

Even the name 'Panini' sounded charismatic, other-worldly."

And Panini did it properly. Previous albums by the likes of FKS and A&BC had left much to be desired. Late signings often appeared in their previous club's kit or, worse, had their new kit 'drawn' onto their card. Panini struck a deal with the PFA that ensured they got the most up-to-date photographs possible. The Italians were also ahead in terms of marketing. Their first UK album, *Euro Football*, was given away in January 1977 in *Shoot*, which began a long association with the then-biggest selling children's football magazine. They also managed to get distribution in WH Smiths. Unlike previous collections which not every shop stocked, Panini were available on every high street. And so virtually everyone who collected stickers ended up collecting them.

Thus began Panini's *anni d'oro*. Every year a free album was given away with *Shoot*, then later the *Daily Mirror*, and children up and down the country would spend their pocket money attempting to complete it.

Playgrounds became trading floors, with shouts of 'NEED! GOT!' resonating at break time. Parents rolled their eyes and tutted at the expense. And Panini began to diversify. Sticker sets were produced for the Care Bears, Disney characters, animals and birds, Star Wars, you name it. Even the Royal Family was honoured with its own collection in the 1980s.

At a time when interest in English domestic football was at a low point, interest in stickers had never been higher, but towards the end of the decade Panini's luck ran out when it found itself embroiled in a Fleet Street circulation war: between the Murdoch-owned *Sun* and Robert Maxwell's *Daily Mirror*, then heading into its most intensive phase.

After the 1986 World Cup, the *Sun* had contacted Panini asking how much it would take to prise album distribution away from the *Mirror*.

The Italians asked both parties to pitch for the contract to give away their *Football 1987* album. It was the *Sun* wot won and Maxwell struck back by doing what he often did when he was beaten – he bought the company. Inevitably, there were repercussions. The main players at the UK arm of Panini quit and formed their own company, Merlin, and the Maxwell-owned Panini got entangled in the mess that ensued when in November 1991 the media mogul drowned at sea and the vast financial holes in his business empire came to light.

In any case, by this point the football collectables market was changing. "Things were getting very blurred around the turn of that decade," suggests Lansdowne. "There were other companies bringing out sticker albums and they all laid claim to being 'official' in one way or another. For it to work you need one set that everyone is collecting. Otherwise it all gets too fragmented, people lose interest and no-one gets anywhere near to finishing."

Eventually Panini fell out of the domestic football sticker market entirely, after Merlin won the contract for the new FA Premier League in 1994.

Merlin went on to dominate the 1990s in the same way the Italians had in the 1980s before they too were taken over by... Topps, which only illustrates how the world of football collectables has a peculiar circularity.

Panini, though, retained the FIFA World Cup contract, which they hold to this day and their *Brazil 2014* collection seems to have been very successful, even if the company themselves are cagey about revealing official sales figures. Panini did state however that that album was 'the largest collectable in the UK this millennium'.

Much of this success is due to the shifting demographics of 21st century football collectables. Football stickers have become another piece of 1980s nostalgia that has been revived. "I saw a stat recently that said that 60% of UK sales for the 2014 World Cup album were to men over 30," says Lansdowne. "It was huge with people like me because of the nostalgia factor. People were buying boxes, packets by the dozen and everyone was swapping online, on Twitter or on specific sites."

Pete Farmer even returned to collecting in 2010. "At the time there was a promotion at Morrisons where if you spent over £10 on shopping you'd get sticker packets.

"All of a sudden I thought 'actually, I wouldn't mind having another go'. Once I opened that first packet after all those years it was the same thrill you had in the 1980s. It was 'would you get any shiny stickers in the packet?' It seemed to strike a chord with people. I'm a teacher and some of my colleagues were also collecting. At break times we would be swapping in the staff room, which is bizarre."

Farmer then backtracked and slowly started collecting the Panini World Cup and Euro collections of the 1990s and Noughties. "What I'm aiming to get is a full collection from every tournament from 1970 onwards. It's a massively expensive hobby, but I love it." Meanwhile, the kids have moved on. The big thing amongst the under-12s now are Match Attax trading cards (again, that circularity). There are rumours that Panini are looking to capitalise on this market shift and increase the cost of a packet from 50 to 80p.

And what of the future? Well, traditionalists will be horrified but electronic sticker albums have already made inroads into the market. Panini offered a 'digital' World Cup collection in 2014 via a code on the back of the physical sticker, though at present it's hard to conceive how a stand-alone virtual collection could generate anything like the same sort of revenue. Or excitement.

But eventually it could mean that the under-12s 'collect' electronically whilst their parents stick with the physical versions. Greg Lansdowne, though, feels that we shouldn't write off children's interest in stickers just yet. "Well, just this afternoon I've bought a couple of packets of Panini *Frozen* stickers for my daughter. I'd say there is an interest from kids if it's brands that are aimed at them – they wouldn't bring them out otherwise."

Whether the younger generation come back on board for Qatar 2022 or 2026 remains to be seen. However, given that FIFA are planning to increase the number of finalists to 48 – which potentially means over 900 stickers per album, it could be that by then you'll need the income of a middle-aged professional to complete it anyway.

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# WHAT'S IN A NAME FOR EUROPE'S FOOTBALL CLUBS?

The name of European sides can baffle the British fan. But **PETER TRUDGILL** has an explanation for some



Those of us who follow Champions League football have become familiar over the years with the names of many European football clubs. More often than not, we don't give these names much thought – some names, like FC Basel and Sevilla, don't require much thought. But there are other names which are opaque to us unless we take the trouble to find out what they mean. One thing that can help is to notice what the words for 'football' are in different languages.

Since the game originated in Britain, it's no surprise that many languages have simply borrowed our English word – Spanish has *fútbol*, Hungarian *futball*, Serbian *fudbal*. But other languages have come up with their form of the term by combining their own words for 'foot' and 'ball' – so we have Dutch *voetbal*, Danish *fodbold*, Finnish *jalka-pallo*, and Greek *podó-sphero*. The Finnish word explains the name of the club HJK Helsinki, which in full is Helsingin Jalkapalloklubi. The Greek term accounts for the name of the Cypriot team APOEL Nicosia, whose full Greek form is Athlētikós Podosphērikós Ómilos Ellīnon Lefkosias 'Athletic Football Club of Greeks of Nicosia' (the city we know as Nicosia is called Lefkosia in Greek).

Yet other languages have invented their own words. The AC in AC Milano stands for *Associazione Calcio*, where *calcio* is the Italian word for 'football' – it originally meant 'kick'. The NK in NK Maribor is the acronym for Nogometni Klub. *Nogomet*, the Slovenian for 'football', was borrowed from Croatian, where *noga* means 'foot' and *-met* comes from the verb *metnuti* 'to put (something where you want it to go)'.

A classical education may also help. The name of the Greek team Panathinaikós means 'all-Athenian'. And the Turin-based club Juventus takes its name from Latin *iuventus* 'youth' (the same concept is honoured in the name of the Swiss team, Young Boys Berne who, however, helpfully use an English appellation).

But sometimes an ordinary British education of any kind is no help. Most people will have no idea that the name of the Turkish club Galatasary means

'Galata Palace'. Turkish *saray* 'palace' was originally borrowed from Persian – it also appears in the name of the Bosnian city Sarajevo.

Equally puzzling for us is the team name Shakhtar Donetsk. We know that Donetsk is a city in southeastern Ukraine – although the situation in that country means the team are now playing in Kharkiv – but what about Shakhtar? We might guess that the name means something like 'Donetsk United'. After all Eintracht Frankfurt does more or less correspond to 'Frankfurt United'. *Eintracht* means 'harmony, concord, unity', and is composed of *ein-* 'one' and *-tracht*, from the German verb *tragen*, which is historically the same as our English verb to draw, so the word's initial sense was something like 'drawing together into one'. But in fact the Ukrainian word *shakhtár* means 'miner'. The original base from which the football club's players were drawn was the coal-miners' trade union.

Like Shakhtar, the name of the north German club Werder Bremen also has an interesting history dating from its foundation. *Werder* is a Low German topographical term meaning an island in a river, or an elevation in a wetland. Old English had the same word in the form of *waroth*, 'bank' or 'shore', which survived into later forms of English as *warth*: Warwick in Cumbria, on the River Eden, was originally Warthwic, 'village on a bank'. English has now lost this word altogether, and it's not very common in German nowadays; but in the name of the Bremen team, *Werder* refers specifically to the floodplain by the river where the club played their matches in their very earliest days at the turn of the 20th century.

Europeans might equally welcome foundation-story explanations for certain puzzling British club names: we can start by telling them that Arsenal was founded by munitions workers at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich.



## BASLE OR BASEL?

The name of the Swiss city which is called Basel in German descends from its Roman name, *Basilia*. The French name – France is just down the road – is *Bâle*. In Italian it's *Basilea*, and in Greek *Vasilía*. The English name, as many people seem to be forgetting these days, is *Basle*.