

The Global Game

A FOOTBALL MONTHLY

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2 • FEBRUARY 2003

Loving football (see [issue no. 1](#) for why “football” is favored over “soccer”) in the United States can seem chic and countercultural. While locals are wrapped up in the Atlanta Falcons’ playoff prospects or the excesses surrounding the Super Bowl or National Basketball Association All-Star Game, watching Arsenal on Saturday or Sunday mornings feels like a form of nonviolent protest.



Pushing beyond the American resistance to football—chronicled thoroughly in [Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism](#) by Andrei Markovits and Steven Hellerman (Princeton University Press, 2001)—gaining knowledge of and taking pleasure in foot-

ball might be one way of becoming a global citizen.

Obtaining global citizenship is especially critical for Americans, perhaps more so now, when the Bush administration has made a grand display of ignorance and triumphalism. Can global citizenship be approached by taking interest in something so mundane as football?

As Ellis Cashmore states in the interview on [page 3](#), “[T]here is no other sport like soccer/football that is played globally and which inspires so many different cultures to similar responses.” I would add that the game, for Americans, can serve as an entrée to geography, politics, religion and traditions among the large immigrant population and abroad.

Interesting that Alessandro Martelli, professor of American literature at the University of Rome, uses the term “exceptionalism” to gauge the U.S. administration’s reaction to September 11. Eric Alterman writes ([“USA Oui! Bush Non!”](#) *The Nation*, 10 February 2003), citing Martelli, “[M]any Europeans yearned to see Americans develop some empathy for the suffering of the rest of the world as a result of their own tragic ex-

MEDIA GLEANINGS

The *New York Times* has had **George Vecsey** positioned in Britain since late January, reporting on the [FA Cup](#), racism in European



football and the anti-racism efforts of struggling Premiership side [West Ham United](#). The latter article ([“West Ham](#)

[United: One Team That Courts Its Neighbors.](#)” 4 February) painted a picture of football-based community activism, quoting **Mick King**, director of West Ham’s Academy of Football, on the team’s relationship to immigrant communities in London’s East End. “Our role is not to bring Asian people,” that is, Pakistani or Bengali, “to the turnstiles.” West Ham “already sell out every game. Our job is to teach people to play football.” Vecsey’s piece provided nice context for understanding the animosity behind erstwhile East Ender **Lee Bowyer**’s recent transfer to the Hammers, who are in danger of relegation to England’s First Division. . . .

The fascination with **David Beckham** goes on. One hopes there is some irony in the latest treatise, as [reported by Reuters](#) (3 February), titled “One David Beckham: Celebrity, Masculinity and the Soccerati,” to be published in the *Sociology of Sport Journal* later this year. The news service quotes **Andrew Parker** of Warwick University and coauthor [Ellis Cashmore](#) of Staffordshire, who describe Beckham in **Walt Whitman**-esque rhythms as “emerging master, global phenomenon, chosen-one, sporting messiah, corporate and commercial standard bearer. Calm, considered, slight yet strong, tattooed for the cause, quintessential sporting icon.” The Beckham phenomenon is also analyzed in a book by Cashmore, [Beckham](#), published by Polity Press in October 2002, and in [Julie Birchill](#)’s *Birchill on Beckham*. (See the interview with Dr. Cashmore on [page 3](#).) . . .

Phil Ball’s writings continue to

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intrigue. Filing for ESPN's [Soccernet.com](#), Ball dissects the comedy involving Ukrainian-born **Dimitri Piterman** and La Liga's Racing Santander ("[Total Football Management.](#)" 28 January). Ball asks, What is the place in football of a moneyed outsider with aspirations to complete control? Ball moves toward larger issues in football and sport, noting the postmodern spread of sport-related topics to academic fields such as biology, economics, sociology and psychology. Piterman's "total management" concept, according to Ball, harks back to a less specialized day. Footballers, too, "for all their bluster, like to be bossed around and organised. They have been brought up on a diet of obedience and conformity. . . ."

Sid Lowe of *The Guardian* (U.K.) covered the mid-January derby between Madrid's Real and Atlético ("[Vikings and Indians Share Spoils of Madrid Derbi.](#)" 20 January), masterfully portraying the personalities involved. "Saintly Real Madrid president **Florentino Pérez** (left in photo) admitted that when he took his centenary-celebrating squad to the Vatican, he asked the Pope to return Atlético to the top-flight. Which was nice of him." I recall the photograph of Real paying homage before its Champions League fixture last September. **Luis Figo** appeared to be nodding off in the back row. . . .



Not to ignore football in South America, [Reuters reports](#) (23 January) that the pitch at Rio's famous Maracanã was unplayable for a time, partly due to kickabouts arranged by **Ronaldo** and others. I had to refer to "[The Idiot's Guide to a Kick-About](#)" at [footie51.com](#) for a full explanation, and I'm still not sure what a kickabout entails. One can agree with [footie51's Andrew Crawford](#), however, that "there are many principles in the noble art of kicking a football." . . .

With pride I note the contributions of **Robert Ross Findly** of Duke University—my alma mater—toward

Keeping the world safe for . . . football

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perience." Alterman goes on to note the "lack of an authentic democratic voice for the American people in the conduct of foreign policy." Fortunately, though, Americans can empower themselves by cultivating fellow feeling with other nationalities—interest in world football is merely one avenue.

At the least, the United States could avoid diplomatic embarrassments such as that created by embassy officials in Bogotá, who did not understand why Colombian players needed entry visas for a 12 February friendly with Mexico, taking place in Phoenix (Grahame Jones, "[A Friendly Flurry to Pass Time.](#)" *Los Angeles Times*, 9 February). More fundamentally, it will take hard-won insight for citizens and politicians to see that the United States is not the center of the universe.

The advantages of football and other world sports, like cricket, are eloquently summarized by William Rhoden ("Metaphors, Realities and Football," *New York Times*, 29 January), who writes how the Super Bowl and other large sporting events perpetuate a narrow idea of patriotism. Why, for example, do we have to listen to "The Star-Spangled Banner" before every game? Rhoden continues: "Our lengthening global reach as a nation has made it increasingly difficult to maintain a Monroe Doctrine-ish distance from the rest of the world—even in sport and perhaps especially in sport. As we police the world and tap into new markets, we also learn more about the world's recreation. . . . We have to a large extent resisted the entreaties of soccer, but resistance is weakening. As the world community shrinks, we become introduced to new tastes, new passions and new realities."

Many thanks to all who have sent kind comments about the first issue of *Global Game*. Again, I am interested to receive postcard-like descriptions of football in your hometown, poetry and photographs. Send these to globalgame@mindspring.com. A reminder, too, that links in this document are active. Click on the violet, underlined text to access the relevant text.

—JOHN TURNBULL

appreciation of football in the United States. Findly interrupted a scintillating home basketball game against archrival North Carolina on 5 February by cladding himself in shoes, blue body paint, scarf and Nike swoosh

and streaking cross-court during a timeout—his tribute to the much-repeated Nike Shox commercial. Life imitated art as Findly faked out his

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INTERVIEW WITH ELLIS CASHMORE

The Global Game on 7 February conducted an e-mail interview with [Ellis Cashmore](#), professor of culture, media and sport at Staffordshire University (U.K.), visiting scholar at the University of South Florida in Tampa and the author of *Beckham* (Polity, U.K., 2002).

GG: *My distant impression of David Beckham is of a shaggy-maned, oddly dressed poseur who is more image than substance. Why has he been accorded such admiration—not just in the U.K., but globally? What drives the trend that sees Beckham as a subject for serious academic study?*

EC: Beckham has become the biggest sports celebrity in the world, bar none. He is known everywhere outside the USA (where interest is nonexistent). But this guy has a status Michael Jordan never approached. Whereas Jordan was admired, Beckham is adored globally, accorded godlike status in some parts of the world and loved by people who have no knowledge of nor interest in soccer.

GG: *I gather from your [course description](#) that Beckham can be discussed within a wider frame of media and fan obsession with sport and a prevalent cult of celebrity. Is the Beckham phenomenon distinct in some way from these large movements or the perfect illustration of them?*

EC: No, Beckham is perfectly positioned in the mainstream of celebrity culture. He is a hybrid: neither athlete nor showbiz entertainer—some of both. Obviously, when he married one of the Spice Girls his status went up immediately—from a promising athlete to an A-list celeb who rubbed shoulders with the likes of Lenny Kravitz and Elton John and attended Armani fashion launches. He and Victoria became prey for the paparazzi. The thing is: as her star fell, his continued to rise, so that, while she is largely forgotten, he remains a global icon—and I used the word appropriately in this instance.

GG: *I'm interested in the phrase "[football culture](#)." Does the phrase have a distinct meaning? Is "football culture" a field that academia has created, or that academics such as yourself are just late to recognize?*

EC: Everything apart from the game itself: the history of the sport, the fans that support it, the things that engage them, the things they collect. Perhaps more importantly, the way the media has shaped, even controlled soccer, the central position it occupies in popular culture not only in Europe but in many other parts of the world. The one thing we don't discuss is: how about last night's game?

GG: *What can the study of football culture contribute to understanding cross-cultural relationships outside football and sport and to a person's self-identification as a global citizen?*

EC: There's no short answer to this. On your second point, football is the locus of a great many peoples' identity today. They understand themselves in relation to their club and there are deep historical reasons for this. On your first point, there is no other sport like soccer/football that is played globally and which inspires so many different cultures to similar responses. I guess that tells us something about universal values, commitments, perhaps even emotions. No other sport comes close, certainly no American sport. And I state this objectively (I personally follow the NFL, major-league baseball and have a passing interest in the NHL—I go to see the Tampa Bay Lightning when in Tampa). I can't stand basketball, though.



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pursuers before being tackled. Findly reported some "bumps and bruises" ("[Evasive Streaker Faces Two Charges](#)," *Raleigh [N.C.] News and Observer*, 7 February) from his seemingly successful drive for notoriety.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Attending the [Women's United Soccer Association](#) draft in Atlanta on 2 February left me with a distinct impression: my cellphone is hopelessly uncool.

Sitting two rows behind early-round draft selections **Aly Wagner**, **Christie Welsh**, **Devvyn Hawkins**, **Hope Solo**, **Lauren Orlando** and **Susan Bush**, I found myself mesmerized by the phones the six exchanged as they worked off nervous energy, chattering with friends or family in

the draft room and in an outside hallway. There were flip-top models, some with glowing blue screens and tiny antennae, all no doubt with text-messaging capability—the players' lifeline as they spread the women's game worldwide. Wagner and Hawkins had returned not two days before from representing the United States at the Four Nations Tournament in China.

More to the point, I became aware how the women's game, like the men's, at times treats its players like commodities. This is not a criticism of the WUSA's draft procedure, but a fact of the professional sporting life. I could not imagine having my services bid upon in public, my sense of self-worth and life course hinging on managers' assessment of performance. This feeling was strongest in Bush's case, who sat rigid in her chair as one selection after another passed her by—the other players embracing and bouncing among admirers—before she was taken 15th overall. One writer spotted Bush—who suffered several knee injuries in her career at the University of North Carolina—crying in the hallway.

Overall, however, the draft atmosphere was optimistic, despite recent pessimism about the league's future (**Lena Williams**, "Staying Power Is Lingering Question," *New York*

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Football, close to home



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A mural, "Paint the Town," at Martin Luther King, Jr., Harmony Park, Decatur, Georgia, USA. Mural artists are Robert Felker and Andy Harmon.

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Times, 3 February) and news about possible rollbacks in Title IX legislation. Wagner, the top selection, had the [quote of the draft](#), after being asked to don the kit of the San Diego Spirit—cleats and all—and to trudge through a fancy corporate lobby for photographs: "I feel like a dork."

INTERNET, TV & CINEMA

Although my Champions League fantasy team is mired in mid-table (standing 50,355 out of 115,187 as of 7 February), this has not dampened my enthusiasm for the [uefa.com](#) website. The site of late has produced reports on football in Greece ([Adam Szreter](#), "Greek Football at the Crossroads," 7 February), on the Scottish Football Association's guidance on goal celebration ("[Cause for Celebration](#)," 10 February) and on Werder Bremen's [Ailton](#), who [compares lovemaking styles](#) with Ronaldo. The site really shines, however, the day following Champions League fixtures, when full highlights are available (for free).



Why, however, do site designers feel it necessary to place boldface headlines over each paragraph? The headlines are a real distraction.

QUOTABLE

"The Serbian police stopped their game in the stadium with force, but they never did stop the wish and their passion for playing football"—[Driton Latifi](#), [speech at the "World Conference of Sports Media,"](#) Copenhagen, 2000, on attempted Serbian controls on FC Prishtina and Kosovar football league during the Kosovar conflict.

"[Zinedine] Zidane tiene una habilidad especial porque, aparte de ser un estupendísimo futbolista, que lo es y de lo mejorcito del mundo, tampoco reparte caramelos de limón" ("Zidane has a special ability because, aside from being a stupendous footballer—the greatest in the world—he's not handing out lemon caramels," rough translation)—[Pablo Alfaro](#) (above), Seville defender, to [Canal Plus](#) (España), after Zidane was cautioned in Real



Madrid's derby with Atlético. Zidane remarked, "No soy un santo" ("I am not a saint").

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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