



RUC FOOTBALL

The history of football is in fact part of the history of the RUC itself. Although the major trophies may only have appeared on the 'side-board' in comparatively recent years, the game was a vigorous going concern since the earliest days of the force.

Captain TD Morrison, whose name rightly stands out in any history of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, recalls the official beginnings of sport in 1928/29. As a Deputy Inspector in 'M' Branch at Headquarters (and subsequently Deputy Inspector General) he was a prime mover in getting football on to a proper basis. When the AA was formed the Inspector General, Sir Charles Wickham, was keen that there should be boxing. Football followed as a natural second. The RUC were not in any league at that time and in fact it was many years before they entered competitions. There was a feeling that the police were better to stay out of local football.

Tom Rothwell, ex-Head Constable, whose role of secretary of the AA spans twenty four years from 1930 to 1954, remembers even earlier days when there wasn't an RUC team as such but the game was played among teams at District level and the Depot.

As in such games protests were numerous and varied. One such complaint was heard at a meeting held at Headquarters, Waring Street on 6 February 1929 according to the minutes, 'a protest was heard from Derry City against their match with County Fermanagh played at Enniskillen on 26 January 1929. After hearing representatives from both teams it was ordered that the protest be not upheld on the grounds that a team cannot protest against the inefficiency of the an IFA referee!' The trophies that caused such a serious approach to be taken to the games were the McAleavy Cup, the McDowell Cup, the Nesbitt Cup, which is no longer played for but on display and the Alhambra Cup sadly lost or mislaid.

The first representative matches were against cross channel forces. March 1930 saw the start of the games against Glasgow City Police, a series which continues to this day with the RUC winning back the trophy this year in Belfast with a 5-0 win. Suspended during the war years, the games were resumed at Windsor Park, Belfast in 1947 when Tom Forsythe, a Scotsman living in Ulster, put forward the idea of a Cup to make the game more interesting and competitive. It was agreed and he generously donated the trophy, which today perpetuates his name and memory. Down the years the honours between the two teams have been very evenly shared but the competition is remarkable for having produced only one drawn game - Glasgow in 1966. Captain Morrison, who took the first team to Scotland, tells the story of their opponents' bemused incredulity at the sight of two rather diminutive figures on the RUC side.

Perhaps they were a bit on the short side but 'Dicky' Ralph and Johnny Gray, both 'wireless men', were footballers of no mean ability and veterans of those days fondly recall their exploits. Johnny and Dicky have both sadly passed on. Dicky is credited with the exaggeration that the only thing that fitted him was his whistle. Perhaps the most outstanding RUC player of the early thirties was Linfield and Ireland centre-half Maurice Pyper. Pyper played for Ireland in their 4-0 defeat of Wales on 5 December 1931. Playing alongside him that day were such revered figures as Joe Bambrick, Billy McCleery and Elisha Scott. Still remark-

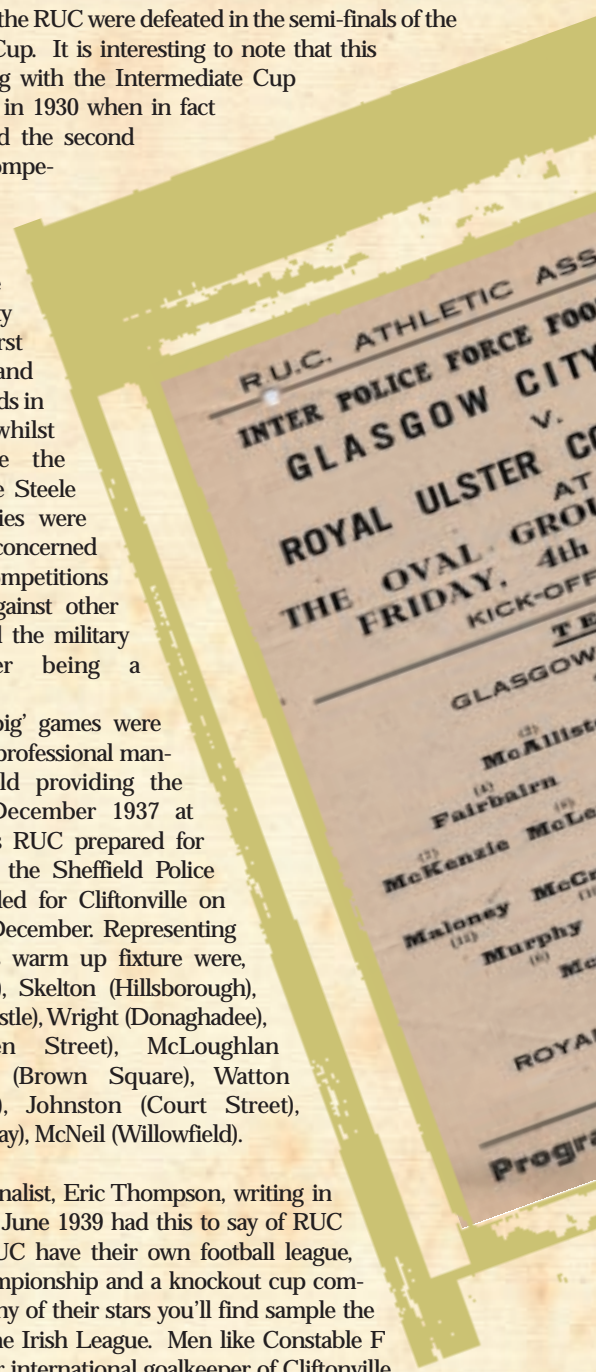
ably sprightly for his years Pyper was an all round sportsman representing the RUC at Hockey and Golf before finishing his playing career with CIYMS rugby club. Looking at the game today he has no doubt that professionalism is killing it.

In 1980 and 1981 the RUC were defeated in the semi-finals of the Steel and Sons Cup. It is interesting to note that this competition along with the Intermediate Cup was first entered in 1930 when in fact the RUC reached the second round of both competitions. In 1933 opposition in the Intermediate Cup included 'City Hall' in the first round and Glentoran Seconds in the second whilst Dunmurry were the opponents in the Steele Cup. The thirties were however mainly concerned with District competitions and friendlies against other police forces and the military with Ballykinler being a favourite venue.

As it is today 'big' games were approached in a professional manner with Linfield providing the opposition in December 1937 at Windsor Park as RUC prepared for their game with the Sheffield Police that was scheduled for Cliftonville on Wednesday, 15 December. Representing the RUC in this warm up fixture were, McCurry (Depot), Skelton (Hillsborough), Clayton (Greencastle), Wright (Donaghadee), Cousins (Queen Street), McLoughlan (Bangor), Over (Brown Square), Watton (Mountpottinger), Johnston (Court Street), Cooke (Helen's Bay), McNeil (Willowfield).

Well known journalist, Eric Thompson, writing in Daily Mail on 27 June 1939 had this to say of RUC soccer - 'The RUC have their own football league, their district championship and a knockout cup competition. But many of their stars you'll find sample the wider scope of the Irish League. Men like Constable F McCurry, amateur international goalkeeper of Cliftonville, Constable RB Johnstone, amateur international left half and Constable SA Over, inter-league forward of the same club.

Constable JA Clayton, former sprinter and Glenavon right back, who





would have undoubtedly, have had an Irish Cap but for one serious hitch – he was born in Wales and Constable W Allen, Coleraine goalkeeper. Constable D Flack played left back for Cliftonville before he moved to Enniskillen. Constable A Corry has also assisted the same Club and Constable DC Watton has played for Ards’.

With the arrival of the war the names were to change as was so much else – RUC versus RAF (Ballyhalbert), 289 Heavy AA (Groomsport), 27th Bomb Disposal RE's, 13th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 70 Royal Berkshire Regiment, MMS Furious, 29th (London) General Hospital, RAM – and many more. The minutes of 1943/44 record 'after a season of ups and downs through the removal of Army teams we have had a very successful season. We played 8 matches, won 7, lost 1'.

The same minutes go on to say, 'Our greatest match of the season, I should say one of the best matches we have had since we started football, was the RUC versus a select-ed North of I r e l a n d Army Team whom we met and defeated by 3 goals to 1 at Grosvenor'.

It was that famous match of 15 March 1944.

The team fielded by the RUC that day was F McCurry, JA Clayton, R Russell, G Brown, C Crawford, M Murphy, R Smyth, RB Johnston, T Parkinson and DJ Maloney.

The Constabulary Gazette of January 1943 reports as follows:

ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL – The RUC suffered their first reverse this season when at Cliftonville on 11 November, a team representing 389 Heavy A/A R A won by 4 goals to 1. The 'Ack-Ack' had quite a formidable reputation to live up to and took the field feeling very confident.

They set about the job with the thoroughness and accuracy, which might be expected of them at their gun posts. However, the RUC were not lacking in spirit – especially the defence – and they can feel justly proud of their display. RUC team: McCurry, Crawford, Pollock, Johnston, Brown, Goodall, Smith R, Hunter, McConnell, Cherry and Parkinson.

On 18 November at Cliftonville a greatly changed team met an RAF XI. The airmen were up against a marked superiority and lost seven goals being registered against them without reply. RUC team: Miller, Russell, Clayton, Johnston, Brown, Miller, Smith R, Hunter, McConnell, Wilson, and Dunning.

Another game was to have taken place on 25 November at Stormont, the opposition being the RAF Fighter Command. The match had to be abandoned at the last minute – the RAF failing to turn up.

The record of the police team then was quite the best for some few years. For a total of 9 games the table was – played 9, won 8, lost 1, for 47 against 14, points 16.

One of the regular players had been causing some little sensation in senior circles. Playing for Cliftonville. Const R Smith had made something of a name for himself and Cliftonville Supporters had not been slow at showing their appreciation of this newcomer to their ranks. In one game he was publicly acclaimed the star of the day scoring one goal and making an opening for a second.

Only one game was played during December against Ards. On paper Ards looked winners all the way. The RUC were without the services of Brown, the Linfield centre-half but despite this the team played with zest and were worthy winners, the score being 2 goals to 1. It was a day-long battle from first to last. Defences on both sides were sound and both forward lines were always dangerous in attack. It was undoubtedly the most enjoyable game played at that time.

The war produced its inevitable sorrows and tragedies but on the happier side there was pride and pleasure too and fun and friendship, that spirit that is somehow special to times of adversity and hardship. In 1943 Constable FH Over retired from the Force and Honorary Secretary of the football section. Never again would the football club have the minutes of the meetings recorded with such care or in such copper plate handwriting.

Five-a-side football had its place too. In the thirties and forties Sergeant Tom Rothwell was the architect of an annual sport and tattoo with five-a-sides from visiting clubs such as Rangers, Celtic, Hibernians, Shelbourne and Bohemians – gold watches for the winners. Played at Windsor Park before crowds of 30-40,000 Rothwell ensured success. Local newspaper report of the 1949 tournament read as follows:

'As usual the five-a-side soccer competition at Windsor Park was an unqualified success. Great surprise was the success of Cliftonville, who deservedly won it. Then star was Kevin McGarry, son of D McGarry, who scored the goal that knocked out Crusaders, repeated the performance against much fancied Glasgow Rangers and then crowned a great afternoon's work by scoring both goals in the final against Dundela. The progress of the competition was:

RUC members of Cliftonville FC, 1938



First Round: - Glasgow Celtic 3 corners, Brantwood 0; Linfield 2 corners, Glentoran 0; Glasgow Rangers, 2 goals (McIntyre), Distillery 0; RUC 2 goals (Brown), Portadown 1 goal (Silcock).

Second Round: - Dundalk 1 corner, Dundela 2 corners; Cliftonville 1 goal (McGarry), Crusaders 0; Glasgow Celtic 0, Linfield 2 corners; Glasgow Rangers 2 goals, (McCall, Findlay), 1 corner, RUC 1 corner

Semi Final: - Dundela 1 corner, Linfield 0; Glasgow Rangers 0, Cliftonville 1 goal (McGarry)

Final: - Dundela 2 corners, Cliftonville 2 goals (McGarry). Cliftonville – Heggarty, Wilson, Williamson, Black, McGarry; Dundela – Russell, Stewart, Newberry, Masters, Cahoun’.

Hostilities over football began to resume a more normal pattern.

In 1946 DJ Ernie Reid a likeable Fermanagh man was elected Chairman of the Football section – a position he was to hold for over eight years as the RUC moved towards its birth as a fully fledged soccer club. April 1949 saw the introduction of the Police International tournaments with the RUC competing at Middlesbrough and Newcastle. In the following year the games were played at Liverpool where the famous John ‘Bap’ Dunlop was to make his debut for the RUC. Already an amateur international when he joined the RUC, Dunlop was to become one of the great characters both inside and outside the game.

As a hard tackling right-back he played in the same Glentoran team with that prince of wing-halves Danny Blanchflower. Included in the same RUC team of that era was arguably the best pair of wingers ever to represent the police – sprint champion Dennis Moloney later to be a very successful team manager and flame haired Dougie Smyth who represented the British Police on many occasions.

In 1951 England were welcomed to Grosvenor Park where they defeated a strong RUC team by 4-3. Captaining the RUC side was another outstanding wing-half Martin Murphy later given the honour of leading the British Police Squad in Europe.

In 1956 the RUC Football Club made two significant advances. According to the minutes of 27 April 1956, ‘The Chairman, District Inspector Crozier, informed the meeting that the RUC AA had now

obtained a new ground at Newforge Lane and that it would be available for football on and after 1 May 1956.’ The same meeting decided that the RUC should be entered in the First Division of the Amateur League.

That it all came about was due in no small measure to men like Head Fay, Fred McCurry, David Watton and Billy Lynas and it was the foundation for the many successes in the years ahead.

One of the first successes and certainly a tremendous achievement at the time was the reaching of the first round of the Irish Cup in 1959-1960 season. A contemporary newspaper account tells the story – ‘Derry fans had a Cup tie sweat – City struggle to avoid defeat’. A draw it was 2-2 with Derry snatching the equaliser only seven minutes from the end. The replay again at Brandywell went to Derry 2-1 but to the RUC team went the considerable distinction of having been Irish Cup qualifiers for the first time.

The team in the drawn match was: Malone, Weatherall, Orr, Gilchrist, Pike, Fisher, Matthews, Thompson, Meldrum, McPolin, McVicker. Scorers for RUC were Matthews and Meldrum.

An atrociously wet day it was but if the weather was inhospitable, the spectators were not. Not a stone was thrown – or likely to be.

Back, however, to 18 August 1956 when the RUC made their long awaited debut in league soccer by entering the First Division of the Northern Ireland Amateur League. Records show that the opposition was provided by 49th OB who record a 5-3 win. Turning out for the police on this auspicious occasion was: Malone, Hartop, Mullan, Mooney, Gillespie, Murphy, W Gilchrist, Dunlop, Smyth, D Gilchrist, Moloney. At the end of a difficult season during which the RUC scored 100 goals and finished a creditable seventh in the league behind such household names as Shorts, Chimney Corner, Dunmurry Rec, and East Belfast many important lessons had been learnt by Secretary/Manager, Davy Watton.

Looking at some of the statistics of that season it is interesting to note 26 first team appearances by one of our Vice Presidents, Bill Mooney. As has been the case down through the years the RUC continued to produce some of the real characters of the game such as big Jim McKinstry, Captain of Distillery and the British Police, Tom Turkington, centre half in the famous ‘red wall’ of Cliftonville, Howard Lynch of Dundela and Irish Cup fame, Ivan McAllister a giant of a centre half with Linfield



who also held the RUC goal scoring record before Ronnie Bell took it away from him. When describing personalities of that period one player who will never be forgotten is red haired Joe Meldrum, arguably the best centre forward ever to wear police colours. Making his debut for the RUC on 14 March 1959 against Dunmurry Joe Meldrum was destined to win practically every honour in the game except a full international cap including two Irish Cup medals with Crusaders and inter league recognition with the Irish League.

Trophies are set out in detail elsewhere. One which deserves special mention during the RUC's period in the Amateur League must be the Barron Cup in the 1970/71 season – the first occasion on which the RUC Football Club emerged triumphant in Division 1A of the Northern Amateur League. It was a difficult final match against Chimney Corner at Antrim but RUC more than fought their corner and held on to a 2-1 lead to the final whistle. It was a good season – the second eleven added to the success by collecting the Walter Moore Cup.

The RUC soccer owes an immense debt of gratitude to Denis Moloney on the birth of the second XI team. A lot of young promising players weren't getting their chance in the top team so Denis and colleagues decided to kick off with a second string in the 1962/63 season.

It was a decision that gave young lads their heads and paid dividends. After being runners-up on three occasions the second XI won their section of the A/League in 1965/66 and crowned a great success by taking the Co Antrim Junior Shield also. From 140 teams they reached the semi-final to beat Lower Shankill the holders and went on to defeat the Nelsons 2-1 at Ballyclare with goals from Harry Bennett and George Patterson. Representing the RUC II were: McGladdery, Pogue, Bennett, McBurney, Pike, McLroy, Patterson, Cousins, Craig, Elliott and Gawley.

With the advent of civil unrest in the early seventies running two soccer teams became a real headache for team manager Denis Moloney and his aids. Nevertheless, the club continued to make progress with two significant events helping to lighten a very gloomy period in the history of the RUC and the club. In 1972 the soccer club celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the RUC with a representative game against the British Army at Castlereagh Park, Newtownards won by the RUC by 3-0 with goals from Ronnie Bell and Joe Meldrum. If the match itself did not live up to the build up the guest list certainly did.

The Governor of Northern Ireland, Lord Gray, Lt General Sir Harry Tugo, Sir Albert Kennedy, Sir Graham Shillington and Sir James Flanagan, all helped to make the occasion a memorable one. Prior to the Golden Jubilee the 1970/71 season saw yet another development – entry to the PAA Football Championship. This tournament was to produce some enthralling encounters over the years with none better than the semi-final tie with West Midlands at Newforge in 1979 when the RUC edged home with a Ronnie Bell goal. In reporting the game for the Belfast Telegraph, Bill Ireland aptly summed up the encounter with these words 'The English aces had style and sophistication – there were several British internationals in their ranks – but they could not subdue the RUC whose fitness and flair allied to pure passion carried them through – but what a battle it was. The muscle-straining relentlessness made it a hard physical confrontation – not one player stepping out of line'.

The eventual final with the London Met at Seaview proved to be a sad anti-climax with the Met winning 2-1. The arrangements for the final including the after match banquet in the Culloden Hotel did, however, draw much applause from Derek Aldridge, Secretary of Met Athletic Association when he later described it as the 'best PAA final he had ever attended'. A compliment indeed from a man who attends several PAA finals every year.

In 1975 the RUC took another major step forward when their application for entry to the Irish League 'B' Division was accepted along with Chimney Corner, Stranmillis and Milford Everton. C/Inspector Wright was new Chairman, having succeeded C/Supt Ross McGimpsey, Sergeant Black was secretary with Brian Dunlop taking over from John Cousins as manager. The RUC were about to enter a new era. Leading scorer in their first season was utility player Hugh McConnell with 27 goals. Sadly McConnell who epitomised the attitude of the squad working under Dunlop was later to be murdered by the IRA in South Armagh.

Right away Dunlop set about building a winning team and one worthy of representing the RUC in the 'B' Division. Davy Gardner and Freddie Cooley were signed from Cliftonville followed by Steve McMurtry from Distillery, Ken Crozier from Linfield, Bobby Clark from Bangor and Ronnie Morrison from Dundela. Two outstanding cadets, Gary McCartney and Ken Alexander, further strengthened the squad. The team was now almost complete but still lacked a first class striker. Once

RUC v Derry City in the Irish Cup at the Brandywell, 1960





again Dunlop finally got his man when he persuaded Linfield's Ronnie Bell to keep a bargain he had made several years earlier when he had left the RUC for Windsor Park. The squad were now ready with one player who was to typify the attitude of the team, hovering in the back-ground. This was Bobbie Keatley, a tigerish midfield player who really showed the way with his crunching tackling and non-stop running. As the battle heated up for honours it was Keatley who emerged as the 'heart' of the team and the man 'to pick up the flag'. With the troops now assembled Dunlop made his last move when he appointed Jimmy Arbuthnot as his 'first lieutenant'.

Arbuthnot proved to be a shrewd tactician whose judgement and ability was invaluable as the pressures mounted. It is now history that the RUC won their first Irish Intermediate Cup by defeating Downpatrick Rec at Castlereagh Park on Easter Tuesday 1979 by two Ronnie Bell goals to one. In leading his team to victory Dunlop had to overcome an illness that was sadly to result in his giving up the management reins the following season. Dunlop's successor, former club captain Alan Thompson, quickly set about extending the glory days for the RUC with a magnificent Irish Cup run and another Intermediate Cup triumph over Queens University. The secretary's report at the end of that season aptly describes the events that almost resulted, as stated earlier, in the RUC playing in Europe.

'The scene was now set for our now historic visit to Newtownards in the first round of the Irish Cup. The 6/1 odds offered by the bookmakers was eagerly snapped up by numerous RUC supporters including quite a few from Ards who were in no way surprised when we destroyed them 4-0 helped by a Ronnie Bell hat-trick. In doing so we produced football of a really high standard and probably our best of the season. Three weeks later we took the road once again to face Coleraine at the Show Grounds. A massive RUC support coupled with bright February sunshine added to an occasion that was filled with tension and atmosphere right from the kick-off. Solid defensive play by the back four coupled with a Ronnie Bell goal earned a replay and another visit to the Bannside. The RUC bandwagon was now gathering momentum and we certainly did not disappoint the many hundreds of policemen who converged in Coleraine for the replay.

Another battling performance and a late Ken Crozier penalty was good enough to take us to Ballymena for a second replay and what a day that turned out to be. From the first whistle we completely dominated the game and were worthy winners with a later Ronnie Bell goal. This was Bell's forty-fifth goal of the season and gave us a historic semi-final tie with Crusaders at Windsor Park. Real pressure was now beginning to surround the team as the semi-final day approached. A freak snow-storm the evening before the game only served to jar already ragged nerves.

On the day, however, the weather cleared and we were treated to a thrilling cup tie that kept the big crowd roaring right up to the last minute after a Gary McCartney equaliser set the scene for a pulsating last ten. If the replay in which we were beaten proved a little bit of an anti-climax it could only be so after so heroics.'

After a tremendous season Bell was to have the satisfaction of taking the RUC's goal scoring record from Ivan McAllister with an amazing 56 goals.

The RUC soccer continued to hit the high spots winning the PAA cup for the first time when they defeated the Metropolitan Police in 1982 at Crystal Palace. In local soccer there is little doubt that the most outstanding season in the history of the club was the 1986/87 when the club won the 'B' Division of the Irish League, the Smirnoff Cup, the Irish Intermediate Cup and the British Police Cup. Our other outstanding achievement was of course winning the Steele & Sons Cup in 1993 when they defeated old rival Dundela 5-1 with a Billy Millen hat trick.

On the international front the RUC again broke new ground when they went on tour to Berlin and visited East Berlin in 1982. This was followed in 1997 by another major achievement when an RUC team sponsored by the 'Station League' won third place at the World Police and Fire Games in Calgary. Ever more recently the DCU league again produced a team for the same games in Barcelona 2003.

Police football has in its colourful history produced many outstanding players and administrators. Maurice Pyper and Mark Caughey both gained international honours for Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively. It must, however, be acknowledged that the outstanding police footballer of all time must be Gary McCartney who made 325 appearances for Glentoran and scored 192 goals. To date he has played 547 times for the RUC/PSNI and in total has scored 595 goals in all soccer. His honours include 3 Irish Cup, 2 Irish League and one European Police Championship medal, a record unlikely ever to be broken.

ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY FC

HONOURS WON

THE NORTHERN AMATEUR FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Clarence Cup	1960/61	RUC
Border Regiment Cup	1964/65	RUC
Cochrane Corry Cup	1964/65	RUC II
John Lunn Cup (2nd Div B Winners)	1965-66	RUC II
Co Antrim Junior Shield	1965/66	RUC II
RUC Cup (2nd Div C Winners)	1967/68	RUC II
Barron Cup (1st Div A Winners)	1970/71	RUC
Walter Moore Cup	1970/71	RUC
Barron Cup	1972/73	RUC
Templeton Cup	1972/73	RUC II
Irish Intermediate Cup	1978/79	RUC
Irish Intermediate Cup	1979/80	RUC
PAA Champions	1982	RUC
Div 2A	1982/83	RUC Olympic
PAA Champions	1983	RUC
Intermediate Cup	1984	RUC
Irish League 'B'	1986/87	RUC
Irish Intermediate Cup	1986/87	RUC
British Police Cup	1986/87	RUC
Steele & Sons Cup	1993	RUC
PAA Cup	1994/95	RUC
WPF, Calgary	1997	Third place