Football is loved by millions of people all over the world and women have played an important part in shaping the game throughout history. Women’s football has seen considerable growth in participation in recent years, with the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) aiming to have 60 million women and girls playing by 2026.

Women may have been playing football since it was invented. Before there was the football we know today, there was a similar game called cuju, often written as ts’u-chü, which literally translates to 'kick-ball'. A competitive game originating from ancient China, cuju involves kicking a ball through an opening and into a net, without the use of hands. Sound familiar?

The earliest record of cuju can be traced back to Chinese literature written more than 2,000 years ago. A bronze mirror in the FIFA Museum collection illustrates a man and woman playing together during the Song dynasty of 960 – 1279. The Chinese painter Du Jin even depicts women playing cuju in an artwork dating back to the 15th Century.

The first ever UEFA Women’s Euro was played in 1984, with qualifying rounds played in 1982. However, as only 16 teams took part, less than half of the UEFA membership at the time, the competition could not be granted official status. The qualifiers comprised of four national football squads, England, Denmark, Italy and Sweden. The tournament was concluded with a dramatic penalty shoot-out that saw Sweden triumph against England. The first official FIFA Women’s World Cup was held seven years later in 1991, with the US women taking the trophy.

The Canadian striker Christine Sinclair holds the goalscoring record of both men’s and women’s international football. In April 2022, she scored her 189th goal in 310 matches. She also holds the title for the most capped women’s player in international football.

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