

The Global Game

world football, women's football, media, culture

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GENESIS OF 'THE GLOBAL GAME'

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Bruce Arena's quote below well captures the spirit of the website and journal, both launched in January 2003. Although based in the southeastern United States—in [Decatur, Georgia](#), the so-called Berkeley of the East—we try to privilege non-American stories. Our interest primarily is in the role of football in daily life around the world, the more remote from us the better.

We are motivated first by love of football, second by a passion for stories rarely told. For example, we present an interview with [Beatriz Vélez](#) of the Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín, Colombia, whose experience with the global game has been less benign than ours. She tells of cleaning up after her brother, who trod into the family home "with his clothes and football cleats full of mud." Within such vignettes lies a grassroots football culture, perhaps even more subtle than that treated by **Franklin Foer** in his recent book, *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization*. We enjoyed Foer's book, although we might take issue with the grandiose title. By learning from people such as Vélez, however, we prefer to let the world explain soccer to us.

Understanding the world is of special importance for Americans, increasingly isolated by wealth and an obdurate foreign policy. We agree with **Alane Salierno Mason**, founder of the online magazine [Words Without Borders](#). She says:

I really thought after Sept. 11 we would feel more of a need to know about the rest of the world, to realize how urgent it was to know what people were thinking and feeling and writing about America and themselves. It's very easy to throw out phrases like "the Axis of Evil," the enemy, and we really don't know who these people are.

Football is the world's game, not ours, so we must ask them about it and read about the game in their publications, in their languages. This is one reason we prefer the word "football" to "soccer." In [issue 1](#) we write:

I have heard that Americans should not call the game "football." It is said that this would be pretentious. Well, I make a distinction between "soccer" and "football." The sport I played as a youth was undoubtedly soccer. The sport I watch now, the game practiced by such artisans as **Thierry Henry, Marinette Pichon, Tiffeny Milbrett, Aly Wagner, and Zinedine Zidane**, is football. I'm not that interested in soccer, but football concerns me very much.

Please allow a slight revision. The suggestion is that football must be played at a high level, and that is untrue. "Football" simply pays homage to a global spirit, which can be embodied by the six-year-old girl kicking a ball by herself in a field; in fact, we prefer stories, poetry or photography about the latter to the "big soccer" that receives the most prominence. (Although we like Arsenal and Real Madrid, too.)

"Big soccer" is a game for men, and, when possible, we try to privilege the women's side. Women's football does not suffer for media attention and sponsorship because it is less important, but because conscious decisions have been made, in many societies over time, to provide men an advantage in almost all areas of human life. In football, grassroots groups and mainstream organizations fight this trend. In [issue 7](#), we noted that frescoes from China's Later Han dynasty (25–220 C.E.) depict stylized female figures playing the ball game *tsu chu*. Women, therefore, have always played the game but must continually strive for their validity

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as players. When asked why such achievements are important for women, Vélez immediately places the answer in broad context: "[I]t would make society more equitable, less sexist, more democratic . . ."

Vélez's answer provides our response and our solace when others ask, or when we query ourselves, why we spend so much time writing and reading about a game.