

ACTIVITY 21

Three is the Magic Number

Suggested Learning Intentions

Pupils learn to:

- develop awareness of the history and use of three points for a win system in soccer;
- investigate the different permutations involved in deciding league standings, using multiplication and addition, comparing two points for a win to three points (multiples of two and three); and
- conduct their own investigations, creating scoring systems of their own to identify potential winners and other places in leagues.

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

Distribute **Pupil Resource O Three is the Magic Number**, which describes the old points system for the English First Division. Ask your pupils to look at the numbers of wins, draws and defeats for the different teams. How do the final league standings reflect this? Discuss with your pupils why the Football Association made this change and whether they think it was a good idea. Ask your pupils to work out who would have become champions if two points were awarded for a win. (Manchester United would have won on goal difference.)

Encourage them to compare how different league tables would have looked using the old and new systems. Ask them to think of their own ideas for creating different scoring systems, for example awarding bonus points for a certain number of goals in a game or keeping a clean sheet. Encourage them to justify their choice of scoring system.

Resource 0: Three is the Magic Number

Before 1981, all football leagues in the UK and Ireland awarded two points for a win. A man called Jimmy Hill proposed to the Football Association (FA) a change that would give teams three points for a win. This was supposed to encourage more attacking play and entertaining football. If teams finish the season on equal points, their final position is determined by goal difference, as explained below.

The FA accepted his proposal. In the 1981–82 season, three points for a win was first introduced. Today, most football leagues throughout the world use this system. Here is the final league table for the 1994–95 Premier League Season. Blackburn Rovers won the title.

There is a key on the next page, to help you to understand what each of the columns in the table represent.

Pos	Team	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Blackburn Rovers (C)	42	27	8	7	80	39	+41	89
2	Manchester United	42	26	10	6	77	28	+49	88
3	Nottingham Forest	42	22	11	9	72	43	+29	77
4	Liverpool	42	21	11	10	65	37	+28	74
5	Leeds United	42	20	13	9	59	38	+21	73
6	Newcastle United	42	20	12	10	67	47	+20	72
7	Tottenham Hotspur	42	16	14	12	66	58	+8	62
8	Queens Park Rangers	42	17	9	16	61	59	+2	60
9	Wimbledon	42	15	11	16	48	65	-17	56
10	Southampton	42	12	18	12	61	63	-2	54
11	Chelsea	42	13	15	14	50	55	-5	54
12	Arsenal	42	13	12	17	52	49	+3	51
13	Sheffield Wednesday	42	13	12	17	49	57	-8	51
14	West Ham United	42	13	11	18	44	48	-4	50
15	Everton	42	11	17	14	44	51	-7	50
16	Coventry City	42	12	14	16	44	62	-18	50
17	Manchester City	42	12	13	17	53	64	-11	49
18	Aston Villa	42	11	15	16	51	56	-5	48
19	Crystal Palace (R)	42	11	12	19	34	49	-15	45
20	Norwich City (R)	42	10	13	19	37	54	-17	43
21	Leicester City (R)	42	6	11	25	45	80	-35	29
22	Ipswich Town (R)	42	7	6	29	36	93	-57	27

Pos	is short for position, which is where each team finished in the league	D	number of games team drew
Team	team name	GF	Goals For is the number of goals a team scored
Pld	number of games each team played in the season	GA	Goals Against is the number of goals the team conceded
W	number of games the team won	GD	Goal Difference is the difference between Goals For and Goals Against
L	number of games the team lost	Pts	the total number of points a team has gained in a season

How would this table have looked had they still been awarding two points for a win? Would a different team become champions? Which teams would have been relegated?

Look online and choose some league tables of your own from past seasons. See how they would have looked using the old system. Alternatively, try some league tables from before the 1981–82 season. What would these have looked like if three points were available for a win? Would Manchester United or Liverpool still have the same number of league titles?

Try devising some systems of your own, awarding different points for a win or a draw. What would be the best way to encourage attacking play and provide entertaining games? How would awarding bonus points for scoring, or not conceding, a certain number of goals affect the league tables?