance by leaps and bounds.”³⁸ Cricket and football vastly improved in Bida Primary School in 1929 after some of their students had returned as teachers from Katsina. As the Superintendent of Education for Bida wrote, “This is partly due to coaching on the part of Europeans and Katsina mallams

³⁶ James Hubbard, *Education Under Colonial Rule, A History of Katsina College, 1921-1942*, New York: University Press of America, 2000, p. 218.

³⁷ C. Wightwick, Resident, Bauchi Province Annual Report, 1926, p. 38, para. 124, SNP17 K101 Vol. III, National Archives, Kaduna.

³⁸ Yola Primary School Annual Report, 1929, p. 9, para. 30, DDN280, National Archives, Kaduna.

and partly on the senior boys.”³⁹ In Bida, the mallams also regularly participated in playing on the school cricket and football teams.⁴⁰

Kashim Ibrahim, who in his final year made the long journey from Maiduguri to Katsina on a bicycle, returned to Bornu in 1929 not only as a teacher, but as a dedicated football coach. The Superintendent of Education reported that, “Football has played to a regular programme throughout the year, and the standard of play has much improved; this is largely due to the coaching from Mallam Kashim who has taken charge of school games.”⁴¹ Kashim was aware of the impact of his coaching on the game in Bornu Primary School. He wrote, “Football has much improved since I took it over at the beginning of the Ramadan term, particularly in their indiscriminate and unnecessary passing of the ball...One who knew the football of the school would realise this improvement by watching the two matches against the European team.”⁴² Kashim Ibrahim, the erstwhile football coach of Bornu Primary School, went on to become the first indigenous Governor of Northern Nigeria at independence.

On his official visit to Okene Elementary School, Kabba Province, in August 1932, the Acting Lieutenant Governor, exhibiting the central importance of character, presentation and sport in the colonial psyche, commented, “The School appears excellent in every way. The boys seem interested and are clean. Physical drill was well done. A

³⁹ I. R. A. Hodge, Superintendent of Education, Bida Primary School Annual Report, 1929, p. 8, para. 15, DDN260, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁴⁰ I. R. A. Hodge, Superintendent of Education, Bida Primary School Annual Report, 1929, p. 9, para. 15, DDN260, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁴¹ S. L. Price, Senior Superintendent of Education, Bornu Primary School Annual Report 1929, p. 9-10, para. 32, DDN304, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁴² Kashim Ibrahim quoted in, S. L. Price, Senior Superintendent of Education, Bornu Primary School Annual Report 1929, p.10, para. 32, DDN304, National Archives, Kaduna.

better football ground is needed.”⁴³ Whether or not the football ground was improved is difficult to ascertain, but the football itself did improve, thanks again to the arrival of a Katsina graduate. The Acting Provincial Superintendent of Education, remarked, “Mallam Isa’s (Isa Koton-Karifi – just came from Higher College Katsina where he passed out first) coaching of the First Game in football has resulted in general all-round improvement.”⁴⁴

Fives for One and All

Although sports and the athletic imperative were an intrinsic part of the British colonial psyche, the introduction of any particular sport in Nigeria was not necessarily pursued in a coherent organized manner, emanating from official government policy. Further, the popularization of a given game was not necessarily done at the hands of the British themselves, but usually by Nigerians as they picked and chose what games most appealed to them. The history of the rather obscure game of ‘Eton Fives’ or simply ‘Fives’ exemplifies both of these principles clearly. The simplest way to describe the game is that it is something like squash in a smaller open air court, using one’s hands to hit the ball rather than a racquet.

In 1922 while teaching at a school in Birnin Kebbi, Sokoto Province, Sidney Hogben redirected the school’s repair funds towards constructing two Eton Fives courts. The game was such an immediate success among the students that four more courts were

⁴³ H. R. Phillips, Acting Provincial Superintendent of Education, Kabba Province Education Annual Report, 1932, p. 4, para. 17, DDN889, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁴⁴ H. R. Phillips, Acting Provincial Superintendent of Education, Kabba Province Education Annual Report, 1932, p. 6, para. 26, DDN889, National Archives, Kaduna.

built the following year in Sokoto by official permission.⁴⁵ In 1924, Hogben was transferred to Katsina to teach at Katsina College, bringing Fives along with him. By 1930, in addition to Birnin Kebbi, Sokoto, and Katsina, Fives was being played at least in Kano,⁴⁶ Yola,⁴⁷ and Kaduna.⁴⁸ In Sokoto Province, the game was so popular that Fives was an integral part of the annual school sports competition between the Sokoto and the Birnin Kebbi schools. So much so, in fact, that the former Director of Education for the Northern Region, Mr. F. M. Urling-Smith, donated a Fives Challenge Plate for the annual competition in 1929.⁴⁹

From that haphazard and humble beginning in an obscure corner of Northern Nigeria, by the mid-1960s, Fives had become something of a ‘national game’ in the Northern Region.⁵⁰ How was this accomplished, if not by colonial policy? It was largely through the efforts of one man, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, the first Premier of Northern Nigeria, and a legendary adherent of the game who used his authority within the colonial structures to advance the game. The Sardauna learned the game through the efforts of Hogben in Sokoto when he was still Ahmadu Rabah. Hogben’s role in introducing the game to the Sardauna and Nigeria was so valued that in

⁴⁵ S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. ix.

⁴⁶ E. J. Arnett, Resident, Kano Province Annual Report, 1924, p. 43, para. 106, File 181/1925, Archives Unit, Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano.

⁴⁷ G. S. Browne, Resident, Adamawa Province Annual Report, 1928, p. 90, para. 196, SNP17 9269 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁴⁸ Interview with Raphael Shonekan conducted by Wiebe Boer, 18th March, 2001, Jos, Plateau State.

⁴⁹ H. F. Blackwell, Resident, Sokoto Province Annual Report, 1929, p. 31, para. 111, SNP17 12127 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁵⁰ S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. ix.

his forward to one of Hogben's publications, the Sardauna listed that as one of three reasons it gave him great pleasure to recommend the book to the public.⁵¹

The future Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was said to have preferred cricket and hockey, but, "...not seeing them as an end in themselves."⁵² His counterpart, the Sardauna, however, was quite different in his approach to sport. Although also a member of the Katsina College Cricket First XI while a student there, the Sardauna's love for the game of Fives was legendary among colonial officials. R. E. Ellison recalled that it was at play that he first met the Sardauna, remarking, "The first time I ever saw the Sardauna was when I went on an educational visit to Katsina in January, 1930, no sorry, it was January 1931, during school holidays from Bornu. And I watched a game of fives being played and I was told that boy there is named Ahmadu Rabu (sic.). Fives was his great sporting outlet all through his life."⁵³ According to A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, if a Nigerian or British official worked with the Sardauna, they almost had to know how to play Fives.⁵⁴ This was something Roger Langley Baker learned in 1959 while principal of Kaduna Capital School. Among the students were a number of children and wards of the Sardauna. When he introduced a dining rule which upset the members of the Sardauna's family, Baker was summoned to see him at his personal Fives court next to the Premier's residence, the best place to get informal face time with the political leader

⁵¹ Ahmadu Bello, 'Foreward', in S. J. Hogben, *An Introduction to the Islamic States of Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. v.

⁵² Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1991, p. 18.

⁵³ Interview of F. D. Hibbert and R. E. Ellison by A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, Oxford, 4 July 1969, p. 55, Mss. Afr. S. 1332, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford University, England.

⁵⁴ Interview with A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, St. Antony's College, Oxford, conducted by Wiebe Boer, 22 February, 2001.

of Northern Nigeria.⁵⁵ Isa Kaita, who served in the Sardauna's government as Minister of Works, Minister of Natural Resources and Minister of Education in succession and learned Fives while at Katsina College, wrote, "I played Fives very well and continued playing with the late Premier up to the time of his death."⁵⁶

In his own words in his 1962 autobiography, the Sardauna wrote of Fives, "It is a first-class game and is the quickest way of getting exercise if you haven't much time. We now want to persuade people to play it all over the North."⁵⁷ The Sardauna's love of the game ensured that the sport would be embraced by the British and Nigerian elite of colonial Northern Nigeria and that it would be a part of the athletic program of schools across the region. Fives rose to such a level of respect that in both 1961 and 1965, Fives teams from Northern Nigeria and Eton exchanged visits. During one of the visits the Sardauna himself was part of the delegation, even playing the game without removing all his robes. It must have been quite a sight. Dr. Birley, the Eton headmaster, remarked of the occasion, that "although considerably discommoded by his robes, he played in great style, displaying a remarkable back-hand shot at times."⁵⁸ Three weeks before his assassination on January 15, 1966, the Sardauna wrote of Fives thus, "Not only is this my favourite recreation but it is a game which has continued to grow in popularity in many parts of the country and has given pleasure and relaxation to thousands of people both young and old."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Roger Langley Baker, *Reflections on His Work in the Colonial Education Service in Nigeria, 1950—1966*, p. 18, Mss. Afr. S. 2138, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford University, England.

⁵⁶ Alhaji Sani Lugard, ed., *Isa Kaita: Wazirin Katsina*, Katsina: Newsworld Publications Ltd., 1991, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Sir Ahmadu Bello, *My Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 29.

⁵⁸ S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. ix.

⁵⁹ Ahmadu Bello, 'Foreward', in S. J. Hogben, *An Introduction to the Islamic States of Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. vi.

Through the misuse of colonial education funds by an enterprising colonial education officer, and subsequently through the embracing of a game by a young man who would grow up to be a significant political figure, the obscure game of Fives was spread throughout Northern Nigeria. A clear example of the haphazard nature of the spread of sporting activities in Nigeria, this does however also clearly show the importance of Nigerians in that spread, in this case of an activity so elitist even most Britons do not know about it! Today, little is known of Eton Fives in Nigeria, and although a Nigeria Fives Association still exists under the Ministry of Sports, the game is no longer common beyond the men who still play on the famous Fives courts the Sardauna built next to Government House (now Arewa House) when he was the Premier. The Sardauna's own unmarked grave is literally a stone's throw away, his death marking the wane of the game as it no longer was of political importance. This again exhibited another important lesson in recreation in Nigeria – that in spite of great efforts by the elite – whether foreign or indigenous, a game would never become widely popular without it being embraced by the masses.

Sardauna's Sporting Fanaticism: An Islamic Anomaly?

(ATTACH HOGBEN'S LIST OF EMIRATE HEIRARCHY)

As discussed earlier, the spread of Islam was said to have severely diminished the practice of wrestling and other extra-colonial Hausa forms of recreation across much of what is today Northern Nigeria because Islam devalued sporting activities.⁶⁰ In early twentieth century Katsina, for instance, the Native Administration disallowed people to

⁶⁰ Sigrid Paul, "The Wrestling Tradition and its Social Function," in William Baker and J. A. Mangan, eds., *Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History*, New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1987, p. 27.

play chess following the decision of a noted Islamic scholar against the game.⁶¹ Another example is in Kano when in 1915 the Islamic rulers of the Native Administration clearly exhibited their distaste for the playing of games at the Kano Provincial School.⁶²

Considering the cultural stigma on sport, one would imagine that the Sardauna's love of Fives was an anomaly among the Northern Islamic elite. The truth is far from it, and numerous examples can be found throughout the colonial period of high ranking Islamic officials supporting sport. As early as 1916, the Shehu of Bornu exhibited his interest in sports by permitting his son Abba Kiari to play polo.⁶³ The Shehu showed further interest in sports by attending the finals of the Bornu Primary School's first organized intra-school athletic competition in 1926.⁶⁴ In 1930, the Emir of Kano attended the Kano Middle School Sports Day, an event that was, "...followed with enthusiasm by a large concourse of people from the town. The meeting augured well for increasing the interest of the townspeople in the activities of the school."⁶⁵ In 1931, the Sokoto Provincial Superintendent of Education commented that the Emir of Yauri took great interest in the football played at the Yelwa Elementary School.⁶⁶ In Yelwa, conceivably because of the Emir's interest, the District Officer promised to supply better equipment for football. Perhaps he should also have promised uniforms in light of the comments of the Acting Superintendent of Education who noted that, "Football is played

⁶¹ James Hubbard, *Education Under Colonial Rule, A History of Katsina College, 1921-1942*, New York: University Press of America, 2000, p. 50.

⁶² H. R. Palmer, Acting Resident, Kano Province Annual Report, 1915, para. 162, File 108/1915/16, Archives Unit, Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano.

⁶³ W. B. Thomson, (Acting) Resident, Bornu Province Annual Report, 1916, p. 77, para. 74, File 2448, Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri Bornu State.

⁶⁴ P. de Putron, (Acting) Resident, Bornu Province Annual Report, 1926, p. 43, para. 143, File 2420, Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Bornu State.

⁶⁵ H. O. Lindsell, Resident, Annual Report on Kano Province, 1930, p. 38, para. 152, File 438, Archives Unit, Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano.

⁶⁶ Mr. Rankin, Sokoto Province Supt. Of Ed., Report on Yelwa Elementary School, 7.5.31 in Yelwa Elementary School, para. 6, Den. 226, National Archives, Kaduna.

on six evenings a week, and all boys are keen and active. They seem to be particularly healthy and clean, though some have no clothes.”⁶⁷ In January 1932, the Sultan – the highest Islamic authority in Nigeria – and his entire Council attended the Sokoto Middle School House Sports. Later in the same year, the Sultan and his Council attended daily for the duration of the inter-school sports competition between the Sokoto, Birnin Kebbi and Argungu schools.⁶⁸ And then, of course, there is the celebrated support of polo by generations of the royal family of Katsina that will be discussed further elsewhere.

Football in the North

But what of football? During the colonial days, most of the Islamic elite preferred more high brow games like cricket, field hockey, and especially polo. According to Neil Skinner, a colonial officer in Northern Nigeria in the 1940s and 1950s, members of this elite, “...would not have allowed themselves to be seen dead running around a football field, or for that matter, wearing short pants.”⁶⁹ And Trevor Clark, writing on resistance from Katsina College students to wearing shorts for physical drill, wrote that such dress was, “...unpopular with gilded youngsters whose culture regarded short clothes after puberty as embarrassing except on the farm or when worn by labourers...”⁷⁰ Some members of the rising young Northern elite played football any way, avoiding this problem by not donning shorts. Colonial officer D. H. E. Vesey described playing football in Gombe in 1930 thus, “Two ‘Mallams’ played, school teachers, both young (about 20-25) and both good. They all use all kinds of odd clothes, many of the boys

⁶⁷ L. R. O. Norwood, Acting Provincial Superintendent of Education, Inspection Notes of 22nd – 28th December, 1931, p. 2, in Yelwa Elementary School, Den. 226, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁶⁸ M. G. Shillington, Provincial Supt. Of Education (Acting), Sokoto Province Annual Report, 1932 pp. 9-11, para. 5d, DDN892, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁶⁹ Neil Skinner, *Burden at Sunset: Last Days of Empire*, (Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, n.d.): p. 77.

⁷⁰ Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1991, p. 17.

practically nothing and the ‘Mallams’ rather a lot of flowing robes.”⁷¹ Another example is that of Islamic law teachers trained in Khartoum who participated in football games at the Kano Provincial Middle School already in 1934.⁷² For students from the ‘pagan’ (Non-Islamic) North, now known as the Middle Belt Region, football was more acceptable, and was declared to be ‘the most useful’ of the ‘standard games’ for them to partake in for physical exercise already in 1927.⁷³

This is not to say that football was not played across the region early on in the colonial experience. From colonial records, one can ascertain that football was played quite widely in educational institutions across the region well before the Second World War. Football was being played in Katsina by 1915;⁷⁴ Maiduguri⁷⁵ and Yola by 1927;⁷⁶ Bauchi by 1928;⁷⁷ Bida, Niger Province,⁷⁸ Ilorin,⁷⁹ Zaria,⁸⁰ Sokoto, Birnin-Kebbi, Sokoto Province,⁸¹ and Toro, Bauchi Province, where football was said to be “our chief diversion” by 1929;⁸² Gombe, Bauchi Province,⁸³ Jos, Plateau Province,⁸⁴ Nasarawa and

⁷¹ D. H. E. Vesey, “Letters to father and others, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford, *Mss. Afr. S. 644*, September 17, 1930, p.1

⁷² H. O. Lindsell, Annual Report, Kano Province 1934 Part I, p. 8, File 1324, Archives Unit, Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano.

⁷³ Stanley A. Hammond, *Pagan Schools: The Training of Teachers*, 1927, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford, *Mss. Afr. S. 1325*, p. 21.

⁷⁴ H. R. Palmer, Acting Resident, Kano Province Annual Report for Half Year Ending 30th June 1915, para. 27, File 382 P/1915, Archives Department Kano State Culture and History Bureau, Kano.

⁷⁵ T. H. Haughton, Acting Resident, Bornu Province Annual Report, 1927, p. 46, para. 212, File 2419, Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Bornu State.

⁷⁶ G. S. Browne, Resident, Adamawa Province Annual Report, 1927, p. 80, para. 292, SNP17 K. 6826 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁷⁷ C. A. Woodhouse, Resident, Bauchi Province Annual Report, 1928, p. 43, para. 128, SNP17 8990 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁷⁸ I. R. A. Hodge, Superintendent of Education, Bida, Bida Primary School Annual Report, 1929, para. 4, DDN260, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁷⁹ I. R. A. Hodge, Superintendent of Education, Bida, Bida Primary School Annual Report, 1929, para. 4, DDN260, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁸⁰ T. R. Batten, Zaria Primary School Annual Report, 1929, p. 9, para. 18, DDN263, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁸¹ H. F. Blackwell, Resident, Sokoto Province Annual Report, 1929, p.31, para. 111, SNP17 12127 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁸² Toro School Annual Report, 1929, p. 11, para. 47, DDN256, National Archives, Kaduna.

Katsina-Ala, Benue Province, by 1930;⁸⁵ Biu, Bornu Province,⁸⁶ Kaduna,⁸⁷ Gumel, Kano Province,⁸⁸ and Yelwa, Sokoto Province, by 1931;⁸⁹ Okene, Ogori, Lokoja, Kabba, and Dekina, all of Kabba Province,⁹⁰ and Kano by 1932;⁹¹ and Abuja (Suleja), Niger Province, by 1933.⁹²

In most cases, the discourse about football in the colonial records implies that by these dates – the first mention of the game in the records I had access to – football in each of these places was already quite developed at the school in question. This entails that one can assume that in each place the game was actually introduced several years earlier, probably region wide sometime in the 1920s. For instance, although the first reference to football in Bauchi in the colonial records is 1928, Tafawa Balewa’s biographer writes that the future Prime Minister was introduced to football when in primary school in Bauchi between 1922 and 1925.⁹³ The same is the case for Kashim Ibrahim, schooling in

⁸³ D. H. E. Vesey, Letters to father and others, letter dated September 17, 1930, Mss. Afr. S. 644, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford University, England.

⁸⁴ T. C. Newton, Resident, Bauchi Province Annual Report, 1930, p. 47, para. 192, SNP17 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁸⁵ W. Morgan, Resident, Benue Province Annual Report, 1930, p. 51, para. 199 & p. 52, para. 207, SNP17 14639 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁸⁶ D. H. E. Vesey, Letters to father and others, letter dated October 11, 1931, Mss. Afr. S. 644, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford University, England.

⁸⁷ Lt. Comdr. A. G. G. Webb, Superintendent of Education, Handing over notes, 1st April, 1931, No. K. J. 3/1930/6, written to J. R. A. Hodge, Assistant Director of Education, Northern Provinces, p. 4, para. 15, Den. 234, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁸⁸ Inspection Report of 17-3-31, Gumel Elementary School, DDN206, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁸⁹ Mr. Rankin, Sokoto Provincial Superintendent of Education, Report on Yelwa Elementary School, 7.5.31, para. 6, Den. 226, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁹⁰ H. R. Phillips, Acting Provincial Superintendent of Education, Kabba Province Education Annual Report, 1932; p. 4, para. 17; p.6, para. 26; p. 8, para. 37; p. 9, para. 46, DDN889, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁹¹ H. O. Lindsell, Kano Province Annual Report, 1932, p. 36, para. 168, SNP 17/2 18956, Archives Unit, Kano State Culture and History Bureau, Kano.

⁹² G. A. J. Bieneman, Chief Inspector of Education, Northern Provinces, Elementary School, Abuja, Inspection of 14th February, 1933, DDN1324, National Archives, Kaduna.

⁹³ Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1991, p. 9.

Maiduguri during the same years.⁹⁴ In addition, it is difficult to ascertain when football was already being played outside of colonial institutional settings. For example, Raphael Shonekan remembers football being played in Kaduna in the late 1920s where his father worked for the colonial service in Northern Nigeria as did many educated Southerners. Shonekan commented, “It was common among children. Every place children of about age eight or nine went together they used tennis balls to play among themselves. They learned how to dribble, and how to play soccer, very common, very very common.”⁹⁵ And even long before, in his early days at the Church Missionary Society station in Zaria, Dr. Walter Miller recalled playing football (and hockey) with the boys of the small Christian settlement.⁹⁶ Dr. Miller moved to Zaria already in 1905, so this is certainly by far the earliest reference to football being played in the North I have come across.

School Sports

Sports days were an extremely common occurrence in schools early on, becoming increasingly sophisticated as the twentieth century progressed. The earliest mention of a sports day I encountered was that of the Bornu Free Slaves Home, not technically a school, in 1906. In the report on the event, the institution’s superintendent wrote, ““The annual sports took place on the last day of the year and proved a most successful meeting. I am greatly indebted to the Resident and all Europeans in the station for their attendance and help. Among the events were the races for boys and small girls, donkey racing, races

⁹⁴ Akinjide Osuntokun, *Power Broker: A Biography of Sir Kashim Ibrahim*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1987, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Interview of Raphael Shonekan conducted by Wiebe Boer, 18th March, 2001, Jos, Plateau State.

⁹⁶ Walter Miller, *Reflections of a Pioneer*, London: Church Missionary Society, 1936, p. 83.

for girls, carrying water pots filled with water, corn beating competition, throwing the spear and hidden treasure quest.”⁹⁷

From sporting contests between competitors within the same institution, it was a natural progression for contests to be expanded to include other schools. While in school in Kaduna from 1929 to 1932, Raphael Shonekan remembers that there were organized inter-primary school football matches between government and mission schools in Kaduna.⁹⁸ By the 1920s, inter-school competition was a relatively common feature of football and other sports in Northern Nigeria, providing social interaction through games between students of different schools.

Many of the most common inter-school contests were within the same town, others within the same Province. As discussed earlier, Sokoto Provincial schools in Argungu, Birnin-Kebbi, and Sokoto had an active inter-school athletic program as was the case for the schools within Kabba Province where government and mission schools competed regularly.⁹⁹

In addition, although consciously divided educationally, sometimes contests were held between Muslim students and their ‘pagan’ contemporaries, many of whom were at the time being rapidly Christianized. In 1932, a football match was organized between the students of the Bauchi Elementary Training Centre and their contemporaries in Toro. The Bauchi centre was established to train Northern Nigerian Muslims to teach in provincial elementary schools, while the Toro school was for training ‘pagan’ teachers, at

⁹⁷ Allan Parsons, Superintendent, The Bornu Freed Slaves Home Annual Report, 1906, in S. G. O. F. Beckless Gall, Resident, Bornu Province Annual Report, 1906, pp. 7-8, File 2445, Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Bornu State.

⁹⁸ Interview with Raphael Shonekan conducted by Wiebe Boer, 18th March 2001, Jos, Plateau State.

⁹⁹ H. R. Phillips, Acting Provincial Superintendent of Education, Kabba Province Education Annual Report, 1932, p. 2, para. 7; p. 6, para. 26, DDN889, Ministry of Education Files, National Archives, Kaduna.

the time the highest level of education available to non-Muslims in the North. Although not far away in distance, the two schools and their students were separated by history, culture, and more than anything else, artificially imposed colonial boundaries. According to the 1932 Education Report, “One of the most interesting events of the year was the visit of a football team from Bauchi Elementary Training Centre to play Toro. The visit was the greatest success and has been the means of establishing a valuable alliance between the Toro men and their Muslim contemporaries.”¹⁰⁰ Young men divided by colonial policy, here brought back together through organised colonial sport.

Distances in the Northern Region were vast, and transportation systems limited, entailing that competitions between provinces were difficult to organize. In the late 1920s, however, such contests were held on an experimental basis between different provinces, exposing these young Northern Nigerians to parts of the region they may otherwise never have seen. As Francis Hibbert, an education officer posted to Bauchi in 1929 who realized his students were not very exposed when they were in awe when taken to a nearby hill, wrote, “In order to help them to see what other places looked like, educational visits and inter-school football and athletics matches were encouraged and were always popular.”¹⁰¹ In 1928, for example, there was an athletic meeting involving football, cricket, and athletic sports between the Primary and Craft Schools of Bornu and Bauchi Provinces. According to the colonial Resident of Bauchi, “The meeting was most successful in every way, and an admirable spirit was shown on both sides. It is hoped

¹⁰⁰ Bauchi-Plateau Provinces Education Annual Report, 1932, p.1, para. 3, ADN890, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹⁰¹ Francis Hibbert, *Schools in Northern Nigeria*, 1973, pp. 5-6, Mss. Afr. S. 1960, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford University, England.

that it may become an annual affair.”¹⁰² This pioneering Inter-Provincial sporting event blossomed into a great tradition throughout most of Northern Nigeria.

The Bauchi-Bornu series did continue, with Yola schools added as well by 1931. In the Christmas 1931 event, held in Yola, students and colonial officials from all three provinces assembled for several days of highly organized football and athletics, cricket no longer part of the festivities. Although Yola participated, the real contest was between Bauchi and Bornu, Bauchi winning the football and Bornu winning the athletics, thanks to a superb performance by Abubakar, described by one colonial official as “our star performer and captain of football.”¹⁰³ In the 1938 edition, hosted by Bauchi, the Provincial Resident and the Emir were both present, and one of the Katsina trained teachers, Mallam Abubakar Bauchi, the future Prime Minister, served as the starting official for the track races. The football matches at the time were only 25 minutes per half.¹⁰⁴ On the western side of Northern Nigeria, a well developed inter-Provincial sporting tradition for both football and cricket developed between the Primary and Elementary Schools of Bida and Ilorin, a series that in 1929 was among “The outstanding events of the year...”¹⁰⁵

Inter-school sports, especially football, became such an important feature of Northern education that an entire file for it is housed in the Ministry of Education Files in

¹⁰² C. A. Woodhouse, Resident, Bauchi Province Annual Report, 1928, p. 43, para. 128, SNP17 8990 Vol. I, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹⁰³ Randal E. Ellison, papers, Education Department, Maiduguri, letter dated December 27th, 1931, Mss. Afr. S. 421, Rhodes House Archives, Oxford University, England. See also Bauchi-Plateau Provinces Education Annual Report, 1932, p. 16-17, para. 52, ADN890, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹⁰⁴ Memorandum No. 74/226, 4th March, 1938, From the Provincial Superintendent of Education, Bauchi Province, Bauchi to the Assistant Director of Education, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, Re. Adamawa-Bauchi-Bornu Sports Meeting, 1938, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹⁰⁵ I. R. A. Hodge, Superintendent of Education, Bida Primary School Annual Report, 1929, para. 4; pp. 8-9, para. 15, DDN260, National Archives, Kaduna.

the National Archives, Kaduna.¹⁰⁶ The correspondence in the file exhibits the detailed attention even paid to sports competitions. The major issues of discussion revolved around the Triangular Sports meetings that had continued between Adamawa, Bauchi, and Bornu Provinces, and the annual series for Niger, Kabba, and Ilorin Provinces started by 1938. By 1946, a Triangular series had been launched between Sokoto, Kano, and Zaria Provinces. Although left out initially, Katsina was subsequently added, leaving only Plateau and Benue Provinces out of the equation for such competitions. The correspondence includes requests for permission to travel for competitions, requests for funds that were sometimes denied, detailed follow up reports for any sporting competition,¹⁰⁷ discussions of rules and regulations of the football matches and track and field events for the competitions, and so on. The correspondence was often at the most senior provincial and regional levels of the educational hierarchy, often including the Northern Provinces Director of Education.

At a later stage in the correspondence, there is even a copy of a question submitted in the Northern House of Assembly requesting the Northern Regional Minister of Education and Social Welfare to consider holding a large annual sports competition for the best athletes of all provincial Middle Schools, “In order to promote the spirit of sportsmanship among the Middle School boys...”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna. The file contains correspondence ranging from 1937 to 1955.

¹⁰⁷ Prompt reports on these sports competitions were considered so important for the records that there is a 1946 letter from the Assistant Director of Education, Northern Provinces, to the Education Officer, Katsina Provinces enquiring why no report on the recent sports meeting in Katsina had been submitted. Letter No. 1092/109A Assistant Director of Education, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, to the Education Officer, Katsina Province, Katsina, 20th March, 1946, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹⁰⁸ Northern House of Assembly, Question No. w. 20, nd, possibly 1952, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

Although to some such matters would appear trivial, to a colonial state carefully moulding these youths for future leadership roles, all interactions with others had to be carefully orchestrated. Keeping Plateau and Benue Provinces, the most thoroughly pagan and Christian of the Northern Provinces, out of the equation may have been for this reason precisely – colonial officials did not want too much interaction between Northern Muslims and their non-Muslim peers. Further, sports was used for the purpose of character building and fair play, and so such activities had to be carefully structured to ensure such was exhibited, especially to the numerous elites and commoners of the local communities who attended the events as spectators.

Some of the more interesting correspondence outside the realm of the discussion on Inter Provincial competitions includes a request for funds made in 1938 to hold a triangular football competition on an intra-provincial level between Azare, Potiskum and Yerwa of Bornu Province. The funds were not granted by the Assistant Director of Education, Northern Provinces and so the event could not hold.¹⁰⁹ But if football was being played in these obscure places by 1938, the dissemination of the game must have been quite widespread verifying the 1935 claim of the Bornu Resident that “Football is keenly played in all schools, and matches have been played between several schools where the distances between them are not too great.”¹¹⁰

There are also occasional references to the involvement of girls in sports days, although at a rather peripheral level. For example, during the 1949 Inter Provincial

¹⁰⁹ Memorandum No. 26/Vol. 4/295 from Superintendent of Education, Bornu Province, Maiduguri, to the Assistant Director of Education, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, 5th September, 1938 and Letter 1092/93A from the Assistant Director of Education, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, to the Education Officer, Bornu Province, Maiduguri, 9th September, 1938, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹¹⁰ A. E. V. Walwyn, Esquire, Resident, Bornu Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 35, para. 98, File 2430 Centre For Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Bornu State.

Middle School Sports hosted by Sokoto and attended by Kano and Katsina, the female students provided light hearted relief to the tension filled atmosphere of the male dominated competition. The report reads, “The grim atmosphere of competition was relieved by a few events of lighter nature including ‘Musical Chairs on Donkeys’ and a ‘Tulu’ race for girls from the Girls Training Centre and Town Elementary School.”¹¹¹ In the same event the following year, this time including Zaria Province and hosted by Katsina, girls again played the same role, this time, “The Middle School girls and junior boys provided entertainment of a lighter type including an egg and spoon race, 3-legged race and a potatoe (sic.) race.”¹¹² That in the last decade of the colonial period girls involvement in sporting competitions remained at this peripheral level should well explain why it has been so difficult to include the role of women in this history of cultural diffusion. Their active involvement in sports throughout Nigeria came at a much later post-colonial date, actually superseding Nigeria’s men in Olympic success and international football performances.

Finally, a dialogue also begins regarding competing against Southerners. In 1949, the Ilorin Provincial Education Officer, following a meeting with the Principal of Warri Secondary School, Warri Province, requested permission to take a team from Ilorin Middle School to Warri for a football match. The Ilorin official, remarking on the additional educational value of such a trip and echoing the views of his Bauchi-based counterpart twenty years earlier, wrote, “Although it is rather a long journey, the trip

¹¹¹ C. K. Brooke-Hunt, Provincial Education Officer, Sokoto Province, Report No. 27/319, Inter Provincial Middle School Sports 1949, 19th February, 1949, p. 2, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹¹² P. Dickinson, for Provincial Education Officer, Katsina Province, Report No. 16/516, Quadrangular Inter-Provincial Middle School Sports 1950, 27th February, 1950, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

would have considerable educational value as the boys would have an opportunity of seeing the Sapele docks and saw mills as well as experiencing for themselves the rain-forests of which they have never seen.”¹¹³ The request was granted,¹¹⁴ but unfortunately no follow up report could be found. Just as football (and other sports) had already done for youths across the Northern Region, here football began contributing its own to breaking down the boundaries that still existed in a massive way between North and South. In March 1950, education officers from provinces in the North were asked to start considering the “...possibilities of the Northern boy competing against his Southern counterpart.” This was followed across the region by similar discussions and plans to centralize Northern competitions to pick the best athletes for competition against the South.¹¹⁵ As of 1952, nothing of the sort had yet been organized, entailing that less than a decade before the demise of colonial rule in Nigeria, interaction between the future leaders of the North and their counterparts in the South remained officially limited.

Depth of Diffusion

As all of this exhibits, football and other sports were spread widely through education institutions in the Northern region long before the Second World War. However, it is important to note that the number of actual students in school at the time was not high. In Sokoto Province in 1940, for example, there were only 1,050 students

¹¹³ Provincial Education Officer, Ilorin Province, letter No. 302/447 to the Deputy Director of Education, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, 27th April, 1949, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹¹⁴ In his permission letter, J. B. Gott, the Deputy Director of Education, Northern Provinces, recommended the education officer request the use of the Native Administration lorry from the Resident and also expressed his fear of what secondary school boys in Warri would do to younger boys from Ilorin. Deputy Director of Education, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, letter No. DDN. 1092/141A, to Provincial Education Officer, Ilorin Provinces, Ilorin, 29th April, 1949, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹¹⁵ P. Dickinson, Provincial Education Officer, Niger Province, Letter No. 33/480 to the Director of Education, Northern Region, Kaduna, 4th January, 1952, Inter-School Football Matches File, DDN. 1092, Vol. II, National Archives, Kaduna.

(including 150 girls) in all the elementary schools in a province with 2,000,000 people.¹¹⁶ In Adamawa Province in the same year, there were 1,286 students.¹¹⁷ Although Adamawa's population was less than that of Sokoto, the total is still rather small overall. Thus the actual diffusion and popularization of these games likely did not penetrate much beyond those few who did go to school. As far as football is concerned, the fact is that even in the 1950s most teams representing northern cities in Challenge Cup tournament – then and now the premier nationwide football tournament – were Southerners working in the North. Further, Anthony Kirk-Greene, one of the keenest European observers of Nigeria, and a District Officer in Northern Nigeria for much of the 1950s did not recall ever seeing a football match being played in the region, although he did remember cricket and hockey games, the latter being his sport of first choice.¹¹⁸

Although not much of a footballer himself, the Sardauna did recognize football's appeal and sponsored numerous tournaments throughout the North, including ones for matches among schools as well as for teams from Public Works Departments when he was Northern Regional Minister of Works in 1953.¹¹⁹ The Sardauna was not the only Northern politician to recognize the importance of football. For instance, Alhaji Usman Nagogo, the Emir of Katsina, attended the Governor's Cup final between Calabar and Kano at the King George V Stadium in Lagos in 1954.¹²⁰ The Emir of Kano, Alhaji Muhammadu Sanusi also got involved in the game through his sponsorship of a

¹¹⁶ R. D. Ross, Resident, Sokoto Province Annual Report, 1940, p.3, para. 5, SNP17 33155, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹¹⁷ A. A. Cullen, Acting Resident, Adamawa Province Annual Report, 1940, SNP17 33248, National Archives, Kaduna.

¹¹⁸ Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, Interview conducted by Wiebe Boer, St. Antony's College, Oxford, 22 February 2001.

¹¹⁹ "Minister Donates Football Trophies," *West African Pilot*, Monday, February 23, 1953, p. 4.

¹²⁰ See "Calabar Defeats Kano to Take Away Governor's Cup To East," *West African Pilot*, Monday, October 4, 1954, p. 4.

tournament for senior teams of Kano's Social Welfare Clubs. Finally, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first prime minister, became the patron of the Nigeria Referees Association, an affiliate body of the NFA, in 1958.¹²¹ Whether these Nigerian politicians were following the lead of their European predecessors who were also known to sponsor sporting events, or if it was from genuine interest in football is difficult to ascertain.¹²²

What is known, however, is that as the colonial era came to an end, a well organized and established sporting tradition existed in select circles throughout the Northern Region, an organized sporting tradition that I myself would participate in as a long distance runner while in secondary school in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A key facet of this tradition was the game of football. Although still dominated by Southerners in the North in the 1950s, the foundation had been laid for the game's massive rise to popularity in the post-colonial era. Today, football fields are as ever present a part of the landscape of villages, towns, and cities in the North as they are in the South, as are players and fans of the game.

¹²¹ "Tafawa Balewa Accepts Patronage of NRA," *West African Pilot*, Thursday, January 16, 1958, p. 4.

¹²² Sir Rex Niven, a man who walked for recreation since he was not good at games, for instance, sponsored a tournament for football in Maiduguri when he was Acting Resident of Bornu during World War II. Sir Rex Niven, *Nigerian Kaleidoscope: Memoirs of a Colonial Servant*, London: C. Hurst & Company, 1982, p. 179.