

What Is the Doctor's Favorite Soccer Team?

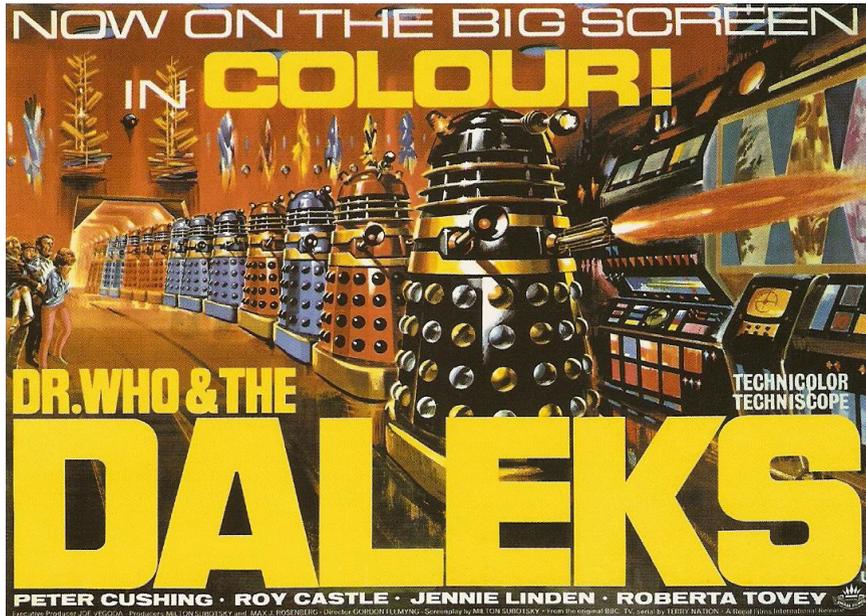
In Which We Prove That You Can Prove Anything with Statistics

It is a question that probably nobody has ever seriously entertained but that must be asked, and not only because it was the Eleventh Doctor who raised the subject in the first place, by kicking around a soccer ball in 2010's *The Lodger*. Then compounded it in the short story "Extra Time" (from the *Step Back in Time* collection) by taking Amy and Rory to the 1966 World Cup Final between England and West Germany. Then compounded it again in an IDW comic book tale.

What is the Doctor's favorite soccer team?

As part of the Eleventh Doctor's first season, *The Lodger* marked a nadir in even this incarnation's career that would not truly be matched until he returned to the scene of the same crime and reunited with the otiose Craig for *Closing Time* the following year. There are a lot of things we really don't need to see the Doctor doing, but slumming it with real human beings on a visceral, personal level is one of them. So is being normal and having a friend. And so is playing soccer.

Soccer is England's national pastime, and England (no, be fair; the British Isles) is/are the Doctor's favorite country/ies. Naturally, then, he enjoys the sport, as much as he used to (in his Fifth incarnation) like cricket. We should also remember this is the man who ignited the 2012 Olympic flame six years before the games actually started (*Fear Her*, 2006), and who might even have materialized out of sight during the actual opening ceremonies in London; the sound of the TARDIS coming into land was distinctly heard interrupting Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody." (A longer sequence was planned, but was dropped for timing reasons.)



The first movie—but who was Who really?

Soccer, though. Soccer is the Doctor’s sport, and not only because he once hoofed a ball around. There is historical coincidence, too, to be borne in mind. The fact that the game’s English administrators, the Football Association, the oldest sporting body in the world, was formed in 1863, exactly one hundred years before the longest-running science-fiction show in the world was born. And among all the adventures that the Doctor has experienced, and logged in his legendary 500 Year Diary, away from the prying eyes and ears of television, print, or audio witnesses, might he have been in the shadows at that particular moment in history? Nudging the founding fathers to first form their association and then, just eight years later, convincing them to establish a challenge cup for all the newly formed soccer teams within their purview?

The FA Cup was launched in 1871 and quickly established itself as the quintessential soccer competition, both in England and abroad. Indeed, by the time *Doctor Who* hove into view, and for the next couple of decades at least, the FA Cup Final was the single most important event in the English footballing calendar, the *Doctor Who* indeed of national sports.

The Doctor has acknowledged this. Twice, in the episodes *Kinda* (1982) and *Gridlock* (2007), the hymn “Abide with Me” has been sung, just as it has been before every FA Cup Final since 1927—when the Cup was won

by Cardiff City, the Welsh capital in which *Doctor Who* has been filmed since 2005.

Inevitably, then, he would have an interest in the fate of the FA Cup. And, equally inevitably, where he is interested, he will also interfere.

Fact. In May 1963, in the last Cup Final before *Doctor Who* was launched, Manchester United won the trophy. In May 1990, the first Cup Final after *Doctor Who* was canceled, they won it again. A pair of triumphs that have absolutely nothing to do with *Doctor Who* apart from the fact that they bookend, very precisely, the life of the original show.

They won a few other things in the meantime—including three more FA Cups. But one of those was only snuck in while the show was on hiatus (1985), and if we look at the era of absolute domination Manchester United would embark on through the 1990s and beyond, we will also realize that it coincided as neatly with *Doctor Who*'s years in the televisual wilderness, as the show's lifetime coincided with their trophy drought.

All but all-conquering throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Manchester United scooped up four more FA Cups while the show was off the air. They lost just one final in that time—in 1995, on the eve of *Doctor Who*'s return for the TV movie. But the last time they won it was in 2004. The year before *Doctor Who* returned permanently to our screens. And yeah, they've won a few other things since then. But that particular trophy eludes them still.

None of which answers the question of who the Doctor's favorite soccer team might be. But I think we can guess who it isn't.