



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

News  
Release  
Draft.

**12 September 2011**  
**Immediate release**

## **Study predicts Jimmy Dickinson and Jimmy McIlroy next in line for football statues**

Portsmouth FC's Jimmy Dickinson, and Burnley and Northern Ireland winger Jimmy McIlroy can expect to be the next legendary footballers to be honoured by statue outside their former home grounds, according to a study by academics from the Institute of Work Psychology at the University of Sheffield, UK.

In the last 20 years, over 30 English football players have been depicted by a statue outside of the stadiums they once graced. Research by Dr Chris Stride and Ffion Thomas, to be presented at the New England Symposium On Statistics In Sports at Harvard University on Saturday 24 September, identifies the factors that are most important in determining which football greats are immortalised in this way, to what extent such commemoration is meritocratic, and which players are unlucky to not yet be depicted.

Personal and team performance statistics from each soccer player on the English Football League's '100 Legends' list, who make up 72% of statue subjects, were collected and analysed. Loyalty was found to make a significant impact on the probability of being depicted. Unsurprisingly, loyal 'one-club' players were most likely to be chosen as statue subjects. The odds of a 'one-club' player being depicted are 3 times those of a player with just 80% of his appearances for his primary club, reflecting the value that fans place on the absolute loyalty of 'their' players.

However, career era was also found to predict depiction, with players from the 1950s the most likely to be portrayed. Statues of players who played during the early years of the game or the past two decades are far less common. This is likely to reflect the use of statues by clubs as a marketing tool appealing to the nostalgia of fans.

Further predictors for subject selection were whether a player featured in the 1966 World Cup winning team, and the number of other legends at a player's club. Over half of the World Cup winners and their manager have already been depicted at different soccer grounds. Conversely, a player at a club with many other legends has a reduced chance of being depicted, due to the presence of alternative subjects.

A similar pattern of results was found when predicting subject selection for baseball player statues, of which there are over 70 in the US Major Leagues.

Of members of the Football League 100 legends list, Jimmy McIlroy of Burnley FC and Jimmy Dickinson of Portsmouth FC are the players with the highest predicted probability of being a statue subject who are yet to be depicted, and thus might be expected to be honoured with one in the near future. Online campaigns already exist promoting the erection of statues of these players.

Dr Stride, a statistician from Sheffield University's Institute of Work Psychology, said: "Far from merely being memorials to past heroes, sporting statues say much about the preferences of fans and the increasingly sophisticated marketing strategies of sports organisations. They are not an entirely meritocratic honour; the eras in which a player appeared and the team he appeared for are influential in being honoured in this way".

#### **Notes for Editors:**

##### **For further information please contact:**

Amy Stone, Media Relations Officer, on 0114 2221046 or email [a.f.stone@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.f.stone@sheffield.ac.uk)

Dr Chris Stride: 0114 2223262 / 0795 2210227 or email [c.b.stride@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.b.stride@sheffield.ac.uk)

**To read other news releases about the University of Sheffield, visit**

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/mediacentre/>

**NR\*\*\*/ends**