

The Global Game

A FOOTBALL MONTHLY

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 9 • OCTOBER 2003 • WWW.THEGLOBALGAME.COM



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The 'World's' curious absence from the Women's World Cup

Nothing about the photograph above, taken before the [South Korea–France](#) kickoff at [Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium](#) on 24 September, commends itself. Certainly, the ritualistic elements should seem familiar to fans of international football. Two sides in colorful kit, bank of FIFA-accredited photographers, coterie of referee and linesmen, TV cameraman scanning tautened pre-game faces and the banner, toward the rear, containing uninspired FIFA slogan (“My Game Is Fair Play”). One can imagine the highly distorted strains of national anthems through stadium speakers. Yes, everything seems in place.

This view, however, was reserved for those fortunate to be on-site. As Thom Satterlee notes in his “postcard” on [page 3](#), television by

its nature as a framed viewing area shuts out a lot. One’s viewing is further bounded by time. Hence, during the Women’s World Cup, at least in the United States, the two-hour viewing window was strictly enforced. Only once do I recall seeing a player (Canada’s Charmaine Hooper) reciting the [FIFA fair-play creed](#). Notwithstanding the comment above about “fair play” as an uninspired catchphrase, only an unrepentant cynic would say it has no meaning or that football, on good days, cannot have positive effects on “equality, peace, children’s right[s], health, education and the environment,” [as the FIFA website states](#).

Further, though, in largely ignoring the creed, national anthems, the foreign faces, the

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MEDIA GLEANINGS

Thanks to the generosity of research director **Vladimir Borković**, we received the first issue of Berlin-based [Streetfootballworld](#), a project of Germany's [Youth Football Foundation](#). Included in the issue, in addition to a roundup of grassroots football organizations and media around the world, is an interview with the Green Party's [Antje Vollmer](#), vice-president of the [German Bundestag](#). She comments on football in the United States:

sfw: Is it a problem for the global language of football that the global superpower, of all countries, is not fluent in this language?

Vollmer: It is more of a problem for the superpower that it pays no significant role in football. There is an important point here—if the USA were to take the global importance of football seriously, they would want to be part of it. It is even a political hope, that the Americans will become more involved. However, sport always poses a risk for a world power. There is no way to guarantee victory. You run the risk of defeat, even years of defeat, and thus you risk being measured against others. Football's appeal is growing in the USA also, and if I am not mistaken, the USA is the continent which still has untapped reserves.

'World,' without ceremony, dropped from Cup

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non-English-speaking voices, we lost sense, perversely, of the World Cup as a global event. If I am mistaken, I sincerely want to be corrected: but during the coverage by Disney/ABC/ESPN, and generously facilitated by Major League Soccer, I saw not a single interview with a non-American, not with the Germans, the Canadians, or the Swedes and certainly not with the Nigerians or the North Koreans. Detailed arrangements had been made for ESPN's production of a documentary on the U.S. women's team—and, in this household, we lapped up every minute. But weren't the Ghanaians laughing on their buses (or minivans), too?

Of course, we in the media tend toward the easier story and shy from the unknown. The same tendency occurs during the Olympic Games or almost any international sporting event. I am not sure if the players themselves evince the same lack of curiosity. Post-Cup scuttlebutt has included grumblings about American arrogance, linked to their deserved "comeuppance" in defeat. But these statements also might be projections, themselves the result of unfamiliarity.

On the field of play itself, and acknowledged by [FIFA's "technical-study group,"](#) physical dominance and desperation seemed to prevail over creative spark. Will Eduardo Galeano soon be writing of the women's game, as he has of men in *Soccer in Sun and Shadow*, that their football "negates joy, kills fantasy and outlaws daring"? Most probably, he and others will just ignore the women altogether.

—JOHN TURNBULL



'I'd lie on my stomach in front of the TV and reach my hand out to adjust the dial. When the picture turned from fuzzy to clear, I found myself in Frankfurt or Munich. . . .'

POSTCARD FROM COLUMBUS, OHIO

Real fans, whenever possible, watch games at the stadium. Television leaves too much out. It artificially restricts our view, dictating which angles we see and leaving to chance the quality of our companionship—the sportscasters may be (especially in the case of football aired on American channels) less knowledgeable than we are ourselves. They might make annoying comments for ninety minutes plus stoppage time.

So, given the opportunity, I didn't hesitate to travel three hours from home to watch four group matches in this year's Women's World Cup. I sat in seat 6A, row 15, section 203 of [Columbus Crew Stadium](#). When the crowd rose for the first set of national anthems, I stood with them in the open air of a warm September afternoon. I had the freedom to adjust my view in any direction I wanted. To my left, I could see the Columbus skyline. If I followed it clockwise, I might see a freight train passing through the outskirts of town. Over my right shoulder, a steady stream of traffic passed by on eight lanes of I-71. And directly in front of me was the field, the players, the game!

I'd come here with my wife and two friends. We all love football and have among us enough knowledge and experience to make up an expert team of color commentators: travels to Europe and Africa; childhoods (for two of us) in South America; three foreign languages; ten advanced degrees; years of playing and writing about the sport. ESPN2 hadn't negotiated a contract with us, but that was their loss. In the Upper East stands of the stadium, without producers to hassle us, we could make our own calls. We could be our own best company.

What I discovered, to my chagrin, was that we weren't enough. I missed the close-up shots and the play

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by play; I missed hearing interesting facts about the players, such as which ones are new to their national teams and which ones had been former teammates in the [WUSA](#). I missed (and I'm embarrassed to admit it) the soft, filtered view of a television screen that would have blocked the sun from my eyes. As it turned out, our stands faced west and the first game—[Germany against Canada](#)—began in the late afternoon.

Sunglasses alone couldn't cut the glare, so my wife and I walked to the souvenir stand and bought visors. They cost \$20 each.

I feel like a football philistine for saying this, but it's true: at some point in each of the four games, I missed my television.

Maybe I shouldn't be so surprised. After all, my earliest viewing of football matches came by way of television. I grew up in the 1970s when, at least where I lived in northeastern Georgia, you could catch a weekly program called *Soccer Made in Germany*. It aired on a UHF station, the kind you had to tune into with a separate smaller dial, passing across large patches of static. I'd lie on my stomach in front of the TV and reach my hand out to adjust the dial. When the picture turned from fuzzy to clear, I found myself in Frankfurt or Munich, or some other city with a team in the [Bundesliga](#), perhaps the first foreign word I ever learned.

To greet me, there was always the voice of Toby Charles. He knew the players' names and their statistics. He knew which teams attempted offside traps. And, best of all, he had his own vocabulary, ready-made for

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any moment in the game: *That was a rocket!* for a hard shot on goal, *That one wasn't far off target!* for a near miss, and *He'll be losing his jersey come Monday* for the player who failed to play up to his potential.

When the pace of the game lagged, the camera would zoom in on the crowd: rough German men in winter coats singing songs and waving their beer in the air. I didn't understand a word they said, and yet the tone of their voices, their communal chant, has stayed with me over two decades.

Now at every game I watch, live or by television, I half expect a swaying group of German men to pop up in the stands and sing their hearts out.

They never made it to Columbus Crew Stadium, though.

And I'm too passive a fan to contribute much to crowd excitement. When the wave passed around the stadium, I didn't even want to stand up. And, honestly, the other spectators didn't show much more outward enthusiasm. After two weekends of matches, I only recall one faint cheer by a small group of Argentineans, *Así se puede!* (We can do it!), and an uncreative "Go Canada!" from some girls who'd crossed the border and come down through Michigan. Both cheers sounded weak and strange, coming at moments when their teams were being hopelessly trounced.

Maybe the careful editing of television would have shown a less absurd scene.

And here's where I'm stuck: I want both. I want the truth of my own experience and I want the packaged art of camera crews and sportscasters. I don't want to give up the stadium stroll my wife and I took between the [Sweden/Nigeria](#) and [U.S.A./North Korea](#) games. From the upper level, we could look down at a makeshift practice field, a strip of grass about



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twenty yards wide and fifty yards long. It was covered with adults and children kicking balls around. They had been fans for the last hour and a half, but now they were practicing the moves they'd see Svensson and Ljungberg pull on the Nigerian defenders. Dads played keep-away with daughters. A boy stood between two pine trees spaced ten yards apart and braved an onslaught of shots from his friends. Above them, I leaned over the rail and remembered those same trees being goalposts in the suburban

backyard of my childhood.

I don't want to trade that scene, not even for the magic of Sun Wen doing her football/karate/calisthenics routine in my favorite Adidas commercial ever.

So where am I left? After spending twelve hours on the road, six hours in the

stadium, over two hundred dollars on tickets (and, of course, \$20 on an official Women's World Cup visor) I remain conflicted about the choices ahead of me.

In less than three years we will have the [men's World Cup played in Germany](#), the country that first brought me the world's game. I could start now and watch as many qualifying games as possible. If I paid close attention, I could learn the rosters of the thirty-two final teams. Then in the summer of 2006, I could fly to Germany and watch the games live, picking out the players from memory, knowing their stories as a serious fan should.

But my real dream would be to go there with Toby Charles at my side. He could talk me through the games, shout his famous lines, and when he runs out of things to say we can both look around the stands for the German fans swaying and singing together and drinking their beer.

—THOM SATTERLEE

Satterlee's poetry was featured in [issue 5](#). For an interview, click [here](#).

THE SPORTS BRA, 4 YEARS LATER

Helene A. Shugart, in "She Shoots, She Scores: Mediated Constructions of Contemporary Female Athletes in Coverage of the 1999 US Women's Soccer Team" (*Western Journal of Communication* 67 [winter 2003], p. 13), analyzes the most notorious moment from the 1999 Women's World Cup:

Many reporters . . . suggested that [**Brandi**] **Chastain** acted out of exuberance . . . ; more often than not, however, they did so in the context of having framed it as a striptease in the first place, belying their argument. In fact this is the most typical way in which the women's athletic performance was sexualized in the media—an acknowledgment of their athleticism presented in such a way . . . as to guarantee its interpretation as sexual.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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