

= Sunday football in Northern Ireland =

Sunday football in Northern Ireland (Ulster Scots : Sundaye fitba en Nairnairn) has been a controversial issue . Until 2008 , the Irish Football Association (IFA) under IFA Article 27 , prohibited any clubs affiliated with them from playing association football matches on Sunday . The ban initially came from Northern Ireland 's Protestant Christian majority 's observance of Sunday as the Sabbath (a day of rest) , but was also a way to combat a perceived encroachment on their culture by Catholics . Since the abolition of the ban , teams can play matches on Sunday if they have mutual agreement , although some teams such as Linfield have club rules against such games .

The Northern Ireland national team also had a policy of not playing on Sundays . This policy was later amended to allow Northern Ireland to play on Sundays away from home before being unofficially suspended due to changes in UEFA rules regarding playing dates for international competition qualifiers . On 29 March 2015 , the national team played their first home match on a Sunday against Finland .

= = History = =

Prior to the 1930s , the IFA had no official ban on Sunday football . However , unofficially no matches were scheduled on Sundays . In 1898 , the Leinster Football Association requested permission for matches on Sunday , which was unanimously rejected by the IFA as " very detrimental to the interests of the game " . In 1901 , the Munster Football Association made a similar request which was also turned down . It is not known when the official ban on Sunday football was instituted but it is known that it was created in the 1930s . The arguments in favour of the ban when was introduced are not recorded , but it is known that the nationalist and predominantly Catholic Gaelic Athletic Association decided to play games on Sundays and the unionist and predominantly Protestant IFA felt that this was an encroachment on their " soccer territory " and their Protestant culture . It has been stated by historians that it might also have been due to strict Protestant sabbatarianism that led to the ban . When the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) broke away from the IFA in 1921 following allegations of the IFA having an alleged bias in favour of Belfast clubs , one of their first actions was to permit football being played on Sunday under their jurisdiction . While the IFA maintained a ban on Sunday football for all senior and junior men 's football , the independent Northern Ireland Women 's Football Association (NIWFA) played their matches on Sundays .

= = Effect = =

The IFA ban on football on Sundays was strictly enforced so that no club affiliated with the IFA could play football in Northern Ireland on Sundays . This included the Northern Ireland national team who also refused to play international matches on Sunday . Before the 1982 FIFA World Cup , it was noted that Northern Ireland would play France on a Sunday . As a result , the IFA relaxed their Sunday football ban to permit the Northern Ireland national team to play football on Sundays outside of Northern Ireland . As a result of this , born @-@ again Christian player Johnny Jameson refused to play for Northern Ireland in that match because it was on Sunday . In 2001 , Cliftonville attempted to play a friendly match against Derry City , who are based in County Londonderry but are affiliated with the FAI , on a Sunday . The IFA initially permitted this , but the match was cancelled after complaints from the North West of Ireland Football Association despite Cliftonville arguing that since Derry City organized it , it was outside of the IFA 's jurisdiction . The ban was also identified as causing problems for ethnic minority players ; the Chinese Football Association Northern Ireland , whose players mostly work in the catering industry , noted that its members often had " no choice " but to play on Sundays and pointed out the ban interfered with outreach efforts .

= = Abolition of ban = =

Towards the start of the 21st century , several clubs made moves to abolish the ban on Sunday football in Northern Ireland . In 2000 Newry Town put forward a motion to play football on Sunday on commercial grounds . However , it was rejected by the IFA overwhelmingly on moral grounds despite Newry Town stating they " do not wish to impinge on anyone 's Christian or moral ethics . " In 2003 , Cliftonville started a campaign to permit Sunday football if both clubs consented . In 2005 , Armagh City and Ballynure Old Boys made a similar request to play on Sundays . Again the IFA rejected it on the grounds that it would interfere with the NIWFA 's fixtures . A year later , the request was made again and members of the IFA voted in favour of it 69 @-@ 28 however they failed to reach a 75 % majority needed due to the NIWFA 's clubs voting against it and thus the Sunday football ban remained in place . Maintaining the ban meant that Northern Ireland was the only country in UEFA which had a ban on Sunday football . This decision was criticized in the media who viewed the ban as outdated . Howard Wells , the IFA chief executive , took legal advice after it was suggested that the ban on Sunday football might not be supported in the European Court of Human Rights if a lawsuit was brought against them . After the failure of the 2006 motion , the predicted legal challenge , supported by the Equality Commission , emerged on the grounds of religious discrimination .

In 2007 , despite opposition from the Democratic Unionist Party , the IFA voted 91 @-@ 14 to remove IFA Article 27 from their constitution . It was replaced by IFA Article 36.b , which stated that no football would be scheduled on Sunday , but matches on Sunday could be played if both teams and the organizing competition agreed . It also stated that no player or club could be punished if they refused to play on Sunday . The ban on Sunday football in Northern Ireland was lifted on 1 June 2008 . The first match held on Sunday since the ban was lifted was an Irish Premiership match between Glentoran and Bangor at The Oval . Before the match there was a protest against it by members of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster led by Reverend David McIlveen . Despite the lifting of the ban on Sunday football , Article 36.b has been used very rarely .

Some clubs maintain a club ban on Sunday football . Linfield , the owners of Windsor Park , used as the home ground of the Northern Ireland national team , had it written in their club rules in Article 24 that no games would be permitted on their grounds on Sundays . Since this could have prevented Windsor Park hosting cup finals or international matches , Linfield members voted to change Article 24 to state that no games involving Linfield could take place at Windsor Park on Sundays . Ballymena United decided to play a friendly tournament in the Republic of Ireland on a Sunday . As a result , one of their sponsors pulled out of the club .

Despite the scrapping of the ban on Sunday football , the Northern Ireland national team continued to negotiate the fixture dates of friendlies and international competition qualifiers so that they were not on Sundays . In 2014 , UEFA changed the match date allocation for qualifying competitions from mutual agreement between associations to randomly selected dates from a computer . The IFA were informed this might mean matches on Sunday and they signed in agreement prior to the draw for UEFA Euro 2016 qualifying . When the draw was made , it was determined that Northern Ireland would play Finland at home on 29 March 2015 in Northern Ireland 's first international match at home on Sunday . Jim Allister , leader of the Traditional Unionist Voice party , questioned the choice of date ; the IFA replied that they had no control over it but accepted that some fans might boycott the match because it was on a Sunday .