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The FIFA World Cup and its Impact on Global History and Culture

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David Sheepshanks, chairman of Ipswich Town once remarked, “Football is an emotional game that what sets it aside from your average business”. What, after all, is a football club or an international football team? Locations, stadiums and crests can all change, directors, managers and players come and go. What breathes life into the sparse institutional shell of a team is the collective emotional investment of its fans and supporters. The people who have decided that, for whatever reason, the historical legacy of a club and its contemporary narratives of winning and losing really mean something.

Yet at the same time football can be the most emotionally inarticulate of games. How many times have you heard a reporter, with practised seriousness, ask a breathless player, “just how did it feel to score that goal” and for them to reply, “I’m lost for words”. One could trawl a whole library of footballer’s autobiographies without finding a glimpse of an authentic emotion, or an experience rendered in anything but the most disingenuous clichés.

Players are not alone in this. Much of the football writing of the twentieth century steered clear of this terrain. There have been exceptions. The great Brazilians, Mario Filho and Nelson Rodriguez, brilliantly conjured up the fever and delirium of football in mid century Rio.

More recently literary fan memoires, particularly from England, have explored the entwinement of personal and club narratives with the emotional turmoil of coming of age, social mobility and mental illness. But the wider social context in which these stories take place is, at best, accidently unveiled.

Our history of football must, in part, be an emotional history, but those emotions should not stand apart from the economic, political and cultural times in which they were forged. Where then might we go for some guidance and some inspiration? My choice would be America.

The United States has had a complex relationship with football and although at last the game appears to be acquiring a sustainable space in America’s sporting culture, it might seem
obtuse to begin thinking about the World Cup from an American perspective. Yet, in one important respect for us, America has no peer; the engagement of its literary elites with sport.

The capacity of American novelists and essayists to capture the complex amalgam of performance, emotion and memory and the deep structural forces of money and power that constitute the modern sporting spectacle is without parallel in global literature.

The historical project that we are embarked upon will, of course, attend to those structures, analyze performances and record the public memory of events; but our histories will not live without access to the extraordinary emotional imagination that this tradition offer us. What other literary canon can boast John Updike and Hunter S Thompson on golf, Norman Mailer on boxing, David Foster Wallace on tennis or Mark Twain and Robert Coover on baseball.

Perhaps the most compelling and penetrating account of the sporting spectacular in contemporary American writing can be found in the opening chapter of Don Delillo’s *Underworld*. This epic and multi-stranded story of post-war America begins with a baseball game. The final play-off in the long struggle for the 1951 National League pennant, played between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants. It went right down to the wire, to the the bottom of the ninth after a 147-game season. Yet it is now remembered as a single moment - *The Shot Heard Round the World* - when Giants 2nd baseman Bobby Thompson scored the winning home run.

America had experienced a similar national focus, a collective obsession even, with a sporting event before; Joe di Maggio’s famous and statistically extraordinary long-running streak of hits-in-games had captivated the nation in 1941 as it geared up for the long war to come. But most consumed the news after the event in print and on the grapevine. Now, for the first time, an epic American sporting moment could be followed live on nationwide television and radio. Dazzled by the moment America’s media and its public accorded to sport the same narrative power and cultural significance of both traditional arts and the new media industries that were emerging. As Red Smith wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune*. 
“Now it is done. Now the story ends. And there is no way to tell it. The art of fiction is dead. Reality has strangled invention. Only the utterly impossible, the inexpressibly fantastic, can ever be plausible again.”

The shot may not actually have been registered in much of the new American imperium but it was broadcast on US forces radio, beamed to garrisons, outposts and sentinels on every continent and on every ocean. To Americans it confirmed their central place in the new global order, New York as the cultural capital of the world and baseball as the place where the imagined community of the nation could be invented.

In the closing moments of his piece, Don Delillo imagines Russ Hodges, the gravelly voiced commentator who called the game for the Giants, and his producer Alex walking across the Polo Fields. Alex looks up into the stands where Thompson hit his homer.

“Mark the spot. Like when Lee surrendered to Grant or some such thing.”

Russ thinks this is another kind of history. He thinks that they will carry something out of here that joins them all in a rare way, that binds them to a memory with protective power. People are climbing lampposts on Amsterdam Avenue, tooting car horns in little Italy. Isn’t it possible that this midcentury moment enters the skin more lastingly than the vast shaping strategies of eminent leaders, generals steely in their sunglasses – the mapped visions that pierce our dreams?

Russ wants to believe that a thing like this keeps us safe in some undetermined way. This is the thing that will pulse in his brain come old age and double vision and dizzy spells – the surge sensation, the leap of people already standing, the bolt of noise and joy when the ball went in.
This is the people’s history and it has flesh and breath that quicken to the force of this...game of ours. And fans... today will be able to tell their grandchildren – they’ll be the gassy old men leaning into the next century and trying to convince anyone who will listen, pressing in with medicine breath, that they were here when it happened.”

Baseball and New York references aside, we could be in Montevideo in 1930 as a tiny buzzing bi-plane flies behind the exquisite art nouveau tower of the Estadio Centenario, its wake ripples the Uruguayan flag and sets off another round of waving and cheering from the tens of thousands who have gathered on the pitch. Tiny Uruguay, an invention of nineteenth century power politics, less than two million souls, has finally, indisputably arrived.

We could be in Berne in 1954, as West Germany, against all known-form, beat the original Golden Generation, the unbeatable Hungarians. This fragile state, this fragment of a nation, had crawled its way from the moral and practical ground zero of 1945 and stood on the threshold of statehood and the return of its sovereignty. Gathered by their radios they hear commentator Herbert Zimmerman on the final whistle “It’s Over! Over! Over!”, and in some strange but real way the humiliations and the hardships seemed to recede a little. Der Spiegel consecrated the game the following day as the founding cultural moment of the Federal Republic: “After 2000 years of taking the wrong path Germans have now discovered the true destiny of their national existence”.

Those midcentury moments have surely and lastingly entered the skin of national cultures. And although the vast shaping strategies of economic and political power have left their mark, it is the collective emotional experience and cultural interpretation of those games that give them weight and meaning.

If you have ever attended or had the misfortune to watch a game played in empty stadium after some punishment has been issued for fan misbehaviour, you will know that there is nothing quite as lonely and maudlin. Until the broadcasters can perfect a digitally enhanced crowd, there is no spectacle without us; without a public that it is prepared to invest emotional energy in the playing of a game there is no glamour and no glory. It is this that makes the sporting spectacle, however much the media –sponsorship complex try and
control it, the people’s history. Historians and football administrators alike forget this at their peril.
An emotional and demotic understanding of the World Cup might be a necessary condition of writing its history but it is surely not sufficient. Every facet of the World Cup - the teams that played and those that didn’t; how the game itself was played and the architecture of the stadiums it was played in; the ceremonial and symbolic dimensions of the tournament and the informal and spontaneous carnival that forms around it – all have been shaped by economic, military and cultural forces, operating at the intersection of global, national and local politics.

This presents a formidable and complex intellectual agenda, but it is one that will richly reward us. Such is the global reach and cultural significance of football that the history of the World Cup provides an increasingly powerful lens for examining the course of globalization and global history over the last one hundred and twenty years. At the same time the history of the tournament allows us to see the dynamic of politics in individual nations and the construction of their national identities – all have been encoded in the ways in which the tournament has been staged, played, reported, celebrated and cursed.

To see the relationship between the World Cup and globalization more clearly, we need to divide our narrative into four eras: first, the pre-history of the tournament particularly football’s relationship with the Olympic movement and the Olympic games; second, the short inter-war era of the World Cup between 1930 and 1938 played alongside a fragmenting global order; third, the World Cups of the long post-war boom and the slow regulated globalisation that accompanied the Cold War; and finally, since 1982, the World Cups of the most recent era of globalization characterised by new geographies of global power and the unprecedented scale, size and significance of global financial and media networks.

The Olympics movement was born in the final stretch of the long nineteenth century which had created a new industrial and capitalist global economy and new global communications networks albeit in a world fractured by competing imperialisms. In this context the IOC can be seen as one of the many international bodies - like the Red Cross or the Nobel Foundation
- that emerged in the years before the First World War, undergirded by a sense of universal mission. In the case of the Olympic movement, this was combined with an amalgam of the new elite sporting cultures emerging in Europe and America as well as the shared classicism of the west – the veneration and reinterpretation of Hellenic civilisation for nineteenth century purposes.

Equally as important the games were sustained in their early days by their association with the World’s Fairs and the great imperial exhibitions, which had become central nodes in the increasingly complex global web of economic and cultural interaction. They showcased the new technologies, artistic styles and commercial products of the era not just to a local audiences but to an international public and between 1900 and 1908 they let the Olympic games in on the act.

Football, unlike the other Olympic sports, was already highly professionalised in its British heartlands and lacked an international coordination body or a champion within the IOC. Consequently it was an unofficial sport until 1908 and a purely amateur European affair till Antwerp in 1920.

The standing of the sport was transformed in 1924 by the arrival of the Uruguayan at the Paris games. The final was a 60,000 seat sell out, ten thousand Parisians milled outside without a ticket as Uruguay beat Switzerland 3-0. Gabriel Hunot, late editor of L’equipe was rhapsodic. “They created beautiful football...Before these fine athletes, who are to the English professionals like Arab thoroughbreds next to farm horses, the Swiss were disconcerted.” They repeated the feat in 1928 beating Argentina in an epic two game encounter, the second match proving so popular that nearly a quarter of the male adult population of the Netherlands applied for tickets.

Recognising both the extraordinary drawing power of international football, and the threat that the Olympic tournament posed to its own control of the game, FIFA finally acted and established its own global tournament. The 1930 hosting rights awarded to the only serious contender Uruguay. Thus the World Cup was born of a different global moment to the Olympics. In the two years following the 1928 Amsterdam games the fragile prosperity and peace of the 1920s was swept away. The Wall Street crash had sent out great waves of economic instability across the world. The key global economic networks of the Gold
standard and free trade were broken and nations increasingly retreated into autarchic and closed economic policies.

Democratic and liberal forces, already defeated in Italy, were steadily displaced in Spain and Portugal, Japan, Germany and across Central Europe. The League of Nations proved utterly ineffective in regulating the global political order as German military force ruled in Austria, Italian arms eventually prevailed in Ethiopia and Japan brutally extended its Chinese empire. The shadow of the Great War to come, lay across the entire decade.

The World Cups of the 1930s reflected this fragmented world. FIFA itself was a minor player in the organisation of the games, beyond awarding the hosting rights it had neither staff nor money nor the authority to decisively shape the tournament. The home nations of the United Kingdom remained outside of FIFA and imperiously aloof, playing at none of the tournaments and only sending a delegation to France in 1938.

Dependent still on ocean-going liners, only four European sides made into to Uruguay, and just Brazil from South America made the return journey to Europe. Africa, Asia and Oceania remained off the map of international football, but for the Egyptians in 1934 and a European colonial team from what was then the Dutch East Indies. In the absence of television and radio with a global reach, media coverage of the tournaments was limited and local.

The real and increasingly bitter political conflicts of the time made their way on the pitch. Austria vs. Italy in the 1934 World Cup pitched the Wunderteam of Red Vienna against the heralds of Mussolini’s Italy. The game between the France of the democratic Front Populaire and the Italians in 1938 was even more explicit as the Azurri, on this occasion alone, swapped their blue shirts for black shirts.

While the inter-war World Cups share these characteristics, they also differ markedly in their political agendas; indeed they set down some of the distinct political forms that World Cups have since assumed. Uruguay 1930 was a national celebration, a marker and an announcement of a period of momentous and successful social change. Timed to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of Uruguay’s independent constitution, the tournament was a global advert and domestic celebration of the country’s economic prosperity, functioning democracy and nascent welfare state; a combination given material from by the restrained
sinuous modernism of the Estadio Centenario – the continent’s first concrete double-decker stadium.

Italy 1934 was the first World Cup to be held under an authoritarian or dictatorial polity and used deliberately to buttress a regime’s domestic and international legitimacy. Mussolini and the Fascist party, anticipating many of the innovations of the Berlin 1936 Olympics, set about creating a staged politicised sporting spectacular. New fascist architecture and sculptures and the stadia were built, the foreign press were invited, subsidised and nurtured; Mussolini framed the entire event as a martial trial of nations and their masculinities. France 1938, organised by the leftist Popular Front government, was considered a deliberate riposte, an example of what a democracy could still do in a continent beset by dictators, a quieter exercise in soft power, but power nonetheless.

In the three decades after the end of the Second World War, the global networks rent asunder by the economic and military firestorm of the thirties and forties were rebuilt anew. At the core of the post-war global order was the Pax Americana, built around American military hegemony and the institutions of the newly formed United Nations. Together they provided sufficient stability for an American-led network of regulated global finance and trade to develop.

No longer, even in the imagination, the dominant global power, the home nations of the UK rejoined FIFA. Their poor showing in the first four World Cups of the post-war era were a poignant footnote to the wider and deeper process of post-imperial decline.

The normalization of the Cold War and the partial incorporation of the Communist Bloc into international institutions saw a Soviet team take part in its first World Cup – though the absence of the United States and the low esteem in which it then held football meant that the World Cup never acquired the kind of Cold War edge that was present at many of the Olympic Games of the era.

The rapid decolonization of European Empires between the late 1950s and mid 1970s opened the way for the first post-colonial nations to make an appearance at the tournament – Morocco, Zaire, Tunisia, North and South Korea.
Television made its debut in 1954 but its decisive impact on the World Cup was yet to come. The 1954 and 1958 Cups were but broadcast only to Europe. As late as 1962, black and white film of games was still being flown from Chile to Europe; television ownership remained rare outside of North America and the richest parts of Western Europe. Radio and press coverage grew but what turned the World Cup from merely a football tournament to a global spectacular was the arrival of live global satellite transmission, colour TV and the global spread of TV ownership and national broadcasting networks. The special place of the Mexico 1970 final in the history of the World Cup was sealed as much by the shimmering blue and yellow shirts of the teams as it was by Brazil’s glorious victory over Italy.

Again, within a common global framework, we find distinct types of World Cup in this era. Brazil 1950 was consciously understood as the sporting proof and celebration of the wave of urbanization and economic development that began under the authoritarian populism of Getulio Vargas in the 1930s. For most of this period and beyond though the Olympics served as the primary global acknowledgement of successful industrialisation and modernisation (Mexico City 1968, Seoul 1988) or reintegration into the international community after a long period of exile (Rome 1960, Tokyo 1964, Munich 1972).

Testament to the growing significance of the World Cup, Mexico 1970 and West Germany 1974, both of which followed hard on the heels of an Olympic Games, were used to press home the same message. Given that both the hosts Olympics had been tarnished by violence, domestic repression in Mexico’s case, international terrorism in Munich’s – their World Cups may well have provided a more positive cultural legacy.

The violence that accompanied the 1968 Mexico City games and the presence of anti-Pinochet protesters in the stands in West Germany in 1974, remind us that the authoritarian, state-directed World Cup, typified by Italy 1934, had not gone away. Mexico was still a highly authoritarian one-party state in 1970 and Argentina who hosted the 1978 World Cup was ruled by the military Junta that had taken power in 1976.

Against a backdrop of ruthless repression of domestic opponents, the Argentinean Junta commandeered nearly a quarter of the state’ budget to pay for the tournaments infrastructure, not to mention extensive support for the Peruvian regime whose team conveniently lost so heavily in the group stages. There was a lot hanging on this. General
Videla spoke to the Argentinean squad before the tournament began “Like a commander says to his troops before battle, you will be winners”.

By contrast to this kind of ideological bombast the post-war era began with the three “small” world Cups. The Second World War had left Europe’s leading economic and football powers in ruins which provided the opportunity for neutral Switzerland and Sweden to host the Cup. In 1962 Chile got the sympathy vote after the president of its football federation, Carlos Dittborn pleaded, “You must give us the World Cup, for we have nothing else”.

The ramshackle quaintness of those World Cups will not be seen again. No future tournament could feature a game like the one Norrkoping in 1958 in which the crowd was held back from the touchline by a rope hung on wooden posts, or a final like Santiago in 1962, in which the crowd invaded the pitch to celebrate the Champions. What endures of these World Cups is not the host’s experience, but the stage they provided for the narrative and sporting triumphs of others – West Germany in 1954 and the dazzling new Brazil of Pele and Garrincha in 1958 and 1962.

This was the norm, for England 1966 was the only World Cup between 1934 and 1974 won by its hosts. Paradoxically, for a culture that has always tried to insist that sport and politics have no connection with each other, it is the world cup story that has settled most deeply in the national psyche. When Bobby Moore wiped his muddy palm on his shorts before shaking hands with the Queen and receiving the trophy the English, after twenty years of imperial decline, felt themselves back where they belonged. The social fabric woven from politeness and deference, rank and status remained firm. The collapse of both these illusions and the failure of England to even make World Cup final let alone win one, makes the past ever more golden as the present becomes ever more unpalatable.

There are many moments from which we can begin to date and chart the new wave of globalization that has swept over us: the collapse of the Bretton Woods institutions and the oil price hikes of the early 1970s; the rise of Anglo-Saxon neo-liberals and their programme of financial and industrial deregulation in the 1980s; the emergence of the first global and digital communication technologies in the 1990s. In the history of the World Cup, Spain 1982 is the moment of decisive change.
Argentina 1978 belonged to the Junta, but Spain 82 was Joao Havalange’s. It was eight years since the Brazilian had beaten Sir Stanley Rous in the election for the FIFA presidency in a campaign that promised a decisive shift in power and presence from Europe to the new football nations of the developing world. In 1982, the newly expanded 24-team tournament with extra places for Africa, Asia and South America, delivered.

To make it possible, Havalange made three key changes. First, he turned FIFA from a cottage industry into a twentieth-century international NGO, with staff, facilities and income to match. Second, he began the process of commercialisation. Indeed Havalange’s FIFA set the template for the sponsorship of all future global sporting spectacles. For the first time, FIFA offered tailored exclusive and protected sponsorship packages to multinational corporations at the 1982 World Cup and aggressively sold the television rights to the tournament realising something near the real commercial value rather than the scrapings they had previously received; together these innovations would secure an ever growing global audience for the World Cup and an ever increasing income for FIFA. Finally, he introduced a style of leadership and a political culture, leant in the hard schools of Brazilian boom and dictatorship, which replaced Rous gentlemanly amateurism and civic service with truly imperial ambition, a razor sharp understanding of power and a preference for secrecy.

In the years since Spain 82, the World Cup has assumed its contemporary form. With 32 teams the tournament now lasts almost a month, requiring double the numbers of stadiums used to host the cups of the 60s and 70s and contributing to the steadily escalating cost of hosting. The pitch invasion that followed Argentina’s victory at Mexico 1986 was the last of the old as the staging, design and choreography of every World Cup game has become more systematised and designed for television consumption.

Opening and closing ceremonies have been added and fan parks have appear, for the increasing number of travelling supporters, giving a dash of both ritual and carnival to the event. The space for the crowd itself has been squeezed by the rising number of covering the World Cup and the large share of tickets accorded to both sponsors and expensive hospitality packages.

Rising costs have certainly not deterred prospective hosts. Three European nations have held the World Cup for a second time and all used it as an opportunity for global rebranding. Italia
90 show cased the emergent post industrial nation of high fashion, high tech and high concept architecture and for those who chose to look, its hidden circuits of corruption, political clique and organised crime.

France 1998 looked at first to be a confirmation of the nation’s etatisme, the sporting expression of François Mitterrand’s grands projects, though that was soon taken over by the democratic and popular dynamic of its unprecedentedly multi-ethnic team.

Germany 2006 told us that a decade and half after unification, it was time to loosen up and thanks to the brio and verve of its young team, that nation duly responded, Public space in Germany that summer was carnivalseque and uncharacteristically open; public expressions of German identity were, perhaps the most visible and uncomplicated since 1945.

While domestic political agendas were the key notes of these European world cups, FIFA’s sporting, political and commercial agendas came to the fore outside of Europe. Both USA 1994 and Korea/Japan 2002 were conscious initiatives to showcase football in regions of the world where the game had previously been either a minority sport or a semi–professional backwater. In both cases this was achieved, although 1994 was also an occasion an outburst of most splenetic forms of American nativism that still considers football a dangerously un-American, communitarian phenomenon and leaves American sporting culture bitterly divided and strangely politicised.

Korea/Japan was a televisual triumph, but the political conflict that accompanied the preparations showed how little the emotional and historical hurts of the Japanese colonial era have healed however much we all like football. Moreover, the enormous expenditure of both nations of new stadiums, that have yet to be filled by domestic football, demonstrated the problems of giganticism, over provision and white elephant infrastructure that the Olympic movement faced, where now on football’s agenda.

Since Germany 2006, the story of the World Cup has taken a different turn. First and foremost, the choice of hosts reflects the rise of the resource rich global South with the tournament already held in South Africa and heading for Brazil, Russia and Qatar. That said a number of the largest and most powerful states in the global South have been absent from
the World Cup altogether – like India, Indonesia and Pakistan or only rarely present as their own domestic football cultures have been ravaged by war like Iraq or corruption like China.

Second, the level of global saturation coverage achieved of the tournament itself has now been accompanied by a much higher degree of scrutiny of the entire process of hosting the tournament. The massive Mexican earthquake that preceded the 1986 tournament made barely a ripple in anyone’s preparations while South Africa endured a firestorm of criticism from the moment it won the right to host the 2010 Cup. Although much of the criticism aimed at South Africa was narrow minded, ignorant and alarmist, it is to a trend to be welcomed.

Public scrutiny of the tournament revealed both corruption and the use of violence during the construction of the stadium in Nelspruit and highlighted the worrying growth of the kick back culture in South Africa. The press and social activists were key to maintaining pressure on both FIFA and the South African government to come good on their promises of leaving a tangible legacy for the country’s impoverished grassroots football scene. Though fact that there has been so little legacy in South Africa, the fact that so many of the new stadiums in remain underused and loss making, the fact that the South African FA proved itself amongst the most dysfunctional and unrefordable institutions in the country suggests that rather than too much scrutiny there was actually too little.

There is more of this to come. It is the price of success, the consequence of creating and hosting one of the truly popular cosmopolitan festivals of a truly global era. But with success, status and prestige come obligations. When one makes the claim to, in some sense, represent or speak for humanity, when one yokes football -rightly I believe - to visions of global equality and social development, then the political game has changed.

It is an agenda that is morally incompatible with the politics of secrecy, rule by clique, untransparent voting and opaque financial procedures. On occasion it is an agenda that will come into conflict with the interests of powerful commercial and political actors. The history of the next three tournaments will, in great part, be a story of how well FIFA and its World Cup hosts adapt to these new demands.
Viewed in the long-term the history of the World Cup offers us an intriguing path through the complex narratives of the twentieth century’s shifting waves of globalisation. The stories of the hosts and the winners provide are the best known tales and offer some of the clearest examples of how national polities work how national identity are imagined. However, the World Cup has many smaller, intersecting stories to tell. We must not ignore them.

The complex patterns of contemporary global migration and citizenship are increasingly reflected in the multi-ethnic composition of European and Gulf state national sides. The huge rise in global tourism is reflected in the increasingly large contingents of foreign fans, able and willing to make the journey. The overwhelming presence of American fans, the largest foreign presence at South Africa 2010, testament to the game’s growing hold on part of the American public.

The enduring sporting and political rivalries of world football continue to offer intriguing subplots – for example, England vs. Argentina, Germany vs. Holland, England vs. Germany. Post-colonial moments abound like France vs. Senegal in 2002 or Portugal vs. Angola in 2006.

The men’s World Cup no longer stands alone. The Women’s World Cup, now over two decades old is rising in stature and gathering an audience; it provides a powerful counterpoint to the overwhelmingly masculine world of global football. The popularity and distinct fan cultures of the 2011 tournament in Germany make it clear we can no longer tell a World Cup history as if there were only a single gender on the pitch. Similarly the creation of the Street Football World Cup that now accompanies the main event has given us a small portal through which to view the vast fields of youth soccer and social programmes.

More than a mere reflection, the World Cup continues to impact upon the world outside the media spectacular. In 1998 Ronaldo’s dizzy fit on the day of the final, which seemed to render him comatose for the game, not only lost Brazil the match but triggered a series of investigations, accusations and commissions into the decrepit state of the nation’s football.
In 2002 Turkey’s third place was not only celebrated as a national holiday, the players rewarded with presidential gifts of gold, but taken as proof of the success of Turkey’s helter-skelter industrialisation.

And then there are just moments, tiny but brilliant portraiture of a single speck of time. Amongst my own favourites: in 2002 the look on Michael Owen’s face as he fooled the Argentineans into gifting him a penalty, a delicious reversal of the national stereotypes of mendacity and cunning. Cambiasso’s goal in 2006 that resulted from Argentina’s 26-pass move; a performance of three-dimensional Euclidian genius. In 2010, the long collective gasp of relief in the Soweto fan park as South Africa beat Mexico and found honour in defeat.

Rarest and most precious of all, are moments of true cosmopolitanism, when the frameworks of national identities, stereotypes and rivalries inherent in international football, are momentarily transcended; when the football is just so good that it doesn’t matter who it is; when the story is better than victory or defeat; when the promise of a universal humanity is made emotionally tangible.

If, as in every historian’s fantasy, I was offered a time machine and told I could choose a single moment in World Cup history to visit, I would choose the final of the 1958 World Cup. There are no time machines, but we have both analytical rigour and our emotional imaginations to guide us. It is somewhere between the two that these moments can be captured and understood and it is in that spirit that I would like to conclude, with my own account of the game’s final moments.
They showed football as a different conception; they killed the white skidding ball as if it were a lump of cotton wool....Didi, floating about mysteriously in midfield, was always the master link, the dynamo setting his attack in motion; and besides Didi with Vava and Pele a piercing double central thrust, they had one man above all the others, to turn pumpkins into coaches and mice into men – Garrincha. Geoffrey Hill, The Times.