

The Global Game

A FOOTBALL MONTHLY

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 5 • MAY 2003

Demonstrating the usual lack of planning, this issue of *Global Game* has taken shape around the important topic of playing surfaces. We in the United States pride ourselves on the unblemished suburban greensward, which, as it turns out, is potentially devastating to the environment and “almost completely useless” according to a recent *Los Angeles Times Magazine* report (Preston Lerner, “[Whither the Lawn](#),” 4 May).

I have become something of an expert on lawn maintenance, having been introduced at an early age to the fierce inter-lawn competition in our tract neighborhood in Rockville, Maryland. I know enough not to envy those charged with maintaining grass “trays” at Giants Stadium. As far as football goes, playing on an unbounded expanse can even be a disadvantage. Numerous sources testify to this fact. Roberto Bettega, vice-chairman of Juventus, [endorses street football](#), saying, “Young players need some time for self-ex-

pression, for spontaneity.” Simon Kuper of the *Times* (London) recently chronicled the early days of Zinedine Zidane on the Place Tartane in Marseilles (“[The Caring Face of Pure Genius](#),” 21 April). On these hard, confined surfaces, Yazid, as he was known then, mastered

[T]he football that Yazid had learnt was not the real thing. The first time a Cannes coach threw a ball at his head, he ducked in alarm. There had been no heading on the Place Tartane.’

—Simon Kuper

his trademark “roulette,” in which he rolls the ball beneath his right sole and pirouettes to create space—demonstrated to perfection in the first half against his former side, Juventus, in the first leg of the Champions League semifinal on 6 May. Kuper, though, adds a caveat: “[T]he football that Yazid had learnt was not the real thing. The first time a Cannes coach threw a ball at his head, he ducked in alarm. There had been no heading on the Place Tartane.”

A variety of playing spaces are on display in *Magnum Football* (U.S. title, *Magnum Soccer* [London and New York: Phaidon, 2002]), a

[>> go to page 2](#)



KERI A. TOPE | THE GLOBAL GAME

Atlanta's Epworth United Methodist Church—across the street from the field pictured on page 4—makes its allegiance known.

MEDIA GLEANINGS

The New York Times Magazine (John Dee, “[This Grass Is Always Greener](#),” 20 April) offered more than one really needed to know about [FieldTurf](#), the FIFA-endorsed artificial playing surface that has made its way onto fields in [Major League Soccer](#) and the [Women's United Soccer Association](#) and that could one day host World Cup qualifying matches. “Lines are marked on it with water-soluble paint,” Dee writes. “[I]f a player should bleed or throw up into it, a small vacuum removes the offending patch of infill, which is then re-



[>> go to page 2](#)

>> [continued from page 1](#)

placed.” Dee’s article serves as good publicity for the Dalton, Ga.–manufactured product, which does have competitors. Dee reports how real grass will grow (unintentionally) amid the carpet-like surface and refers to the polyethylene-polypropylene blend as the “awesome triumph of the ersatz: it gives beneath your feet, it provides some cushion when you run and fall on it and, unlike the more traditional asphalt-backed surfaces, it doesn’t heat up like a giant frying pan in summer weather. The fake grass blades are oil-coated to prevent the scourge of turf burn.” Still, [Kansas City Wizards](#) and U.S. national-team striker **Josh Wolff** makes clear that FieldTurf, which coats the field in Naperville, Ill., the temporary home of the [Chicago Fire](#), was part of the reason for his departure. “The stadium is nice,” Wolff told the *Chicago Daily Herald*, “but the soccer side of playing Naperville is just shocking.” . . .

Perhaps the definition of celebrity is feeling a need to talk about someone even when you really don’t want to talk about them. This is how I have felt about **David Beckham** recently. His face is ever in my mind, and I read incessantly about the [potential transfer to Real Madrid](#)—even though I have no reason to care. **Frank Deford** of *Sports Illustrated* and National Public Radio even used air time to ad-

dress the Beckham phenomenon (“Brilliance Afield,” 30 April, available in [text](#) and [audio](#) versions). “Is it fair



to say that, for all time—not even **Babe Ruth** and his home run—there has never been an athlete so identified with a single play as has Beckham with his free kick?” Deford asks. “That, for us provincials, is when the kicker gets a ball spotted while the defenders make up a human wall before him, blocking transit to the goal. . . . No athlete . . . may ever have been so brilliant at one thing as David Beckham is at bending it.” As **Thom Satterlee** (see “Postcard” on page 3) points out, Deford’s comments fall into the tradition of U.S.-based media, who treat soccer as an exotic import to which the American public needs a formal introduction. He notes, in particular, Deford’s self-identification as a “provincial” (and one can see how Deford distances himself with strange diction like “kicker,” “blocking transit”). “That self-abasement would never have happened in the ’70s,” Satterlee writes, “and yet the same mixture of education and entertainment prevails.” . . .

As if you hadn’t heard enough already about Beckham and friends, the *Washington Post* devoted [several thousand words](#) to recently crowned Barclaycard English Premier League champions Manchester United (**Thomas Heath**, “[ManU’s Perfect Pitch](#),”

1 May). The article mentions the early 1990s as a critical period in the club’s development, when the ManU brand took shape and when the club was transformed “from a respectable and beloved team into a power on the field and in the board room.” Yet Heath does not address the tawdry side, especially the raucous and racist fan elements that **Bill Buford** chronicled, in sickening detail, in *Among the Thugs* (1991). Apparently, if the *Post*’s account is accurate, such gruesome scenes as United fans on rampage in Turin following a late-’80s European Cup fixture presaged the club’s rise to glory, as travel bans, stadia reform and the birth of a sanitized, money-rich Premier League made football more palatable for non-hooligans. All that said, it’s still surprising to learn that there is a Manchester United–brand ketchup. . . .

Several media outlets chronicled the ordeals of Iraqi footballers under **Saddam Hussein** and, in particular, the torture they received at the direction of Saddam’s son **Uday**, who controlled the nation’s Olympic committee. The *New York Times* offers the freshest report (**John Burns**, “[Soccer Players Describe Torture by Hussein’s Son](#),” 6 May), suggesting that footballers attracted special attention because they were Shiite. Many came from Saddam City (now Al-Sadr City), a Shiite area of Baghdad. **Emmanuel**

>> [go to page 3](#)

Sometimes, the most important thing is the ground beneath our feet

>> [continued from page 1](#)

boulevard leading toward the destroyed National Library in Sarajevo, a beach in Blackpool, chalky hardpan in Kometou, Cameroon. And most readers likely saw pictures of Iraqis playing recently, smoke plumes on the horizon.

One enjoyable account of football’s many surfaces is Phil Ball’s description of the Peruvian football derivative, *fulbito* (“Peruvian Rhapsody,” [When Saturday Comes](#), November 1988). “The whole continent is littered with stone or concrete pitches, probably 25 yards by 12. It is a sophisticated form of six-a-side

which naturally develops every player’s close control, dummying skills and an aversion to the long ball.” Naturally, my tendency while growing up in suburbia, given the boundless grass pitch and lack of tactical knowledge, was to whack the ball as far as possible: whether I aimed for a teammate was immaterial. We had a public-address announcer at some of our games (youth football has been big in the Washington, D.C., area for some time), and how I loved to hear the words: “Long ball by Turnbull.”

—JOHN TURNBULL

POSTCARD FROM UPLAND, INDIANA

In correspondence with Thom Satterlee (below left), assistant professor of English at Taylor University, we learn of his humble beginnings as a football supporter. A native of Canton, Georgia (see poem below), Satterlee was raised a fan of the Atlanta Chiefs of the defunct NPSL (National Professional Soccer League) and NASL ([North American Soccer League](#)). Satterlee won a trophy, which he retains, with the Cherokee (County) Chiefs in 1974. Off the pitch, Satterlee has positioned himself among the leading poets about Pelé, having published no fewer than three in *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*—"Pelé to Rosemari: Chile, 1962" (fall 1998); "Pelé at Thirteen" (fall 1999); and "I Was Almost Pelé" (fall 2000). He has written, too, on the media's presentation of football to an often uninterested U.S. audience ("Making Soccer a 'Kick in the Grass': The Media's Role in Promoting a Marginal Sport, 1975–1977," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 36 [September 2001]), and is an award-winning translator.



The poem below was published originally, without title, in *Paragraph: A Magazine of Paragraphs* (no. 13, fall 1994). It is used by permission.

The Soccer Field in Canton, Georgia

It is a playing field 100 yards long and 80 yards wide. Early morning, a man unloads a silver two-wheeled cart from his truck and begins to chalk the field. He is holding a black rubber handle. The two wheels squeak, but white dust falls in a steady stream from a flap underneath. He will retrace a square, an arc, a circle, and two dots. Because he is alone and it is quiet, he drifts into himself, into that wavery place, the office of the mind, where notes are forgotten and the desk turns over and all his papers spill on the floor. Whenever he is in town or here coaching one of the younger teams, he smiles at people. They forget him. He is just a normal guy. When he finishes and pushes his cart to the truck, he can't remember walking around the whole field, but the lines are there. He wonders if he is sad or just in a calm place now. Where had he gone those quiet minutes on the field, the grass bending under his boots, white lines appearing behind him like a trail of thoughts? He decides he likes drifting off, forgetting, being forgotten by others. And here he has left something to play on and use up, so he can come back again.

COPYRIGHT © 1994, THOM SATTERLEE

[>> continued from page 2](#)

Baba Dano, longtime national coach, reports debates with Uday Hussein over player selection. "I told him, 'If you want oil, you go to an oilfield.' In soccer, our oilfield is Saddam City." Also disturbing in relation to the Iraq conflict is a report about Syrian international **Fadi Afash**, who plays professionally with the [A-League](#) Portland (Oreg.) Timbers (**Jason Vonder-smith**, "[Syrian Soccer Star Focuses on Goals during Tense Times](#)," *Portland Tribune*, 25 April). In an action reminiscent of fans in Scotland directing hand gestures of a crashing plane toward U.S. international **Claudio Reyna** shortly after September 11, 2001, one of Afash's teammates reminded him that Syria might be the target of U.S. military action. The teammate made "a noise like an explosion and gesture[d] as if to signify a rising plume of smoke." Afash's response was muted: "These guys always give me a hard time about my country." The fan in Scotland was disciplined for his action. Will the same be true for Afash's teammate?

INTERNET, TV,
CINEMA & MUSIC

[Bend It Like Beckham](#) was, as film reviewers say, a "boisterous romp," but not for the expected reasons. True, we see Jesminder Bhamra (**Parminder Nagra**), Jules Paxton (**Keira Knightley**) and friends "gender-bending" it by playing football in a culture resistant to the change in roles (see [online interview](#) with **Anjana Gadgil** of *The Guardian*). But, also important, we get hints of overt racial prejudice from Jess's Punjabi Sikh father (played by **Anupam Kher**, right), who late in the film confesses to the lingering hurt of exclusion from an English cricket club. Jess, too, as **Thierry Henry**, **Emile Heskey** and others have encountered during Euro 2004 qualifying in recent months, is forced to react to racist behavior on the pitch.



In short, the premise of the film—despite protests from critics (see below) who charge filmmakers with

[>> go to page 4](#)

Football, close to home



KERI A. TOPE | THE GLOBAL GAME

An Atlanta pitch, located in Candler Park, next to a municipal golf course and picnic ground, receives all-season use. The pattern of wear seems to reflect inattention to wing play, perhaps a tactical defect innate to the American game.

>> [continued from page 3](#)

artificiality—is credible. Members of London’s Sikh community—many of whom, according to [information from the BBC](#), arrived from Punjab in the 1950s and ’60s—dealt with discrimination in the wake of September 11, when they were mistaken for Muslims. Curiously, since Jess’s father is depicted as a worker at Heathrow, there has also been tension over the rights of airport employees and travelers who follow Sikhism to wear the *kirpan* (small sword), a symbol of the faith.

In the Bhamra family’s living area we see a large portrait of **Nanak**, the founder of the Sikh religion (*sikh* means “learner” in Punjabi). One of Nanak’s sayings, according to a [Punjab website](#), is “Sabbhe sanjhiwal sadain koi na dise bahara jiyo,” or, “Everybody is a part of the same large community; nobody is an outsider”—a nice coincidence, since the film addresses exclusion in numerous forms, whether by gender, race or sexual orientation.

I am certainly not alone in noting the significance of racial issues in *Bend It*. The film, [according to the BBC’s Delhi correspondent, Jill McGivering](#), is credited with sparking in-

terest in the women’s game and with helping to form India’s first girls league. **Ashley Hammond**, a soccer trainer and women’s-league organizer from Montclair, N.J., said, “I took eight or nine of the girls to see the movie. They loved it. They had no idea that it could be so difficult for a girl, especially an Indian girl. We discussed it afterward, how it was about racism as well as feminism. And they really got it” (quoted in **Bob Campbell**, “[What a Kick: ‘Bend It Like Beckham’ Delights Young Soccer Fans.](#)” *Newark Star-Ledger*, 1 May). In the same article, a consultant on Indian films refers to South Asians who “brought along non-Indian friends to show them what their culture is really about.” (Not all responses have been positive. **A. O. Scott** in the *New York Times* criticized director **Gurinder Chadha** for predictability and for failing to grant the characters “full human oddness.” Similarly skeptical is **Michael D. Giar-dina**, “‘Bending It Like Beckham’ in the Global Popular: Stylish Hybridity, Performativity, and the Politics of Representation,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 27 [February 2003].)

Participants in and supporters of football should feel proud that the sport, despite the inbred sexist and racist attitudes that remain a large

problem, can nevertheless be seen as a credible vehicle for messages of tolerance. The bottom line? *Bend It Like Beckham* marks a big improvement over *Mean Machine*.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

The Global Game is published monthly by [JZ Editing & Publishing](#), 629 2nd Ave., Decatur, GA 30030, USA. All material is copyright © by JZ Editing & Publishing, unless otherwise noted. The publication is distributed at no cost on the World Wide Web at [jandkeri.home.mindspring.com/game.htm](#). E-mail submissions and letters are welcome, with the understanding that these materials may be used, with attribution, in future issues. *The Global Game* cannot provide remuneration for submissions and does not guarantee that such submissions will be acknowledged. The writer or artist retains proprietary rights to material on submission, but agrees to acknowledge *The Global Game* for future use.

